Impressionism and Professionalism:
Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, and the Performance of Authorship

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Abstract

The Edwardian era was a formative period for both modernism and professional society. My dissertation examines the intersection of these two concepts in a selection of works by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, concentrating on Conrad’s strategies of self-presentation, and Ford’s positioning of literary impressionism vis-à-vis the public sphere, but situating these gestures in relation to a wide range of contemporary sources. Professionalism, with its system of accreditation and rhetoric of expertise, suggested a way for authors to mediate their relationship with the mass market. Constructing authorship as a profession, Conrad could mitigate the indignities of commodification, presenting his product as a trusted and technically rigorous service rather than a consumer item, and compensating financial loss with literary prestige. Moreover, the value of human capital in a professional society parallels the emphasis placed on memory in Conrad’s aesthetic, a correspondence which I also trace in one of the period’s most elaborate gestures of self-fashioning, Henry James’s New York Edition Prefaces. The rise of the professions was bound up with the increasing size and complexity of industrial society, and particularly with the mounting demand for occupational specialisation. Ford reacted ambivalently to this aspect of professional society, adopting the professional shibboleth of technique, but resisting the growing authority of experts and the withdrawal of specialist discourses from the public sphere. I read his literary impressionism in conjunction with a number of contemporary non-literary discourses – most substantially, Edwardian sociology – to draw out Ford’s dissatisfaction with the disintegrating effects of specialisation, and his desire to formulate a literary response to complexity without recourse to esoteric expertise.
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Abbreviations

Works by Joseph Conrad


Works by Ford Madox Ford

MA      Mr. Apollo: A Just Possible Story, London: Methuen & Co, 1908.
MF      Mr. Fleight. London: Howard Latimer, 1913.
SLL     The Simple Life Limited. London: John Lane, 1911.¹

¹ This work is published under the nom de plume “Daniel Chaucer”.
Works by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford


Other frequently cited works


Preface

The first stirrings of modernism, in which Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford played important parts, roughly coincide with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rise of professional society, and tracing the intersection of these two developments will be my main concern in this thesis. By way of orientation, then, I begin with an outline of this seismic nineteenth- and twentieth-century social change, which has been most comprehensively charted by the historian Harold Perkin. In Perkin’s analysis, professionals – specialists whose labour is perceived to be both highly difficult and highly valuable to society – emerged as an increasingly cohesive and powerful class during the nineteenth century, one usually omitted from the era’s own tripartite schemes of social strata.¹ The growing size and complexity of industrial society, together with the accelerating pace of scientific discovery, created more and more specialised occupations as the century progressed, meanwhile giving rise to an auxiliary stratum of expert managers and administrators. Émile Durkheim thought the division of labour had become so central to modernity by 1892 that he made it the subject of his doctoral dissertation, alluding in the preface to “the increasingly important position the occupation takes in life as work becomes more specialized, for the field of each individual activity tends steadily to become delimited by the functions with which the individual is particularly charged.”² People, Durkheim thought, were becoming their jobs. Of course, not every specialised occupation succeeded in becoming a profession: what Perkin calls the “professional social ideal” – the self-interpretation that professionals seek to impose on their clients – was the key to obtaining professional status.³ Because the authority of experts must be taken on trust – that’s what makes them experts – professionals depend on persuading the marketplace that what they do is hard, important, and not entirely self-interested.

¹ Such as Carlyle’s “Workers, Master Workers, and Master Unworkers”, Marx’s landowners, bourgeoisie and proletariat, and Matthew Arnold’s “Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace”.  
³ Perkin, The Rise of Professional Society, p. 3.
Recognition as a profession offered, among other things, an exit visa from the free market. Professionals collaborate at maintaining the "artificial scarcity" of their labour, allowing them to regulate the price of their services and the conditions under which they are sold, often with the cooperation of the state. This protection against unlicensed competitors was the main incentive for occupations to professionalise in the nineteenth century. The prohibition on advertising among, for example, doctors and lawyers, provides an emblem of this privileged position: rather than an object of desire, subject to the law of supply and demand, the commodity sold by professionals is understood to be a trusted and socially necessary service. In professional transactions, at least as far as individual consumers are concerned, trust in an abstract system of qualification is a more important factor than cupidity. Modernist writing, it is often argued, sought a similarly mediated relationship with the mass market: as Lawrence Rainey puts it, "[m]odernism marks neither a straightforward resistance nor an outright capitulation to commodification but a momentary equivocation that incorporates elements of both in a brief, unstable synthesis." Constructing authorship as a profession was one way in which early modernist writers could seek, not always successfully, to obtain such a controlled distance from the marketplace, disposing their commodities towards a network of peers and critics rather than selling them directly to the consumer on High Street. Accordingly, the self-fashioning of writers such as Conrad and Henry James, in letters, memoirs and prefaces, mobilised the tropes of professionalism to present authorship as a relatively disinterested occupation concerned to provide a trusted service rather than produce desirable commodities. There was, however, an objective component to the professional self-interpretation of such writers, and I have tried to be attentive to the signs of "professionalism" in Conrad's literary practice as well as in his overt gestures of self-presentation.

6 I use the term "self-fashioning" to denote public self-presentation rather than private narratives of selfhood, although the two senses are, of course, intertwined. As Marysa Demoor explains, "the term has now entered critical jargon with respect to any period in which individual artists choose to self-mythologise, to, that is, construct an identity in and through language and represent it 'before an audience'." Marysa Demoor, ed., Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves, and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930 (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2004), p. 14.
Professionalism presupposes specialisation: at its base, it is an outgrowth of industrial society. “[T]he rise of the professions”, as Perkin puts it, “stems ... from the logic of the division and reintegration of labour which inspired the Industrial Revolution.” Professionalism is very much an effect of what Max Weber called “rationalisation”, the “iron cage” of capitalism requiring each worker to specialise in a particular Beruf or calling: in a sense, the aeronautical engineer and the government technocrat are well compensated, relatively autonomous reflections of Karl Marx’s “crippled” factory worker, experts in the performance of a specialised function. Modernism itself is sometimes seen as a stage in this process of specialisation: at the end of Axel’s Castle (1931), his status rerum of the modernist project, Edmund Wilson worried that “just as the development of mechanical devices has compelled us to resort to sports in order to exercise our muscles, so literature will survive as a game – as a series of specialized experiments”. The rise of specialisation, the increasing role of experts in everyday life, and particularly the professionalization of academic disciplines like literary criticism and history, contributed at the turn of the century to an anxiety about the degeneration of the public sphere. As Ford wrote in 1909, not without an edge of peevishness, “[t]here is ... a general suspicion of all generalised thought abroad in the land today”: “[v]ersatility” connotes “shallowness”, and meanwhile “we are creating specialists everywhere: we will listen to none but specialists”. What Ford called “The Passing of the Great Figure” might well be rephrased today as the death of the public intellectual: the complexity of modern life was such that interpreting it fell to the lot of specialised experts. Ford’s impressionist doctrine can be productively understood as a reaction against specialism, an effort to articulate a response to modern complexity without recourse to esoteric expertise. More precisely, literary impressionism was itself a form of expertise, but one which was oriented towards the public sphere. To see literary

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impressionism in this way as an intervention in the public sphere, we must ourselves resist specialisation: rather than a chapter in the history of literary forms, impressionism should be placed in relation to other, non-literary discourses. Comparing Ford’s impressionist project to, for example, Edwardian sociology, exposes both its continuity with non-literary responses to specialisation and the specificity of its regenerative strategy.

Broadly, then, my argument will be conducted within these two spheres: my discussion of Conrad centres on the forms taken by authorial self-fashioning in a professional society, whereas in Ford’s case I focus on his resistance to specialism, and his conception of the role of literature in the public sphere. Taking my cue from the historicist turn in modernist studies, the desire, as Michael Levenson puts it, “to provide richer, thicker narratives” of modernism, I read Ford and Conrad as deeply immersed in their era: my intention is to situate practices of early modernist authorship in the context of professional society.\(^{11}\) I refer to a range of texts outside of the Ford and Conrad corpuses, most substantially Henry James’s New York Edition Prefaces in chapter two, to provide a richly contextualised setting for their work. This historical bent has foreclosed certain avenues of inquiry: a comparative study of Ford’s and Conrad’s aesthetics or an account of their three collaborations lies beyond my ambit here.

Ford and Conrad wrote at a time of rapid change in the material circumstances of authorship: the Victorian triple-decker novel had only recently passed into retirement, and authors and publishers were preoccupied with the ramifications of mass literacy and questions of how the mass market could be turned to account. Ford and Conrad’s first collaborations, for example, were essays in reaching this public, attempts to fathom its mysterious tastes: *The Inheritors* (1901) was an “experiment”, intended to “extract shekels” from the “Bsh Public’s pocket” (CL 2: 261, 335), *Romance* (1903) an excursion into “the genre that is currently very much in vogue with the public.” (CL 3: 76) How they negotiated these circumstances, and how they positioned themselves in relation to the market and the public sphere, will also be a recurrent theme of my discussion.

As Cedric Watts observes, Conrad’s self-definition as a *homo duplex* aptly describes his relationship with the mass market; he sought both the accreditation of expert peers and the financial reward of a wide readership.¹² Broadly speaking, the latter consideration became more important as his career progressed, and his familial responsibilities increased: “It’s about time for the greater public to discover me, if they mean at all to become aware of my existence”, he wrote to William Rothenstein as he revised *The Secret Agent* for publication in 1907. (CL 3: 481) However, although Conrad did take steps to reach the mass market, he was never indifferent to the symbolic capital of his artistic reputation. In focusing on *The Nigger of the *Narcissus*” and *Lord Jim*, early works published in the prestigious settings of *The New Review* and *Blackwood’s Magazine*, respectively, I have chosen texts which display what might be called Conrad’s modernist side, to foreground the professional element in his self-presentation. As Susan Jones notes, it was these early publishing venues which “promoted the image of the author as a writer for a somewhat select, coterie audience, thus initiating his reputation as what would later be termed ‘modernist’.”¹³ In my discussion of these novels, I integrate critical analysis with an account of Conrad’s strategies of self-presentation, attempting to “bypass”, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “the opposition between internal reading and external analysis”.¹⁴

The exiguous selection I have made from Ford’s large oeuvre is motivated in part by a desire to avoid what Tony Davenport and Robert Hampson have described as “the institutionalisation of a particular version of Ford, which emphasises *The Good Soldier* and *Parade’s End* to the exclusion of almost all Ford’s other works”.¹⁵ More particularly, *English and the English* and Ford’s editorship of the *English Review* present themselves as signal instances of his involvement with the public sphere, the former allowing a productive comparison with the contemporary discourse of sociology, and the latter a major attempt, as Mark Morrisson has shown, to “bring modernist aesthetics to bear on

Edwardian public culture." Each of these moments in Ford’s career engages in interesting ways with the rise of specialisation.

My introductory chapter addresses the well nigh terminally vague category of literary impressionism, and attempts to pin down a working definition in the idea of the writing body. This idea will be useful later on in drawing a comparison between literary aptitude and the professional ideal of training. Having carved out a reasonably stable paradigm of impressionism for the purposes of this project, I address the baffling polysemy of the term’s usage in criticism, and provide an abridged survey of its genealogy and significance at the turn of the century. The remainder of the introduction is concerned mainly with methodological business: using material taken principally from Conrad’s correspondence and Ford’s impressionist biography of Conrad, I map out the lineaments of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the literary field – the symbolic economy in which reputations are made – and construct a model of authorial self-fashioning as performance.

Chapters one and two introduce the historical focus of this thesis. Chapter one assesses the centrality of trust to the idea of professionalism, as the necessary condition for the sale of expert services. I assess the usefulness of this concept to an understanding of authorial self-fashioning, as a means of mediating between professional authors and the mass market. The concept of trust serves as a pivot joining the rise of professional society to Conrad’s most searching appraisal of professionalism, Lord Jim.

Whereas Lord Jim focuses my inquiry into trust in expert systems, the Prefaces to Henry James’s New York Edition furnish the centrepiece for my discussion of training in chapter two. Ford described James’s Prefaces in 1908 as an “historic” event; this momentous event in the development of early modernism will function here as a kind of template, a paradigmatic gesture of self-fashioning by a writer whom Ford and many subsequent critics have described as an impressionist. Taking up the historical thread once again, I offer an account of the imaginary potency of the ideas of training and

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human capital in the ascendant culture of expertise, situating the Prefaces in relation to a variety of contemporary writings.

The impact of Conrad’s professional past on his performance of authorship is the subject of chapter three. As an ex-officer of the Merchant Service, Conrad had access to a readymade, accredited image of probity and technical rigour; I assess some of the ways in which the continuity of his two careers could be rhetorically accentuated. My examples of Conrad’s performance of authorship come from a range of letters and published writings. This chapter concludes by looking at how Conrad fashioned his memories – his impressions – into a form of human capital, paying particular attention to the correspondence surrounding the publication of The Nigger of the “Narcissus” (1897), laying the ground for a more sustained consideration of that novel in chapter four.

The Nigger of the “Narcissus” may well be Conrad’s manliest novel, and it is the masculine features of his self-fashioning that will occupy me in this chapter. Taking off from the anecdote of Conrad’s £500 grant from the Royal Bounty Fund in 1905, an episode that brought about an improbable collision between Conrad and the patriotic poet and public school ideologue Henry Newbolt, I consider the relationship between professionalism and masculinity, and specifically the paradigm of manhood articulated in the public school ethos. A necessary task of the construction of authorship as a profession was the assertion of masculinity.

In chapter five I read England and the English, Ford’s trilogy of social criticism, as an attempt to fashion a non-specialist sociological discourse under the sign of impressionism. The parallel activities of the London Sociological Society serve to situate Ford in a wider field of anti-specialist reaction, whilst highlighting the specifically literary capabilities of his impressionist technique. This chapter focuses mainly on the first volume of the trilogy, The Soul of London, as a response to the most pressing visual sign of modern complexity. Ford’s supernatural fantasy Mr. Apollo will also be considered here as a fictional attempt to think through the problem of totality.

My discussion of the English Review focuses on Ford’s editorials, but incorporates a range of his other writings to round out the picture of his resistance to specialisation. The theme of anti-specialism in Ford’s editorials clarifies his conception of the function of art: the capacity of the artist to attract interest and awaken thought was
all the more urgent in a public sphere disaffected by complexity and fragmented into specialist discourses. I also consider the presence of New Liberal writers in Ford's review, to suggest affinities between Liberal ideology and Ford's desire for a unified public sphere.

We begin, however, at the beginning, with a scene from Ford and Conrad's first collaborative project, the adventure novel *Romance*, and with the image of the writing body, a central but neglected trope in the mythology of literary impressionism.
Introductory: The Impressionists

EMBODIED IMPRESSIONISM

If style is the discharge from a deeper wound, as Gustave Flaubert speculated, then we might expect bad style, or style infected with a foreign body, to produce a physical reflex of disgust. Ford’s famous 1911 response to Pound’s affected style, which was indeed contaminated with Provençal archaisms, came close. In his obituary for the elder writer, Pound recalled that Ford “felt the errors of contemporary style to the point of rolling (physically, and if you look at it as mere superficial snob, ridiculously) on the floor” when Pound recited his thirteenth-century pastiches.¹ Pound showed his own imperviousness to superficial snobbery by reading Ford’s body language aright, and modernising his style accordingly. Perhaps the dramatic roll met his criterion of “maximum efficiency of expression”: he estimated that “that roll saved me at least two years, perhaps more.”² Efficient language, after all, was a hygienic regimen for Pound, comparable to “keeping tetanus bacilli out of one’s bandages” (keeping mannered contagions out of one’s style).³ What is not often noted about this scene is that it repeats an earlier moment of inter-modernist corporeal criticism between Ford and Conrad, this time with Ford on the receiving end (or not, depending how you read it).

Wayne Koestenbaum believes that “Ford’s literary technique of ‘impressionism’ permitted him to sentimentalize the bygone days of [his and Conrad’s] friendship”, but this does scant justice to Ford’s complex and vivid account, in Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (1924), of collaborating with Conrad on their adventure novel Romance (1903).⁴ Indeed, Ford’s anecdote of reading an early draft of the novel aloud to

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Conrad in 1899 might well have found its way into Koestenbaum's study of "the erotics of male literary collaboration". Shrouded "completely in shadow", gradually shrinking into his chair, Conrad punctuated the audition with groans of uncontrollable horror, which eventually "grew in length of ejaculation" into breathless apostrophes: "O! O! ... O God, my dear Hueffer ...." And towards the end, 'O God, my dear faller, how is it possible....'" At the unbearably disappointing climax, "he groaned and said, 'Good God!'" (JC 16-7) The staging of this recollection as an episode of sadomasochistic coitus, whatever else it suggests about literary collaboration, obliges us to confront the insistently embodied character of literary impressionism. Conrad's groans, like Ford's roll, are physical reactions to style, reflexes of taste. As Conrad wrote to David Meldrum, a publisher's reader for Blackwood's, "bad work hurts". (CL 2: 223) Indeed, Ford's much-quoted rationale for impressionism invokes this paradigm with its claim that "Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains" – not on our minds. (JC 194) Ford's statement has a scientific ring to it; the positivist Karl Pearson, for example, used the same terms in his *The Grammar of Science* (1892) to describe "the physical brain, the marvellous complex upon which no element of race, of ancestry, of education or of experience has failed to leave a more or less indelible impress." The vocabulary of impressionism is haunted by physiology.

In beginning this study with a discussion of embodied impressionism, my objects are twofold. First, and most immediately, I want to shed light on this neglected aspect of impressionist writing and thought, particularly as it is represented in *A Personal Remembrance*. Secondly, I want to establish early on the idea of the writing body, as one that will be foundational to several strands of my argument. The notion that one writes with one's whole body, as Remy de Gourmont put it, speaks to the professional ideal of training with which I will be concerned in chapter two. As will become clear in my discussion of Gourmont's physiology of style, there is a logic of human capital at work here: texts are the product of accumulated experience, invested in the writer's body. This line of inquiry also serves as a reminder that literature is a product of socialised bodies, as well as creative minds, an idea of the utmost importance to Pierre Bourdieu's sociology.

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3 This is not the only trace of sexual tension in Ford's reminiscence: Saunders notes the "homoeroticism that is touched upon" in the anecdote of Conrad's attempted strangulation of Ford as their train pulled into Charing Cross. Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 168.

of art. The difference between embodied and disembodied authorship, at least for the idea of authorial self-fashioning I am working with here, is the complex of socialised dispositions and perceptual schema that Bourdieu calls the habitus.\(^7\) We are perhaps overly inclined, today, to read authorial self-fashioning abstractly, as the implementation of a cunning strategem, whereas the habitus implies that practices “can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing conscious aiming at ends”.\(^8\) Just as impressionist writing implicates the physical, affective processes beyond a writer’s control – like Conrad’s gut reaction to “Seraphina” – so the metafiction, as it were, of an author’s self-presentation implies a habitus, an unreflected grasp of the moves and strategies that go to making up a career. One of my objects in addressing the physical imagery of impressionist literary work is to keep this social sense of embodied authorship in view.

_A Personal Remembrance_ is much concerned with the kinetic, embodied drama of authorship. Writing is portrayed as tactile and outdoorsy, occurring on the floors of railway carriages, in drafty, itchy hotels, or rattling along country lanes: “We went out of a sunshiny morning with bits of manuscripts; we returned through rain-storms, the mud splashing up visibly before the dim lanthorns, the manuscript read aloud, commented on, docketed for translation”. (JC 166-7, 243, 50) “Heavens”, Ford adds in a later memoir, “don’t my fingers still tingle with the feeling of undoing the stiff buckles, long past midnight, of a horse streaming with rain”. (RY 154) This figuration of vigorously active writing is presumably designed to dispel aestheticist connotations of effete poetising – an agenda most in evidence when Ford advises mixing Flaubert and Maupassant “[i]n about the proportion of a sensible man’s whiskey and soda” – but the rugged image also foregrounds the writing body. (JC 208) The body is further accented by the memoir’s motif of strangulation, which straddles the metaphorical and the literal physicality of writing. This image pertains not only to an author’s instinct for a good subject – like the trial of Aaron Smith for piracy, which “caught [Ford] by the throat” – and his feel for a

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fine line – like Ford’s “‘Excellency, a few goats...’” which “jumped out of the prose and caught Conrad by the throat” – but also to the harrowing act of composition, as when Conrad “sprang to his feet and straight at the writer’s throat” on being interrupted at his work. (JC 5-6, 155, 167) This versatile figure enacts the inseparable bond between a sense of literary style and the body of the writer.

If the remembered scene of writing is pungently physical, and often violent, rereading the work itself is no less of a visceral experience: the affect of vicarious shame relieved by Ford’s writhing on the ground and Conrad’s involuntary exclamations is equally acute when the style in question is their own. Ford recalled that Conrad’s “shyness” was such that he could not read “certain of the stories of ‘The Outpost of Progress’” without getting “chair de poule all down his spine.” (JC 100) (“The Return”, which inspired him later with “dismal wonder”, was surely one of these stories, along, perhaps, with “The Lagoon”, which he described at the time as “secondhand Conradese”.) Just as Ford’s body tingles to recall a literary collaboration, Conrad gets goose-bumps thinking about his textual gaucheries. Ford’s pathological aversion to his own juvenilia makes him want to incinerate the shelf in the British Library where they are housed, and extends to The Inheritors (1901), the invasion fantasy on which he collaborated with Conrad. (JC 100) His abhorrence of the “juvenile prose and ... dreadful sentences” on display in this early work amounts to a phobia, attributable to “some obscure nervus first cause”; rereading it requires the “subordinating of one’s nerves to duty” (JC 149, 124, 137). (Conrad, for his part, reacted to Ford’s ethereal female characters in The Inheritors with “nausea”.) (JC 152) Ford fictionalised this pathology of self-disgust in The Benefactor (1905), a melodrama of thwarted romance in which the gentleman-author George Moffat is appalled by the sentimentality of his historical novel, Wilderspin: “He read it out of curiosity, and it left him gasping and ashamed to think that he had ever been so callow and so crude. It was like looking at a portrait of himself in his boyhood, though it was not really ten years old.” (B 103) Writing, it seems, is permanently bound to the body of the author, capable of stimulating jolts of shock and shame even a decade after the event; the feeling, Ford explains, is one of “physical modesty”. (JC 100) (My emphasis.)

Ford returned to the theme of authorial abjection in *The Simple Life Limited* (1911), his satire of the turn of the century pastoralist movement. “Simon Bransdon” is the anglicised moniker of Simeon Brandetski, an English-educated roughneck of “possibly Polish” extraction, who gives up his career as a brutal colonial overseer for the soft job of writing. (SLL 69) Stricken by fear and self-loathing after beating his dog to death in a blind rage, Bransdon allows himself to be manoeuved into the role of poet-seer for a simple life commune by the parasitic Horatio Gubb. Gubb becomes Bransdon’s amanuensis, encouraging, recording and publishing his florid Rossetti-esque “prose poems” and pseudo-Morrisite epigrams, until a brawl with the local peasantry restores some of Bransdon’s machismo, leaving him horrified by the flowery tracts that bear his name. Bransdon, as Max Saunders notes, “ineluctably calls Conrad to mind”, and Ford’s depiction of Bransdon’s “everlasting shame of having poured all this flapdoodle out” owes something to Conrad’s *chair de poule* as well as to Ford’s own literary embarrassment.10

Just think … of my signature going out into the world along with those disgusting things! And there are thousands and thousands of copies circulated! And Heaven knows how many million words of this disgusting sickly prose I haven’t written! … Don’t you feel disgusted when you think of the things you’ve done for this imbecile movement? (SLL 246-7)

“Leave your bolusses alone” he snaps at the colony’s resident homeopath: “they won’t cure me of having written this stuff”. Bransdon’s “sickly” outpourings of “flapdoodle” do indeed sound like a symptomatic emission – the discharge from a shallow wound – and hence something of which he might wish to be cured. Writing is figured here as a symptom, an excrescence or effusion. Like Moffatt, Bransdon experiences his own works very much as a corpus, an extension of the body that can make one gasp with shame. Fine writing, on the other hand, could give keen sensual pleasure: Conrad’s agonies on hearing “Seraphina” are balanced by his ecstatic response to a good bit of dialogue, which leaves him in an identical position: “exhausted and rolling on the sofa, he continued to gasp,”

‘Genius! ... This is genius’”. (JC 156) Granger, the journalist protagonist of *The Inheritors*, is “sickened”, “revolted” and “disgusted” by best-selling fiction, whereas a well-written political article sets him “tingling with desire, with the desire that transcends the sexual; the desire for the fine phrase, for the right word – for all the other intangibles”. (I 33-4, 163-4) Ford alludes to this erotics of writing again in *Some Do Not...* (1924), in which the belletrist dabbler Vincent Macmaster looks forward to the narcissistic gratification of correcting one’s proofs: “he had expected a wallowing of pleasure – almost the only sensuous pleasure he had allowed himself for many months”. (PE 12) These images register the libidinal component of writing, figuring it as a matter of desire and disgust.

Conrad’s correspondence abounds in images of embodied creativity, presenting a vivid portrait of a stylist who writes with his whole body: “I write in doubt over every line”, he assured T. Fisher Unwin, his first publisher. (CL 1: 293) His elaborate descriptions of writer’s block prompted Edward Said to opine that “there is scarcely any [author] I have read who seems so profligate in his complaining”, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham groups his letters “with those of Flaubert, Rilke, Gide, and Kafka”, as examples of “the modernist sense of the agony of art”. Conrad is construed through the letters as the great tradition’s première poète maudit, whose work was, “for all he knew, [a] sterile and pointless self-punishment, a daily subjection to the spectacle of his own nonproductivity.” Conrad’s biographer Frederick Karl concludes that Conrad’s creative process and his physical organism were mutually determining. Karl reads his assertion to R.B. Cunninghame Graham in 1898 that “I suspect my brain to be yeast and my backbone to be cotton” (CL 2: 39) as a creative puation: “His description of bodily changes looks forward to his period of ‘transformation,’ when he would reshape himself for a new kind of creative life [the anni mirabiles from 1899 to 1904]. While his imagination was still sluggish, his body foretold of the changes that would come, however painfully.” Conrad’s corporeal imagery supplies a physiological strand to Karl’s narrative of artistic development, which affirms Conrad’s own view that his physical suffering was deeply bound up with the quality of his work.

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Conrad developed a richly Gothic idiom of gestures and symptoms to describe how he felt when he wrote: the physiology of fiction is a leitmotif in his correspondence. His body is figured as a barometer of his imagination, as with the yeast-brain above, or when he tells his old friend Edward Sanderson that “[t]he unreality of it seems to enter one’s real life, penetrate into the bones, make the very heart beats pulsate illusions through the arteries.” (CL 2: 205) The physicality of writing determines his costiveness: “[n]othing would induce me to put down my pen”, he assured Meldrum, “if I feel a sentence”. (CL 2: 191) To H.G. Wells in 1903 Conrad invoked a neural economy of writing, the conversion of “nervous force into phrases” (CL 3: 85); to John Galsworthy in 1907 he posited a chemical process, musing that “[t]he molecular changes in my brain are very pronounced. It seems to me I have a lump of mud, of slack mud in my head.” (CL 3: 435) Most famous, perhaps, is his declaration to Edward Garnett, recipient of all Conrad’s most extravagant lamentations, that he was “mercilessly haunted by the necessity of style” and that as a result, “I feel my brain. I am distinctly conscious of the contents of my head. My story is there in a fluid – in an evading shape. I can’t get hold of it. It is all there – to bursting, yet I Can’t get hold of it [sic]”. (CL 2: 50) Hunting le mot juste makes Conrad literally mindful of his organic being, his brain transformed into an abscess, style the longed-for discharge.

Apropos this letter to Garnett, Jesse Matz argues ingeniously that Conrad suffered from “somatophobia”: the creative mind’s loathing of its own materiality.14 According to Matz, this phobia inhibits Conrad’s ability to draw benefit from the productive ambiguities of impressionism. The “distant labourer” of the Preface to The Nigger of the “Narcissus” holds out the possibility “that mind and body can work together”, but Conrad’s somatophobia is triggered by class and racial difference, causing the impressionist project to collapse into “a retrograde conflation of impressions and sensations.”15 (NN 146) The pattern of similar letters adduced above, however, suggests that being a thing was not so much a potentiality Conrad feared was true, as it was a fact that he sometimes found dreadful to contemplate. As he wrote in a calmer mood to R.B. Cunninghame Graham in 1900, “[o]f course there is a material basis for every state of

15 Matz, Literary Impressionism, pp.145, 153, 146.
mind, and so for mine.” (CL 2: 242) Conrad seems to have understood writing as a physiological process, style as a fluid build-up in the brain.

If its Humean origins are anything to go by, impressionism is semantically weighted towards such a blending of mind and body. David Hume, whose sceptical philosophy inspired the first English use of the term, had denied the categorical difference between thinking and feeling, psyche and physis. Only “degrees of force and liveliness” distinguish “impressions” from “ideas”, “sensations, passions and emotions” from “thinking and reasoning”, leading inevitably to the conclusion that reason is only a deceptively calm sort of passion: “all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation”. This slippage in impressionist philosophy between thinking and feeling is repeated in Conrad’s symptomatology of impressionist writing. Of more contemporary relevance to Conrad, however, would have been nineteenth-century materialist psychology, and especially biological theories of artistic genius like those contained in Max Nordau’s Degeneration (1895) or J.F. Nisbet’s The Insanity of Genius (1891). As Ian Watt points out, “[i]n the last half of the nineteenth century it was not the physical but the biological sciences which had the deepest and the most pervasive effect upon the way man viewed his personal and historical destiny.” With the theories of scientists like Pearson, Norcau and Nisbet, biology had encroached on human subjectivity, giving rise to what William James in The Principles of Psychology (1890) called “the automaton-theory”, the deterministic idea of the brain as “a sort of vat in which feelings and motions somehow go on stewing together, and in which innumerable things happen of which we catch but the result.” It was, perhaps, this kind of brain that Conrad talked of feeling, a stew of slack mud from which he distilled the fluid of his stories.

Indeed, the catchphrases of nineteenth-century biological materialism seem to have made a deep impression on him. In 1891 he quoted Jakob Moleschott’s renowned

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17 On the influence of these ideas on the culture of modernism, see Louis Menand, Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and his Context (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 84-6.
slogan, "Without phosphorus, no thought", in a letter to his aunt, and twenty years later in Under Western Eyes Razumov quotes Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis to the effect that "Man is a digestive tube."\textsuperscript{20} (CL 1: 97, UWE 187) The Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, whom Conrad paraphrases in a similarly blasé manner in The Secret Agent (1907), was a more contemporary figure in this tradition, with his biological explanation of criminality (and artistic genius).\textsuperscript{21} Marlow recounts a run-in with a phrenologist in Heart of Darkness (1899), and in Chance (1914) he mocks the "farcical" science of "physiognomy" (HD 15, C 132). In the same novel Fyne appears to have been reading Degeneration, parroting Nordau's theory of "poetical genius being allied to madness, which he got hold of in some idiotic book everybody was reading a few years ago."\textsuperscript{22} (C 158) Evidently not interested in the intricacies of these materialist theories, and mocking of their solemnity, Conrad was yet unable to forget their more dramatic pronouncements, and his famous jeremiads of physical suffering are shaped within this episteme. Like his fictional counterpart Simon Branson, whose emissions of flapdoodle cause him physical disgust, Conrad imagines writing as a physiological process.

At this point I want to introduce a comparison with a contemporary theory of physiological style, that of the Symbolist poet and critic Remy de Gourmont, hailed by Arnold Bennett in 1908 as "the greatest unappreciated writer in France to-day."\textsuperscript{23} Gourmont's Le Problème du Style (1902), an attempt to formulate a physiological theory of literature, is profoundly informed by nineteenth-century positivism; Gourmont quotes approvingly Cabanis's dictum that "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile","

\textsuperscript{20} Cabanis's most influential work was Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme (1802). Joseph Conrad, Under Western Eyes (New York: Random House, 2001), n. 16, p. 292.
although he attributes it to the positivist Hippolyte Taine. Although Gourmont's scientism would have seemed extreme to Ford and Conrad, the very gauche explicitness of his theory will serve to highlight the contours of their more muted idea of the writing body. The philosophical background of literary impressionism is usually traced from the British empiricists John Locke and David Hume, with Walter Pater the most important aesthetician. Gourmont's essay *Le Problème du Style* (1902), a highly influential document in modernist aesthetics, offers an important sidelight on this tradition, foregrounding the affinity between impressionism and a physiological theory of art. Gourmont implicitly situates himself within the impressionist line of thought when he declares that "the senses are the unique doorway through which enters all that lives in the mind ... An idea is only a faded sensation, an effaced image"; this binary echoes Hume's famous distinction between impressions, "which enter with the most force and violence", and ideas, "the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning". Believing that "[w]e write, as we feel, as we think, with our whole body", Gourmont divides writers into the categories of "sensorial" and "ideo-emotive", two different metabolisms which account for the distinction between original and banal styles. While ideo-emotives rely on the "worn coins" of cliché, sensorials are compelled to mint new metaphors for their perceptions. (This Symbolist cliché is a basic assumption of Conradian impressionism: "to make you see" involves a refurbishment of "the old, old words, worn thin, defaced

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24 Remy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du Style* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1924), p. 56. Where possible I have used Glenn S. Burne's English edition of selected works; where passages are taken from the original, the translations are mine.


29 Gourmont, *Selected Writings*, p. 115.
by ages of careless usage.”) (NN 12) Like Ford and Conrad, Gourmont foregrounds the wetware of creativity, situating style in “le cerveau”, the brain, and deriding the idealist synonym, “la mentalité”: style “is determined by the structure of the brain”, he declares, “from which [the poet] receives the factual material with which he deals.”  

In the 1868 Conclusion to The Renaissance, often taken as a touchstone of literary impressionism, Walter Pater also dwells briefly upon the material basis of experience, the “phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres”, but unlike Gourmont he firmly separates “that which is without” from “the inward world of thought and feeling.” Pater’s “impression” is characterised above all by evanescence: the Conclusion’s urgency springs from a preoccupation with the fleetingness of presence, “of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is.” By contrast, Gourmont’s theory of style, like Pearson’s image of the recording brain, rests on the positivist assumption that experiences are stored in the matter of the body: “an imaged style ... asserts itself in proportion as sensations are accumulated in the neural cells and make the archives of memory more dense, rich and complex.” Whereas Pater’s hedonistic orientation emphasises momentary experience, the optimisation of “pulsations”, Gourmont describes a kind of sensory capitalisation, the investment of experience in the nerve fibres, to be redeemed later as style. Thus life itself is a durable training for the sensorial writer, a “natural education”: “it is life, the habit of sensation, that will create the stylistic image”; for Pater, by contrast, “to form habits” is “our failure”. The physiological conception of style, formulated polemically by Gourmont and perceptible in such modernist touchstones as Eliot’s transformation of the “digestive tracts” into a poetic organ, resituates the emphasis in our understanding of literary impressionism. Contrary to the Paterian idea of kaleidoscopic flux, Gourmont offers a perspective in which writing proceeds from durable dispositions, shaped by the sensations “stored up in nerve cells”. This perspective does not invalidate the standard view of impressionism as a mode where

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32 Bloom, ed., Selected Writings of Walter Pater, p. 60.
33 Gourmont, Selected Writings, p. 122.
34 Bloom, ed., Selected Writings of Walter Pater, p. 61.
37 Gourmont, Selected Writings, p. 121.
"all that is solid melts into air". But it does direct our attention to another side of impressionist practice, one apparent in Conrad’s preoccupation with the body in his letters, and Ford’s figuration of literary shame. It invites us to interpret subjectivity not in Hume’s terms, as a “bundle or collection of different perceptions”, but in William James’s: “living creatures from an outward point of view ... are bundles of habits.” As Ford wrote in his memoir Thus to Revisit (1921), his and Conrad’s research into le mot juste was aimed not at Aestheticist self-consciousness, the deliberate construction of “jewels five words long”, but at acquiring a habit: a practice durably inscribed on the body. “We desired to achieve a style – the habit of a style”, and the “habit of language” eventually devised by Conrad was not a rhetoric but a dramatic persona, “the figure of Marlow.” (TR 51-3)

LESS A KERNEL THAN A HAZE

Impressionism, then, is a useful lens for focusing criticism on the embodied nature of writing. I will move on in the following section to consider how embodiment affects the idea of authorial self-fashioning, but this is an opportune juncture to interrupt the discussion of Ford and Conrad and offer a selective survey of the concept of literary impressionism. My aim in this thesis is more historical than formalist, and hence the focus here will be semantic rather than aesthetic. That is, I intend not to disentangle a coherent suite of techniques or epistemology from the morass of primary and secondary sources on literary impressionism, but simply to establish the sheer irresolvable variety of meanings that have been assigned to the term, gesturing, in the process, to certain loci classici of its usage, both by practitioners and by critics.

38 In Marx and Engels’s formulation. Giovanni Cianci, for example, argues that “a basic assumption underlying Ford’s ‘impressionism’” is the city as a region where “all that is solid melts into air”. Giovanni Cianci, "Three Memories of a Night: Ford’s impressionism in the great London vortex," in Ford Maddox Ford’s Modernity, ed. Robert Hampson and Max Saunders (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), p. 49. An exception to this trend is Aaron Fogel, who puns on the meaning of “impressment” to argue against painterly readings of Conrad’s impressionism. “Aesthetic performances themselves have more coercion in their impression than is usually recognized.” Aaron Fogel, Coercion to Speak: Conrad’s Poetics of Dialogue (Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 42.

The use of “impressionism” to describe literature is often attended by a certain tentativeness or embarrassment: the term seems never to have entirely shaken off the sneer with which Louis Leroy coined it, in 1874, as a satirical description of Monet’s *Impression: Soleil Levant*. When Ferdinand Brunetièrre transposed it to the literary context five years later in a review of Alphonse Daudet’s *Les Rois en exil*, he felt obliged to forestall the reader’s ridicule: “don’t be put off by this bizarre expression”, he advised. Appropriately enough, it was Daudet’s embarrassing unclassifiability – his “confusion of genres”, provoking a certain “disquiet … in the mind of the reader” – that called forth the uncouth epithet: “What is doubtful, is that M. Daudet is a novelist in the ordinary sense of the word; what is certain, is that he is an artist and that he is a poet. And it is this mixture of artist and poet that I am trying to describe when I call him an impressionist of the novel.”

Apart from the embarrassment attaching to the term itself, impressionism has often been used to denote a defect rather than a quality, as is suggested by Ford’s reference to label as a “stigma” in *A Personal Remembrance*. (JC 198) Conrad applied the term backhandedly to Stephen Crane, “only an impressionist”, and qualified his appreciation of Daudet, the subject of Brunetièrre’s review, for the same reason: “he saw only the surface of things”. (CL 1: 416, NLL 22) Similarly, Arthur Symons defined the “Impressionism” of the Goncourts as a mode concerned with “a world which existed only as a thing of flat spaces, and angles, and coloured movement”, or else the “merely

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43 For a survey of Conrad’s attitudes to impressionism, see Hay, “Joseph Conrad and Impressionism.” Hay suggests that Conrad may have read Brunetièrre’s essay when it was reprinted in 1883 in *Naturalism in the Novel*. (138) Conrad’s earliest recorded reaction is one of antipathy to the impressionist paintings he saw in his aunt Marguerite Poradowska’s Paris flat in 1891 (139); by 1900 his hostility had mellowed enough for him to see impressionism as an “interesting, superficial movement in the arts” (141); and in his essay on Stephen Crane, written in 1919, he executed a volte-face, admitting that “[h]is impressionism of phrase went really deeper than the surface.” (142) “Stephen Crane: A Note Without Dates”, *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 50.
receptive consciousness of men and women” (my emphasis).44 Impressions lacked the mystic suggestiveness of the Symbol. Conrad’s own most elaborate aesthetic statement, the Preface to The Nigger of the “Narcissus”, invites the label with its emphasis on “impressions conveyed through the senses”, but evades it with the idea of the artist’s reflective transformation of the original impression, descending “within himself” into a “lonely region of stress and strife”. (NN 12, 11)

As Eloise Knapp Hay has shown, Conrad, “like his master Henry James, dissociated himself from impressionism and even derided the movement as to some extent unsound.”45 Michael Levenson confirms this account – “Conrad skirted identification with the term” – and notes that Ford adopted the label only “after having for long enough been called an Impressionist”.46 He did so in the epilogue to his novel of upper-class psychosexual malaise, A Call (1910), in a spirit of weary resignation: “You have called me again and again an Impressionist, and this I have been called so often that I suppose it must be the fact. Not that I know what an Impressionist is.”47 (C 300) Ford’s hasty denial of knowing “what an Impressionist is”, like Brunetière’s defensiveness about his use of the term, points up its denotative weakness. Ford made a more concerted effort to define his aesthetic in “On Impressionism”, an essay published in Poetry and Drama in 1914, specifying its paradoxical combination of self-effacement and egoism and its rule of rendering the unreflected “impression of a moment”.48 Even here, however, he shies away from definitiveness: “I do not know why I should have been especially asked to write about Impressionism; even as far as literary Impressionism goes I claim no Papacy in the matter.”49 Arnold Bennett and Joseph Conrad did reach a sort of consensus

47 With its sarcastic mockery of conventional endings, the epilogue implies a very Jamesian connotation of impressionism, as a quality of opacity and inconclusiveness. Ford would address this theme more explicitly in his monograph on James. (HJ 152-3) Robert Meixner notes this connotation of Ford’s impressionism: “[i]n his earlier fiction the method consisted principally in withholding the full situation from the reader ... and only gradually exposing it.” John A. Meixner, Ford Madox Ford’s Novels: Anguish and Cat’s Cradle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 11.
49 Ford, "On Impressionism," p. 34.
that “The Return” (1897) exemplified impressionism. Bennett used the term in tones of unqualified approbation, writing in The New Age in 1908 that “the opening paragraph of ‘The Return,’ [is] perhaps the most dazzling feat of impressionism in modern English”.

Ironically, however, Conrad regarded “The Return” as among the least successful of his works, and his surprised discovery that “notwithstanding all its apparatus of analysis the story consists for the most part of physical impressions” implies that this “dazzling feat” was only the nicest thing that could be said of a failed experiment. Impressionism, on its own, often signified the lack of something else. (TU 157)

The slippage between painting and writing was at least in part responsible for the low taxonomic dignity of impressionism. One of Brunetière’s several objections to Daudet’s project was the perversity of trying to paint in words, an issue on which he took his cue from Lessing’s Laocoon. There was something monstrous about Daudet’s ambition, as though it were evidence of a will to witchcraft: it was as if “one wanted, in painting … to give to the objects that one represents their real thickness, it is as if one wanted, in sculpture, to give marble the true colour of flesh.”

In Howards End (1910), Margaret Schlegel reacts more glibly, but no less violently, to another confusion of media, involving painting and music this time, but once again joined along the axis of impressionism: “What is the good of the arts if they’re interchangeable? … Oh, it’s all rubbish, radically false. If Monet’s really Debussy, and Debussy’s really Monet, neither gentleman is worth his salt – that’s my opinion.” What annoys Margaret is that impressionist art forms seem to lack definition, impressionist painters and impressionist composers blending into one another. This slippage continues to confuse the signification of the term; as Saunders notes, “[t]o call [Ford’s] method ‘impressionism’ can be misleading, since instead of the glows and hazes of Impressionist painting, Ford’s surfaces scintillate with the glints of hard edges, dazzling clarities.”

I would agree with critics such as Saunders, Jesse Matz and John G. Peters that the analogy with painting is of limited usefulness in understanding literary impressionism.

Ambivalence about the merits of literary impressionism, and lack of consensus as to its meaning, have also characterised the term’s use in criticism. The meanings of

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"impressionism", or the referents of "impressionist", are so various that one is tempted to act on Calvin S. Brown's 1968 recommendation to drop "impressionism and impressionist" from the musical and literary vocabulary."55 With the exception of Matz's recent book, which cannily makes uncertainty "definitive" of impressionism itself, attempts to define the concept outside of the practice of an individual writer have proven inconclusive.56 Herbert Muller's breezy pronouncement in 1938 that "Imagist poetry, the technique of montage in the movies, the broken rhythms and jagged forms of modern music – these have a fairly obvious correspondence with impressionistic fiction" did not portend definitional rigour, any more than does Peter D. Stowell's statement that "[i]n attempting to carve out the essential qualities of any 'ism,' one hopes that the movement, phenomenon, or set of elective affinities will transcend national and cultural characteristics, as well as those of any one literary genre."57 The most bafflingly synthetic work on literary impressionism is Maria Kronegger's 1973 study, which is concerned with a Zeitgeist as much as with an aesthetic: "the impressionist style ... implies man's orientation to a supreme value".58 It is difficult to disagree with Julia van Gunstern's conclusion that Kronegger's work presents "a considerable mental confusion, listing everything from Ernst Mach's influence on Impressionism to the much later existentialist Merleau-Ponty."59

Single author studies of impressionism tend to be more definite, although interpretations of Conrad's impressionism afford a stark illustration of the caveats with which the term is often wreathed. Despite the fact that Joseph Warren Beach opened the Impressionism chapter of The Twentieth Century Novel (1932) with a discussion of Conrad's work, later scholars have tended to argue that his work transcends the mimetic connotations of impressionism, continuing the trend of ambivalence in the usage of the

55 Brown, "Symposium on Literary Impressionism." For a heterogeneous list of writers who have been called "impressionist", see Peters, Conrad and Impressionism, p. 14.
56 Matz, Literary Impressionism, p. 18.
59 Julia van Gunstern, Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 47.
term.\textsuperscript{50} Ian Watt posited his influential concept of “delayed decoding” — the practice of presenting sense impressions detached from their explanatory narrative — as “the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter’s attempt to render visual sensation directly”, but warned against any reductive equation of Conrad with the art movement: “Conrad wanted to pay as much attention to the inside as to the outside”.\textsuperscript{51} Eloise Knapp Hay, similarly, distinguishes between Maupassant’s predilection for “objective style” in the 1887 preface to \textit{Pierre et Jean}, and the dual interest in vivid description and subjective “temperament” to be found in Conrad and Proust.\textsuperscript{52} She develops this point in a later article, where Conrad and Proust are classified as Post-Impressionist because of their interest in “an intricately emerging narrative of the self”, as opposed to the supposedly mechanical impressionism of Ford, Stephen Crane, Daudet and Hume.\textsuperscript{53}

Bruce Johnson, although affirming the link between Conrad and the Impressionist painters at the level of underlying “epistemology”, also moves beyond a merely mimetic framework when he draws a comparison with Husserlian phenomenology to introduce the concept of \textit{aletheia}: truth as unveiling.\textsuperscript{54} Adriaan de Lange seems to be working from a similar knowledge base as Johnson when he, too, adds a further “ontological” stage to the practice of impressionism: “we have to focus on two crucial aspects, the visual and through it, the ontological.”\textsuperscript{55} Many critics of Conrad’s impressionism seem to come up against a version of this dualism; Ford implies as much in \textit{A Personal Remembrance}, claiming that Conrad’s word-choice in “Youth” — his preference for “azure” over the more plausible “blue” — was motivated by a symbolic, rather than a mimetic end, intimating “the personality of Destiny that watched inscrutably behind the sky.” (JC 173) (“Blue”, on the other hand, would connote the broken brushwork of a “French Impressionist painter”.") (JC 171) From this point of view, impressionism is a reductive rubric, inadequate to the metaphysical range of Conrad’s art.

\textsuperscript{51} Watt, \textit{Conrad in the Nineteenth Century}, pp. 176, 179.
\textsuperscript{52} Hay, “Joseph Conrad and Impressionism,” p. 141.
The most coherent accounts of literary impressionism confine themselves to a single author; of these, John G. Peters and Julia van Gunsteren construct the clearest interpretations of the “impressionism” rubric.\textsuperscript{66} Peters’s recent study, *Conrad and Impressionism* (2001), decisively breaks with the tendency towards deprecating or qualifying Conrad’s impressionism, using the concept as a key to the coherence of his entire oeuvre. As he sees it, Conrad’s consistent use of “impressionist techniques to show that the epistemological process is individual” reveals “a kind unity in [his] works that may not initially be apparent.”\textsuperscript{67} Defining “the individual point of view through which objects of consciousness filter” as “the crux of all impressionist theory”, Peters vastly extends the range of insights into Conrad’s fiction made available by the rubric of impressionism, with often surprising results. To consider only his account of the “epistemology of the object”, Peters supplements Watt’s delayed decoding – in his scheme one instance of “primitive perception” – with “the influence of public and private past experience on the perception of objects and events”.\textsuperscript{68} To achieve the clarity and system everywhere apparent in his account, however, Peters must define impressionism quite idiosyncratically, unpacking its significance in ways that Ford and Conrad might not have recognised.

Gunsteren infers her lucid definition of literary impressionism from a close reading of Katherine Mansfield’s fiction, informed by narratology. Impressionism, she believes, is essentially concerned with reproducing the texture of sensory experience: impressionism rests on a “a reality which is apprehensible only in terms of sensations. The result is a text that renders and resembles the sensory nature of human experience.”\textsuperscript{69} This is perhaps the most stable feature of the concept of impressionism, invited by Ford’s statement that “Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains”, Conrad’s


\textsuperscript{67} Peters, *Conrad and Impressionism*, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{68} Peters, *Conrad and Impressionism*, pp. 37, 45. In *Under Western Eyes*, for example, Razumov perceives the cask, lamp and other accoutrements of his student’s existence differently after Haldin’s visit has “nullified his future” at the university (a transformation of familiar objects that is hard for me to imagine at this moment). (44) The idea that impressions are always already embedded is also explored by John Carlos Rowe, “James’s Rhetoric of the Eye: Re-Marking the Impression,” *Criticism* 24, no. 3 (1982). and Johnson, “Conrad’s Impressionism and Watt’s ‘Delayed Decoding’,” pp. 51-2.

\textsuperscript{69} Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield*, p. 20.
doctrine of “fidelity to the truth of my own sensations”, and Virginia Woolf’s famous
description, in “Modern Fiction”, of life as “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope
surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end”.70 (JC 194, WT 10) As
John Carlos Rowe puts it, “impressionism claims to ‘make it new’ by returning us to the
‘purity’ of an object (sensible or mental) by means of an aesthetic act that is characterized
by its spontaneity, freshness, and immediacy.”71

Peters does fall in with the dominant trend in interpretations of impressionism by
defining it as a reaction against nineteenth-century science: “Impressionism is at its core
a response to scientific positivism.”72 Most influential in literary studies has been Fredric
Jameson’s reading of Conrad’s impressionism as a reaction to the “deperceptualization of
the sciences”, transmitted throughout capitalist society in the form of rationalisation.
Mirroring this process of reification in the cultural sphere, “Impressionism ... offers the
exercise of perception and the perceptual recombination of sense data as an end in itself.”73
Peter D. Stowell, similarly, situates impressionism as part of an “anti-
Newtonian” paradigm shift in European culture, and David Stouck observes that what
Ford and Conrad understood by le mot juste was not the “precision of accurate scientific
description but ... the exact rendering of impressions experienced by the writer.”74 A
pointed illustration of the ambiguities with which the term is fraught, however, is
provided by Bender’s recent study, which traces impressionism’s emphasis on direct
observation to the empirical method practiced by Darwin and Comte.75 I would suggest
that impressionism in Ford and Conrad, with its tropes of embodied writing, is
ambivalently bound to the positivist epistemel, rather than breaking with it entirely. Ford
often described the novelist as an “exact scientist”, and in chapter five I will argue that
his impressionist social criticism operated within the same paradigm as scientific

72 Peters, Conrad and Impressionism, p. 13.
73 Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London:
74 David Stouck, “Willa Cather and the Impressionist Novel,” in Critical Essays on Willa Cather,
Impressionism: James and Chekhov, pp. 16-7.
75 Todd K. Bender, Literary Impressionism in Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, and
sociology, and can be understood in many ways as a complementary enterprise, rather than an antagonistic one.

With the notable exception of Peters, the most sophisticated critical accounts have tended to emphasise the ambiguity, and consequent frailty, of the “impression” as a concept. Michael Levenson’s indispensable genealogy takes a broadly epistemological approach, situating Ford’s impressionism at a time of crisis in moral and intellectual authority. Ford sought refuge in a subjectivist aesthetic, offering “a sceptical critique of traditional beliefs and institutions, and a renewal through retreat to the self – the existing order criticized from the standpoint of the ego.”

Impressionism, Levenson notes, was intrinsically unstable, seeming objective to Ezra Pound but subjective to Ford, and swiftly decomposed into a Humean bundle of perceptions, a “subjectivity in which the subject has disappeared.”

In *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (2001), his acute refurbishment of impressionism as a critical tool, Jesse Matz makes the ambiguity of the impression into a fortunate fault, the condition that enables its usefulness as a mediatary concept: “the impression is … a mercurial metaphor for perception, one that inspires and endangers aesthetic effort.” Matz’s integration of high-powered aesthetics with cultural materialism opens valuable new perspectives on literary impressionism, which, in Matz’s view, “begins as a perceptual theory that then falls into the realities of social structures and social plots”. This turn towards a more sociohistorically situated account of impressionism is also apparent in readings that stress the technique’s relationship to the phenomena of modernity.

Given my interest here in authorial self-fashioning, I have found Max Saunders’s interpretation of Ford’s “dual life” useful in shifting the focus of discussion away from

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79 Matz, *Literary Impressionism*, p. 43.
questions of mimesis and onto ones of memory, suggesting a dynamic understanding of impressionism rather than a static morphology. As well as attending to aesthetic and philosophical features of Fordian impressionism, such as its premise of intentionality and emphasis on visual concreteness, Saunders explores the ways in which experience and impressionist writing reciprocally impact on one another.\textsuperscript{81} In his account, life and art are linked in a reflexive circuit: “[n]ovels do more than merely transcribe personal experience ... Ford was using fiction to provide new perspective on his own predicament”, and thereby change it.\textsuperscript{82} Within this circuit, the effect (impressionist writing) could sometimes shape the cause (impressions), as with “the novelist’s dual habit of living himself into interesting situations, in order to be able to transform them into fictional experiences.”\textsuperscript{83} Similarly, Ford’s impressionist fictions became woven into his identity. Discussing Ford’s different versions of a 1909 omnibus accident, written up first as fiction in *The New Humpty-Dumpty* (1912) and later as autobiography in *Return to Yesterday* (1931), Saunders argues that “he had so thoroughly lived out the fictional version in his imagination that when he came to recall the original episode twenty years later, what he remembered was the version he wrote, rather than the version he first experienced.”\textsuperscript{84} Importantly for my purposes, Saunders’s account places value on the non-writing phases of impressionist work, on Ford’s “expert eye for dramatic episodes that could be the germs of more complex situations (so the biographer’s task is not just to trace the fiction to its germ, but to show how it exfoliated).”\textsuperscript{85} This notion of lived impressionism will be particularly relevant to my discussion of the Prefaces to Henry James’s New York Edition in chapter two, where I am concerned with how James’s gathering “direct impression[s] ... of life” figured in his self-presentation. (AN 45)

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\textsuperscript{81} Saunders notes that “[e]consciousness is [Ford’s] subject, rather than the objects of that consciousness”, and analyses how Ford’s “visionary” writing calls for an investigation of “the metaphysics of writing and reading: how literature can ‘make you see’”. Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, vol. 1, pp 5, 384-6.

\textsuperscript{82} Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, vol. 1, p. 309.

\textsuperscript{83} Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, vol. 1, p. 334.

\textsuperscript{84} Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, vol. 1, p. 283.

Literary impressionism, then, remains an unstable concept in itself, a fact taken into account by recent studies (Levenson, Matz), whilst continuing to provide insights into the work of individual practitioners. I do not offer a comprehensive reading of impressionism here, but rather draw on certain connotations of the rubric to pursue an account of authorial self-construction. For my purposes, impressionism usefully implicates the writing body, the accumulation of impressions as human capital and, I will suggest, performance. At this point, then, I turn to the scene of authorial performance for Ford and Conrad, the space that Pierre Bourdieu has called the “literary field”, taking as a departure point the vexed relation between literary purists and the promotional machinery of the mass market.  

“[I]f Joseph Conrad is one Pole, Marie Corelli is surely the other” punned Arnold Bennett acutely in his pseudonymous column for The New Age in 1908.  

Conrad’s A Set of Six and Corelli’s Holy Orders both appeared that autumn, prompting Bennett to wonder just who constituted a public with such eclectic tastes. “Who buys books? Who really does buy books?” he muses. Bennett’s positioning of the two authors seems about right. Conrad, who entered the literary field in 1895 with Almayer’s Folly, and Corelli, who swept it in the same year with the unprecedentedly high sales of The Sorrows of Satan, were poles apart in both critical reputation and commercial success: Corelli became so exasperated with her adverse critical reception that she stopped her publisher sending out advance copies. Bennett’s pun, and his bafflement, usefully highlights the environment created by the mass market and the demise of the triple-decker format, changes which combined to focus the attention of authors and publishers more sharply on the whims of “le public introuvable”, and seemed to place the two poles of the market in competition with one another.  

Corelli’s name recurs frequently in Bennett’s causerie in The New Age as a by-word for popular fiction, often paired with that of another early blockbuster, Hall Caine. (Caine’s The Eternal City (1901) was reputedly the first novel to

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88 Conrad used this epithet to describe the market for fiction in a letter to John Galsworthy. (CL 4: 385) On these changes, see Peter Keating, The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875 - 1914 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), pp. 404-5, 420-3. The reduced royalties from the new single-volume, 6s format meant that relatively unpopular authors became more dependent on sales to the public, as opposed to the stable demand from circulating libraries.
sell a million copies in Britain. Caine was stigmatised by literary purists not only for his trite didacticism but also for his willingness to advertise himself in personal interviews, a relatively novel journalistic fashion imported from America. Ford and Conrad themselves took part in this vilification, satirising Caine as “the great Callan” in The Inheritors: “I’ve written a good deal of autobiographical matter”, says Callan with unintentional irony, “and it would verge on self-advertisement to do more. You know how much I dislike that.” (I 23, 28) Conrad must have relished this opportunity for caricature: he often denounced Caine in his letters, regarding his availability to interviewers as the mark of a “megalomaniac”, and rebuffing a request for a photograph (another feature of the new literary journalism) with the words “I hope you will not take it ill if I decline to compete with Mr H. Caine.” (CL 2: 132, CL 4: 151) Whether he declined to or not, Conrad could not compete commercially with Corelli and Caine, his polar opposites. In the counter-economy of literary reputation, however, we might construe his frigid rebuff as itself a competitive manoeuvre, a way of asserting his status as the upper pole. Although initially chary of advertisement, Conrad did engage in other more subtle forms of image management, presenting himself as, among other things, a disinterested professional rather than a producer of commodities (a point I discuss in more detail in chapters three and four).

As Stephen Donovan observes, “disdain for advertising became an integral part of Conrad’s public image”, in spite of his collusion with the apparatus of promotion in later years. Such perceived aloofness afforded Conrad symbolic profits, shoring up his reputation as an artist rather than an entertainer. Another article in The New Age provides an example of this kind of profit: in 1911 the critic J.M. Kennedy cited Conrad’s abstention from self-advertisement as a proof of his literary superiority. Measuring Conrad against H.G. Wells, Kennedy concludes not only that Conrad’s “knowledge of the technical side of his art” far exceeded Wells’s, but that “[w]hat is of equal importance is the fact that Mr. Conrad does not advertise. You will take up all sorts of papers and magazines and look in vain for articles dealing with Mr. Conrad, his art, his

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hobbies, and his mode of life.” Conrad’s refusal to compete with Caine had not gone unnoticed: his professional expertise – his “knowledge of the technical side” – was confirmed by his abstention from advertisement. As it happens, Ford later codified this strategy of reputation-building in his memoir *Return to Yesterday* (1931): aspiring authors are advised, not without an undertone of bitterness, to keep a low public profile. He infers this rule from the success of Meredith, Hardy, Conrad, Bennett, Kipling and James, whom he classifies not as the great tradition but as “the great permanent sellers”. Avoiding publicity, he advises, is merely a means to this end. “All your life until reaching that stage should have been devoted to that progress. You should have eschewed as you would shrink from soiled underwear all personal publicity.” (RY 201) This advice shows an awareness of the counter-commercial advantages of not advertising, exemplified in Kennedy’s praise of Conrad. However, the implication that Conrad engineered his reputation consciously and strategically throughout his career is belied, elsewhere in Ford’s memoirs, by his stories of Conrad’s visceral abhorrence of promotion and commercialism. In *A Personal Remembrance*, for example, Ford recalls that “publicity caused Conrad an unbelievable agony”, and made him paranoid: when Conrad was complimented on the hoardings for *Nostromo*, he suspected that he was being chaffed for “the dishonour of serialisation in a popular journal”, *T.P.’s Weekly*, and the following day was so “ill with mortification” that Ford had to write the next instalment. (JC 227, 229) Ford suffered some of the same symptoms himself. He had his first major succès d’estime, *The Soul of London* (1905), with the short-lived publishing house Alston Rivers, which deployed an “unusual and numerous” array of “devices … for obtaining publicity” on Ford’s behalf. Among other things, the firm’s dynamic young managing director René Byles was supposed to have extracted a promise from Lord Northcliffe himself, proprietor of the popular half-

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94 For an interesting account of R.L. Stevenson’s comparable qualms about advertising and being a celebrity generally – the “frothy bubble” around his name – see Roslyn Jolly, "Light Work: RLS, the family business and the guilt of the writer," *TLS*, January 28 2005.
penny *Daily Mail*, to personally review Ford’s new title. (RY 182) Ford also relates how a colourful stunt for promoting his satire *Mr. Fleight* (1913), involving the distribution of bogus visiting cards, earned him a reprimand from G.W. Prothero, editor of the *Quarterly Review* and embodiment of Victorian literary respectability. (RY 184) Whether or not Prothero’s patriarchal chastisement actually occurred, the anecdote is an authentic working-through of Ford’s shame about advertisement. When *The Heart of the Country* was published in 1906 he wrote his wife Elsie that Byles’s zeal “makes me positively sick at times – his methods, & I feel as if other people must be despising me.”95 As with Ford’s figuration of taste in terms of physical disgust, it is the body that intervenes here to give the lie to the idea of cynical career management.

Pierre Bourdieu gives the name “symbolic capital” to non-material assets such as Conrad’s reputation for disdaining advertisement. This concept, and its implication that modernist writers had, as Bourdieu puts it, “an interest in disinterestedness”, are standard features of recent materialist accounts of modernism.96 In its most basic form, the argument relating symbolic capital to modernism maintains that modernist difficulty, which alienates the wider reading public and deprives authors of immediate pecuniary reward, acquires value within what Bourdieu calls the “inverted economic world” of High Art. In extreme cases, commercial failure itself becomes the measure of artistic achievement – “the artist cannot triumph on the symbolic terrain except by losing on the economic terrain” – and therefore “those who enter [this world] have an interest in disinterestedness.”97 Such careers are “oriented to the accumulation of symbolic capital” rather than sales, prestige which can eventually yield, “under certain conditions and in the long term, ‘economic’ profits.”98 This reasoning was not foreign to the Edwardian literary field. In *The Benefactor*, an American publisher explains blandly that Moffat’s reputation for uncompromising artistic integrity would be a commercial asset should he ever venture into a more accessible genre: there is a lucrative market for “[s]omething they can *like* that’s written by a real man with a reputation like yours”. (B 169) This scenario was at least approximately realised in Conrad’s long-time-coming commercial hit, *Chance*

96 Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 216. I provide a survey of some of these works below.
(1914), which was marketed as a distinguished author’s foray into a “feminine” subject. Bourdieu’s relational understanding of the “literary field” emphasises that symbolic capital is accrued within a system of differences, a “network of objective relations ... between positions – for example, the position corresponding to a genre like the novel or to a subcategory like the society novel”. In these terms, Conrad’s refusal to advertise can be understood as a “position-taking” (prise de position), intelligible by comparison with the antipodean position – or pole – occupied by those commercial authors like Corelli and Caine who did publicise their work and themselves. Broadly speaking, this symbolic capital was redeemed by Conrad’s cooperation with the American publicity campaign for *Chance* (although Conrad had admitted the need to compromise with advertising long before: by 1903 he was diffidently assuring his agent J.B. Pinker that “I recognise also that I am not quite at liberty to indulge my tastes – or rather distastes in the matter of publicity”). (CL 3: 38)

THE PERFORMANCE OF AUTHORSHIP

It is less and less heretical to see modernists in Bourdieu’s terms as interested in disinterestedness, and even as cunning self-promoters and acute trend-spotters, whose apparent disdain for commercial success masks an actual complicity with markets of one kind or another. In Lawrence Rainey’s influential formulation, “modernism, among other things, is a strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits its commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes a commodity of a special sort, one that is temporarily exempted from the exigencies of immediate consumption.” I have been influenced by several recent studies and essay collections that combine this perspective with an interest in authorial self-construction or self-fashioning. In common with these

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approaches, my reading of early modernist writing emphasises self-fashioning and means of production, rather than formal properties. But although I do engage in a small amount of “not reading”, as Rainey has described his critical method, I don’t want to forego the insights into professional society afforded by my authors, and I have not baulked at reading, too, where those insights have seemed likely to be forthcoming. Also like these studies, I see Ford’s and Conrad’s relationships to the mass market — *le public introuvable* — as crucial to a reading of their work and self-presentation. This will not always involve a narrative of furtive venality, however: as Joyce Piell Wexler has shown, Conrad’s desire to be widely read is compatible with many of his artistic ideals, notably


those expressed in the Author’s Note to Chance.\footnote{104} Similarly, Ford’s interest in reaching a wide audience can be read as a desire to renew a fragmented, apathetic public sphere.

If cultural capital has become Bourdieu’s “trademark concept”, as Jaffe believes, then it must be time to retrieve another aspect of his work.\footnote{105} Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus, and the critique of rational agency it entails, opens up new perspectives on the material history of modernism. The following (comparatively) lucid exposition from a 1988 lecture series, collected in Practical Reason, connects his critique of voluntarism with the habitus and the “feel for the game”, and is worth quoting at length:

To the reduction of conscious calculation, I oppose the relationship of ontological complicity between the habitus and the field. Between agents and the social world there is a relationship of infraconscious, infralinguistic complicity: in their practice agents constantly engage in theses which are not posed as such. Does a human behaviour really always have as an end, that is, a goal, the result which is the end, in the sense of conclusion, or term, of that behaviour? I think not. Social agents who have a feel for the game, who have embodied a host of practical schemes of perception and appreciation functioning as instruments of reality construction, as principles of vision and division of the universe in which they act, do not need to pose the objectives of their practice as ends.\footnote{106}

If social life is conceived in this way as “the two-way relationship between objective structures (those of social fields) and incorporated structures (those of the habitus)”, then analysis of the “institutions of modernism” should be complemented by interpretation of the “incorporated structures”, the embodied dispositions, that enabled modernists to read

\footnote{104} [W]hat I always feared most”, Conrad wrote in reference to the warm popular reception of this novel, “was drifting unconsciously into the position of a writer for a limited coterie”. (C 10) Wexler, Who Paid for Modernism?, pp. 21-2.
\footnote{105} Jaffe, Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity, p. 13.
\footnote{106} Pierre Bourdieu, Practical Reason (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 79-80. Habitux, from the Latin habere, to have, connotes at once an external demeanour and a habitual disposition, a customary way of comporting oneself. It expresses the interdependence of “generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices” and “classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes.” (8)
those institutions. The dispositions are cultural capital, the schemes of perception and behaviour inscribed in the body by family, education, work, sports, political parties, and so on. McDonald usefully summarises the implications of Bourdieu's model: "for the culturally and socially privileged, being a purist is like speaking a first language, while, for the more marginalized, it is like learning a second late in life. Biography or sociobiography, that is, affects how 'natural' a writer feels occupying a particular position in the field." I would suggest that Ford's and Conrad's visceral aversion to publicity instances this kind of incorporated structure, as does their disgust at bad writing, especially their own. The fact that Conrad reacted so violently to serialisation in T.P.'s Weekly, or that Ford could so convincingly imagine feeling shame for a sentimental novel, signifies their instinctive feel for the hierarchy of literary genres and the disgrace of commercialism. Even if Conrad's early avoidance of publicity - his refusal to compete with Mr. H. Caine - paid off in the long term, this does not necessarily imply a calculated career move such as Ford describes in Return to Yesterday.

The various moves which culminate in canonical status, patronage, grants, academic favouritism or whatever should not, Bourdieu argues, be interpreted teleologically, or even altogether logically, but rather as "practical schemes, opaque to their possessors, varying according to the logic of the situation, the almost invariably partial viewpoint which it imposes, etc. Thus, the procedures of practical logic are rarely entirely coherent and rarely entirely incoherent." This may seem an elementary point so late in the day. However, some revisionist accounts of modernism are apt to sound a little paranoid in their attribution of cunning designs. A quotation from the introduction to the edited collection Marketing Modernisms (taken, to be sure, out of context) will serve to illustrate this tendency: "modernist writers and many of their first-generation proponents in the academy", the editors observe, "wanted us not to think too deeply about their work in light of marketing and market concerns." Wanted? Us? Far from wishing to absolve modernists of complicity in their accrual of symbolic capital, my objection is

107 Bourdieu, Practical Reason, vii.
110 Dettmar and Watt, eds., Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, and Rereading, pp. 7-8. Timothy Materer, in his essay on Pound, does, however, observe that "Pound's motives were obviously more idealistic than those of a Madison Avenue executive". (26)
merely to the default assumption that they were pursuing reasoned programs of self-promotion.

Although I frequently refer to authorial self-fashioning, self-construction, or self-presentation, I have sought to temper the connotations of voluntarism inherent in this terminology with the idea of authorial performance. I derive my definition of this concept loosely from the sociologist Erving Goffman’s theory of the presentation of self; in what follows, I will endeavour to specify this definition, with reference to a seldom-cited source on impressionism: Rudyard Kipling’s Stalky & Co. (1899) This revisionist school novel may seem an unlikely authority on literary impressionist procedure. However, its fourth chapter, “The Impressionists”, recovers a repressed performative sense of “impressionism” that is silent in more orthodox sources. The way in which Stalky and Co give a false “impression” to their housemaster provides a microcosm of the performance of authorship. As Stephen Greenblatt has shown, wielding power through performance depends on two main conditions: “the ability and willingness to play a role, to transform oneself ... into another” and “the transformation of another’s reality into a manipulable fiction”, which in turn requires “the subversive perception of another’s truth as an ideological construct”.\textsuperscript{111} Greenblatt illustrates the improvisation of power with an example from the history of European colonialism, so it should not surprise us that Kipling’s schoolboys excel at improvisation in Greenblatt’s sense.

Stalky, Beetle and McTurk’s impressionism consists of conveying false “impressions” to their housemaster. The subtle disinformation of Mr. Prout, who is led to believe the boys are deep in the stereotypical schoolboy vice of usury, is cued to the public school genre itself: Stalky and his co-performers explicitly model their imposture on F.W. Farrar’s heavily didactic Eric, or Little by Little (1858) and the Boy’s Own Paper (founded in 1879 by the Religious Tract Society), as well as on anti-Semitic racial stereotypes.\textsuperscript{112} In Greenblatt’s terms, the protagonists master Prout’s reality as manipulable fiction. Without scripting their performance, they improvise their parts instinctively in a series of dialogue set-pieces; as the narrator remarks during one of these exchanges, “[t]he game was developing itself almost automatically.”\textsuperscript{113} “The Impressionists”, with its theme of culturally specific, “automatic” role-play, activates the

\textsuperscript{112} Rudyard Kipling, Stalky & Co. (London: Macmillan, 1899), pp. 105-6, 108.
\textsuperscript{113} Kipling, Stalky & Co., p. 108.
performative connotation of Edwardian impressionism, gesturing towards the unavoidable slippage between fiction and life for impressionist authors, whose profession is the suggestion of atmosphere. As Saunders suggests, self-dramatisation was integral to impressionist writing: “For role-players such as Conrad and Ford, writers who often lived their way into their fictional worlds, experimenting with tones and attitudes, one man’s true impression will be another’s exaggeration, or misprision.”

Literary impressionism, then, signifies not only textual illusionism, but also the performance of an authorial identity, and it seems likely that the techniques employed in each activity sometimes overlapped.

This interpretation of literary impressionism is, I think, solicited by Ford’s memoir of impressionist collaboration, his “record of the impression made by Conrad the Impressionist upon another writer, impressionist also”. (JC 34) Conrad’s Impressionism, it is implied, consists also in his consummate ability to make impressions on Ford, bringing literary impressionism into line with Kipling’s improvisatory hijinks. Again, Saunders has noted this dimension of Ford’s literary practice: “Ford’s impressionism”, he observes, “is finely attuned to the different impressions we make on different people.”

Accordingly, the “Impressionist” Conrad of A Personal Remembrance is a mercurial character actor, differentiating sharply between his on-stage and off-stage personae – “but that time Conrad came” – and capable of metamorphosing from a dishevelled old man into a spruce dandy “as he stood and talked”. (JC 11, 257) Conrad’s gifts as a storyteller are held to be dramatic: he lives himself into the historical parts of his vivid table-talk and, Ford recalls, varies his performance to suit his audience: “like every inspired raconteur Conrad modified his stories subtly, so as to get in sympathy with his listener.” (JC 24, 73) Jessie Conrad confirmed this observation in Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him: (1926), recalling her astonishment “at the extent to which, in his mouth, the same story varied.”

In Ford’s account, Conrad’s modifications are vocal and gestural rather than substantial, a matter of “gestures of the hand, droppings of the voice, droopings of the eyelid and letting fall his monocle”, emphasising their dramatic and embodied nature. (JC 73)

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In an intriguing gloss on the well-thumbed factoid of Conrad's accent, Ford explicitly links this self-dramatising narrative instinct to Conrad's writing praxis.\textsuperscript{117} Although his pronunciation was generally erratic, Ford maintains that Conrad recited from his works faultlessly: "Conrad's marvellous gift of language was, in the end, dramatic. When he talked his sense of phonetics was dormant, but the moment it came to any kind of performance the excitement would quicken the brain centres that governed his articulation." (JC 216) Here a sense of linguistic competence as what Bourdieu calls an "incorporated structure" combines with a recognition of performativity: language, as an aptitude embedded in the "brain centres", is activated involuntarily by the requirements of a dramatic scene. Ford speculates that the same dialogic imagination animated Conrad's prose: "Probably the mere thought of reading aloud subconsciously aroused memories of once-heard orations of Mr. Gladstone or John Bright; so, in writing, even to himself he would accentuate and pronounce his words as had done those now long-defunct orators". (JC 217) The sly humour of Conrad emulating Liberal orators aside, Ford's hypothesis figures writing as an embodied and dialogic activity, akin to performing for an audience. There is a direct continuity, in Ford's memoir, between the Conrad who creates illusions on the page and the vivid dinner-party raconteur: impressionism involves not only research into the technique of fiction, but also the performance of a role.

Understanding authorial self-fashioning as performance foregrounds both its involuntary and its collaborative aspects. As they explain to the college chaplain, Stalky and his co-performers are not guilty of lying, only of failing to correct a false inference. "You see, he was under an impression, Padre, and I suppose I ought to have corrected that impression; but of course I couldn't be quite certain that his house wasn't given over to money-lendin', could I?"\textsuperscript{118} Rather than lying outright, the heroes exploit their victim's familiarity with a repertoire of schoolboy clichés, giving a false impression. Without wanting to put too much more pressure on Kipling's comic tale, it will be useful to draw out the implications of this kind of impressionism, again to suggest the collective and partially unconscious nature of social performance, the feel for the game. The


\textsuperscript{118} Kipling, \textit{Stalky & Co.}, p. 124.
philosophe: Bernard Williams argues that the difference between being lied to and receiving a false impression consists in the conscious investment of trust in the will of another: therefore, “[h]earing the truth is ... not the same as being presented with the real, and, correspondingly, lying is different from the deceiver’s arranging a simulated scene which ... makes his victim believe that a certain thing is happening in front of him when it is not.”119 As Williams points out, an ethical theory of trust, if it is to avoid Kantian dogmatism, must differentiate between contexts like these. “We need to consider the various kinds of communicative expectations that obtain between people who have different kinds of relations to one another”.120 Williams wants “people to have a disposition of Sincerity which is centred on sustaining and developing relations with others that involve different kinds and degrees of trust.”121

However, the level of mental clarity assumed in Williams’s ethics of trust is a best-case scenario. It is here that I want to introduce Goffman’s dramaturgical interpretation of everyday life, as a way of supplying the pessimistic unconscious of Williams’s ethical ideal. Goffman interprets trust as the element of social equilibrium, less a conscious bestowal of responsibility than a mutual investment in the definition of social situations. In this interpretation, the ethical gravity of lying rarely comes up: social life tends to resemble Williams’s “simulated scene”, where there is no question of voluntary belief (nor of egregious betrayal). The kind of “consensus” needed to carry on social interaction is not such that “each individual candidly expresses what he really feels and honestly agrees with the expressed feelings of the others present”; this, in Goffman’s view, is “an optimistic ideal”. Rather than explicitly emitting truth-statements about the state of affairs and his or her role within it, most of the time “the individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before others”. Nor is this definition a solo performance: social life rests on a “division of definitional labour”, so that a “veneer of consensus”, “a kind of interactional modus vivendi” of interlocking social roles, is collectively maintained.122

120 Williams, *Truth & Truthfulness*, p. 111.
121 Williams, *Truth & Truthfulness*, p. 121.
Goffman’s idea of an interactional *modus vivendi* carries several implications that are advantageous to an account of authorial self-fashioning. First, it defines trust in social performances as a tacit agreement among social beings rather than a deliberate bestowal of responsibility. Although “[t]he individual’s initial projection commits him to what he is proposing to be”, this “projection” is less an explicit assertion of how things are than a participation in the mutual definition of a social situation.\(^{123}\) By the same token, crediting a gesture of definition involves a reciprocal performance, participation in the “division of definitional labour”, rather than a conscious act of trust: the success of Stalky and Co’s simulation hinges on scripting Mr. Prout into the answering cliché of earnest censure, lecturing them on how “money-lending ... opened the door to all evil”.\(^{124}\) “[F]ew impressions”, Goffman argues, “could survive if those who received the impression did not exert tact in their reception of it.” This collaborative dimension of social consensus also embraces, in Goffman’s model, the alliance of co-performers that he calls a “team”, a sort of “secret society ... co-operating together to maintain a particular definition of the situation.”\(^{125}\) Finally, Goffman, like Bourdieu, assumes a degree of involuntariness in the performance of social roles: “The legitimate performances of everyday life are not ‘acted’ or ‘put on’ in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do, and does this solely because of the effect it is likely to have. ... In short, we all act better than we know how.”\(^{126}\)

Goffman argues that the situation Williams designates as simulation — the kind of setting created by Kipling’s Impressionists — is more common than the one he refers to as lying. It consists of an interactional *modus vivendi*, produced by an ensemble of social roles that mutually define and sustain one another. “The game” of giving impressions, Kipling writes, develops “almost automatically.” Like Kipling’s improvisation-game, Goffman’s interactivity involves both tact — the audience’s inclination to trust the performers — and a team: trust in a performance is generated by co-performers and colluded at by an audience. Authorial self-presentation, I submit, takes place in this grid of reciprocal performances, comprising authors, agents, critics, publishers, editors, and so on: the literary field possesses its own collective momentum.

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Conrad’s performance of disinterested literary professionalism, with which I will be most directly concerned in chapter three, is not, then, in any sense a lie; as Goffman observes, “[w]hether an honest performer wishes to convey the truth or whether a dishonest performer wishes to convey a falsehood, both must take care to enliven their performances with appropriate expressions”. This self-presentation resulted, nonetheless, in an accrual of symbolic capital, by assuring correspondents such as Edward Garnett, a publisher’s reader, and Arthur Quiller-Couch, an influential critic, of his disinterested motives (a definitive element of professional identity, as we will see in chapter one). This select audience of literary insiders can, in turn, be construed as a team, or rather, as colleagues, “a team that differs from ordinary teams in that the members of its audience are not in immediate face-to-face contact”, but rather constitute “a marginal type of ‘weak’ audience”. As with other performances of professional identity, public trust in Conrad’s self-definition was sustained by this supporting cast of colleagues.

Teamwork, of course, is alien to the bourgeois ideology of art, according to which “the production of the autonomous work of art is the act of an individual”, in Peter Bürger’s influential formulation. In 1891, at the high watermark of British Aestheticism, Oscar Wilde could be found vehemently propounding this view, insisting that “alone, without any reference to his neighbours, without any interference, the artist can fashion a beautiful thing”, and that accommodating “what other people want” reduces him to either a “craftsman” or a “tradesman”. The achievement of “a supreme artist like Flaubert” had been “to isolate himself”. Conrad incorporated this trope into his performance of authorship, reminding Edward Garnett, for example, of art’s awful autonomy: “I am frightened when I remember that I have to drag it all out of myself.” (CL 1: 288) When The London Magazine suggested changes to “A Smile of Fortune”, he fiercely defended the sovereignty of genius along Wildean lines: “My signature stands for something quite individual and distinctive in the art of expression. How then can I

127 Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, p. 66.
128 Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, p. 166.
modify my work in its inner texture in accordance with another man’s views?" As we will see, in a demystifying account such as Bourdieu’s, the idea of solitary genius is reinterpreted as an institutional category, dependent not only on individual achievement but also on the socially determined taste of critics like J.M. Kennedy, and on extratextual gestures like abstention from advertisement; for Goffman, similarly, a social identity is constructed by teamwork and audience collusion. To conclude this discussion of authorial performance, I want to return to Ford’s memoir of impressionist collaboration. My hypothesis is that A Personal Remembrance prefigures, to a certain extent, these sociological demystifications, scandalously challenging the myth of solitary authorship, and implying that Conrad’s reputation was consciously fashioned within the assembly of agents and structures that constitute the literary field.

**JOSEPH CONRAD**

The outcry of the “Conradistas” against A Personal Remembrance was energised by the Aestheticist myth of autonomous creation. The defence of Conrad’s reputation against the alloy of collaboration was carried out most explicitly in Jessie Conrad’s vitriolic letters to the TLS and the Bookman’s Journal, in which she denies that “Joseph Conrad ever poached on Mr. Hueffer’s vast stock of plots” and repudiates Ford’s claim to have played midwife to The Rescue. Her description of Ford’s tampering as a “sacrilege” indicates the religious nature of the feelings in play. Edward Garnett, too, took issue with Ford’s account of the collaborations, claiming rather brutally in the Nation and Athenaeum that Conrad had set far less store by them than Ford implied. The New York Times also balked at Ford’s depiction of a symbiotic relationship, doubting that Conrad

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131 Quoted in the London Magazine’s reply, which was addressed to J.B. Pinker. J.H. Stupe and Owen Knowles, A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), p. 74. Conrad’s letter has not survived.
was really so indebted to Ford”. 135 In the first place, these are responses to Ford’s concrete claims of facilitating several of Conrad’s masterpieces: “The End of the Tether” (JC 261), “Amy Foster” (JC 127, 140), The Mirror of the Sea (JC 25), “Gaspar Ruiz” (JC 110), The Secret Agent (JC 246) and The Rescue (JC 179, 189-90). However, in addition to these direct responses, the less serious charge of egotism and conceitlessness that even sympathetic reviewers levelled against Ford is also related to his portrayal of writing as a deeply collaborative enterprise. 136 These accusations did little justice to the book’s subtleties: as Joseph Wiesenfarth notes, “critics simply did not read Ford’s memoir well enough to understand it”, in spite of its being “plain to see that Ford relentlessly presents Conrad as the older and better writer in his biography.” 137 Nonetheless, it is easy to imagine how such criticisms came about: what reviewers saw as “egotism” – the memoir’s ratio of “far too much Ford Madox Ford” to “far too little Joseph Conrad” – is perhaps its central motif, and is deeply bound up with the model of collaborative writing Ford proposes. 138

Aaron Jaffe suggests that the dominant high modernist narrative of collaboration is one in which collaborative projects are subordinate to solo ones, a devalued counterpoint to heroic individual creation: “The subordination of collaborative work thus served as a controlling mechanism for ordering networks of literary relationships vis-à-vis hierarchy and self-promotion.” 139 A Personal Remembrance, however, violates these myth-making conventions, in fact reversing the “self-hardening” of “the exteriorised singular artist” that would characterise later modernist memoirs. 140 The self-destructive impudence of Ford’s reminiscence is coded throughout as a blurring of outlines: life and art, biography and novel, biographer and subject. These syntheses are rooted in the kind

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136 Reviews in the Manchester Guardian, the New Statesman, the Spectator, the Bookman and the Sewanee Review all referred to Ford’s “egotism” or “conceit”, whatever their overall verdict (mostly favourable). Mark van Doren, writing in the Nation (US), thought Joseph Conrad “one of the most conceited books ever published”; H.L. Mencken in the American Mercury judged Ford “too engrossed by the bombs going off in his own ego”. Excerpts from these reviews are reprinted in Harvey, Ford Madox Ford, pp. 349-56.


139 Jaffe, Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity, p.101.

140 Jaffe, Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity, p.135.
of chronic and unbounded literary collaboration that Ford describes, Conrad’s having, as Ford puts it, “at his disposal the whole brain of a man of letters”, a relationship not confined to the study, but woven into the whole fabric of a friendship. (JC 186) Ford heralds this motif of continuous mutual influence with the touching story of his reading of Conrad’s death in the newspaper. Typically, this anecdote is superimposed on another: Ford’s account of his and Conrad’s constant research into textual “render[ing]”, spending “quiet hours” touring the countryside and deliberating the mot juste for whatever objects struck their eye. (JC 26) So deeply ingrained is the habit of consultation that Ford maintains an internal stylistic discussion with Conrad even in his absence, a quirk which heightens the shock of his death: “He was speaking to me. Not five, not three … minutes … Not three seconds”, Ford protests. (JC 27) This internalisation of Conrad as an artistic superego foreshadows Ford’s treatment of the collaboration, which emerges as a complex interpenetration of two minds rather than a quantifiable division of labour.

This muddlement of the border separating two creative minds prevents Ford from relating certain segments of Conrad’s biography coherently. As he explains, “[i]ntimately mixed up as he was with the writing of so many of Conrad’s sea stories he could not disentangle to his own satisfaction which version of a semiautobiographical story, like ‘Heart of Darkness’, was the printed story, which the preparation for the printed story, as Conrad told it to the writer”, and which were the various versions Conrad related as anecdotes. (JC 98) Ford alludes here to an untraceable oral component of collaboration – the use of another writer as a sounding-board – to illustrate the profound impact of working together, a process both intensive and diffuse that colours his whole image of Conrad. The hectic and irrecoverable dynamics of collaboration are figured romantically in the episode of rewriting the end of “The End of the Tether” after its accidental incineration, with Ford correcting and adding to Conrad’s copy willy-nilly, or shouting out solutions for his non-native-speaker impasses from “across the dead-still, grass-grown street”. (JC 262)

These images of an “[i]ntimately mixed up” collaboration, together with the related motif of Ford’s internalising or becoming Conrad, account for much of the “egotism” in A Personal Remembrance – Ford’s alleged use of Conrad as a “pretext for
the author to say much about himself”, as one reviewer put it.\textsuperscript{141} The insuperable biobiblogic tangle implied in such sketches as the rewriting of “The End of the Tether” must also have factored in the scepticism and indignation of Jessie Conrad. Edward Gernett and the New York Times. In a response to Jessie Conrad’s letter in the Bookman, however, William McFee seemed to imply that basic assumptions about authorship were also at stake in the controversy: “[t]o say that Conrad was independent of plots is to misunderstand the whole business of writing”.\textsuperscript{142} I would suggest that the memoir’s “egotism” – Ford’s impressionist method of entangling himself in Joseph Conrad – also subtends a heretical assumption about the “whole business of writing”: the memoir reveals the contingency of the creation of masterpieces, and redefines collaboration as the inevitable involvement of friends and colleagues in this process.

However, the exalted state of Conrad’s reputation at his death – “with one obvious exception”, declared Virginia Woolf in her obituary, “the highest in England” – ensured that A Personal Remembrance would be a polymorphously invidious work: it suffered from presenting the “man” rather than the “public idol”, as the Commonweal review put it.\textsuperscript{143} Ford cannot have been unaware that the mingling of selves implied in passages like the following would be read as provokingly outré:

We made the voyage in the Judea, Do or Die – actually the Palestine – that you find narrated in “Youth.” In the East we passed so and so many years. You find the trace of them in “The End of the Tether”, to go no further outside “The Youth” volume. We commanded the Congo Free State navy – for the sake of “Heart of Darkness.” So we have the whole gamut of youth, of fidelity and of human imbecility .... And if the writer write “we” – that is how it feels. For it was not possible to be taken imperiously through Conrad’s life, in those unchronological and burning passages of phraseology, and not to feel – even to believe – that one had had, oneself, that experience. (JC 102)

\textsuperscript{142} Bookman 61 (1925): p. 500, excerpt reprinted in Harvey, Ford Madox Ford, p. 357.
Joseph Conrad, c’est moi. Characteristically, Ford entwines voices of arrogance and homage inextricably: this is a finely turned compliment to Conrad’s narrative gift, but also a breezy appropriation of his exotic exploits. Ford’s conceit gets weirder and more grotesque as it proceeds, going on to imagine the birth of a monstrous, eight foot tall Ford-Conrad-Kurtz composite in a hut in the Congo, weaned on cans of condensed milk.¹⁴⁴ (JC 103) Eliot’s unctuous obituary note in The Criterion is a useful foil to bring out the effrontery of this whimsical device: “No periodical which professes a devotion to literature could neglect to associate itself with the general regret at the death of a writer who was beyond question a great novelist, and who possessed the modesty and the conviction which a great writer should have.”¹⁴⁵ Ford’s recherché impressionist method – the rationale for his “egotism” – would have seemed antic in this sepulchral atmosphere. Particularly relevant here, however, is the way in which his technique of collapsing biographer and subject is intertwined with the theme of collaboration, radically questioning the narrative of solitary achievement implicit in the idea of a “great novelist”. The sheer oddness of appropriating Conrad’s memories is perhaps a pre-emptive response to this taboo, a self-conscious gaffe designed to puncture the solemnity, not just of Conrad’s reputation, but of this Aestheticist myth in particular. As Ford sagely observed, “the critics of our favoured land do not believe in collaboration.” (JC 22)

Ford’s memoir disrupted cherished assumptions not only about autonomous authorship – notably the hermetic, irrefragible circuit of experience, memory, author, text – but also about the social space in which reputations are made, and the degree to which Conrad sought his own canonisation. In keeping with the memoir’s motif of impressionist performance – impressionism as a whole way of life – Conrad’s personality is figured as essentially fictive: “Conrad was Conrad”, Ford writes, “because he was his books”. (JC 19) Hence Ford casts Conrad’s schemes for obtaining credit as the romantic exploits of a Lord Jim (with himself in the role of Marlow), and claims that his disposition should be understood through the characters of Captain Marryat’s adventure novels. (JC 18-9, vi, 64) Conrad’s rather savage method of composition is described as “squeezing the last drop of blood out of a subject”, a metaphor that reappears to figure Conrad’s romantic delight in Ford’s historic furniture (previous owners Christina Rossetti

¹⁴⁴ This creature seems slightly taller than the invalid Kurtz appears to be; eight as opposed to “seven feet long”. (HD 59)
¹⁴⁵ The Criterion, October 1924, 3(9), p.1.
and Thomas Carlyle), and later, more suggestively, his single-minded pursuit of literary eminence. (JC 42, 92) Ford recalls that Conrad was determined to rise steadily through the ranks into the “literary firmament”, and was appalled by his collaborator’s supposed indifference to his own reputation: a failure to manage one’s reputation with care “is, in effect, the same crime as not squeezing the last drop of blood out of your subject”. (JC 134-5) Forc’s implication is that the thoroughness evident in Conrad’s fiction is continuous with a deliberate campaign of reputation-building: Conrad’s careerist aspiration to the “shipshape life”, and his disinterested commitment to making “shipshape books”, are cognate expressions of his personality. (JC 135, 185)

Fashioning a shipshape literary career in the way that one would compose a novel involves, Ford suggests, the enlistment of supporting characters. He discusses Conrad’s indebtedness to editors, critics and publisher’s readers as a matter of course, listing “Mr. Henley [editor of the New Review], Mr. Marriott Watson [Australian romancer and a Henley protégé] and, the writer presumes, Mr. Edward Garnett” as “his chief backers behind the scenes”, and H.G. Wells as “his chief backer before the public”. (JC 46) Conrad’s performance needed a stage-crew, or, in Goffman’s vocabulary, a team. Switching metaphors, Ford suggests that Conrad’s intervention in Ford’s manuscript of “Seraphina” (later Romance) was a sort of buccaneering, “[a]n adventure like that of ‘Victory’ itself”, concluding: “Well, all we who supported Conrad to his final, so great victory, were the subordinate characters of his books, putting up with his extortionate demands for credit, for patience or for subjects”. (JC 20) Ford figures the literary field as, in fact, an interactional modus vivendi, a tissue of collective beliefs much like a novel or a play, in which a centre of legitimacy is held in place by a cast of supporting characters and a team of “backers behind the scenes.” The supposedly objective “victory” of literary pre-eminence is conflated with the writing of Victory, implying that both are labours of verisimilitude, the manufacture of an illusion. The scene of this con-fabulation is what Bourdieu calls the illusio, “the collective adhesion to the game that is both cause and effect of the game.” The institutional category of genius owes its existence to this circulation of social energies: “the artist who makes the work is himself made, at the core of the field of production, by the whole ensemble of those who help to ‘discover’ him and consecrate him as an artist who is ‘known’ and ‘recognized’.”

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art depends not on the heroic author alone, but rather on “an immense enterprise of symbolic alchemy involving the collaboration, with the same conviction but very unequal profits, of a whole set of agents engaged in the field of production.”\footnote{Bourdieu, The Rules of Art, p. 170.} Among the many improprieties of Ford’s outré memoir is the implication that Conrad deliberately sought this consecration, cultivating his “backers behind the scenes”, and that his fictive, performative existence was partially oriented to this end: Conrad fashioned his shipshape career like a shipshape novel. A Personal Remembrance issues a double challenge to the Aestheticist myth of solitary authorship, first by presenting an image of literary collaboration as constant and pervasive, and secondly by intimating the collaborative nature of reputation-building.

**A SHIPSHAPE CAREER**

Without abandoning the idea that the logic of practice is never entirely coherent, we can nonetheless observe Conrad at certain moments managing his career in the way Ford implies, as if it were a novel. In 1908, for example, he wrote to Pinker of his hopes for “Some Reminiscences” (now A Personal Record), the autobiographical essays he was contemplating for publication in Ford’s prestigious journal, the English Review.

My literary reputation which seems more clearly defined with every published novel vol ... has already enough substance to weigh favourably in the scale for the success of a personal book. This seems the psychological moment – and the appearance of a new Review [the English Review] is a good determining factor. My friendship for the editor (which is known) is a sufficient motive. It is generally a lucky concourse of circumstances. It may be, so to speak, the chance of a lifetime – coming neither too soon nor yet too late (CL 4: 138)
past.” 148 A Personal Record (1912) was also related to Under Western Eyes (1911) externally, as an apologia for Conrad’s change of direction, but the most important interpenetration for my purpose is Conrad’s use of narrative techniques to plot his career. 149 The narrator of Under Western Eyes refers distastefully, in reference to the protagonist Razumov’s comparatively blameless memoir, to the “innumerable people, criminals, saints, philosophers, young girls, statesmen, and simple imbeciles [who] have kept self-revealing records”, drawing on anxieties that must have attended Conrad’s own, contemporaneous memoirs. (UWE 6) The need to dissociate his Personal Record from such “self-revealing records”, as well as splashy literary memoirs like Caine’s My Story, which appeared in the same year as “Some Reminiscences”, and Bennett’s anonymous expose The Truth About an Author (1903), meant Conrad’s promotional strategy needed an alibi, the “sufficient motive” provided by his “known” association with Ford. Having satirised “Mr. H. Caine” as a pompous self-promoter in The Inheritors, Conrad could not be seen to compete with him by prostituting his own private experiences: combining Bourdieu’s terminology with Goffman’s, we can say that this prise de position – this performance – required careful management “lest the audience impute unintended meanings”. 150 Elsewhere in his correspondence Conrad stipulated nervously that the essays were not “gossipy”, and described them defensively as “silly” and “ghoulish” to Wells. (CL 4: 441, 149) Wells was also presented with a version of Conrad’s “sufficient motive”: “Ford has persuaded me to give some personal stuff for the R. His arguments have been too strong for doubts and reluctances.” (CL 4: 149) This remark follows the strategy Conrad had outlined to Pinker, presenting the autobiographical venture as largely Ford’s idea. The more enthusiastic prospectus that Conrad offered Pinker was partly designed to mollify his agent’s frustration at another distraction from the long-awaited novel (as Karl notes). 151 Nonetheless, the calculations in the Pinker letter are authentic, even if Conrad’s cynicism is exaggerated, and they redeploys a logic that was also informing his fiction at the time.

149 He wrote to Pinker nearly three years later, when it was finally published, that “I wished to explain (in a sense) how I came to write such a novel as Under Western Eyes (I shall say that much in the preface) so utterly unlike in subject and treatment from anything I had done before.” (CL 4: 477)
150 Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, p. 66.
The phrase “psychological moment”, which Conrad uses to describe the “lucky conourse of circumstances” surrounding the publication of “Some Reminiscences” in the English Review, comes from the French, first used in 1870 to describe the German army’s timing of the bombardment of Paris to maximise the demoralisation of its citizens.\(^{152}\) It refers, that is, to a kind of impressionism, in which action itself is secondary to theatrical effect. This idea of psychic catalysis is a mainstay of Conradian verisimilitude. Marlow, the “expert in the psychological wilderness”, asserts in Chance that “[e]ach situation created by folly or wisdom has its psychological moment”, and expounds a similar idea in Lord Jim (1900): “There are in all our lives such moments, such influences, coming from the outside, as it were, irresistible, incompressible – as if brought about by the mysterious conjunctions of the planets.” (C 259, 350, LJ 277) In Under Western Eyes, the novel Conrad was working on as he wrote “Some Reminiscences”, Razumov employs the concept to fashion a cover-story for his departure from St. Petersburg.

“I conclude,” said Razumov, “that the moment has come for me to start on my mission.”


All the arrangements to give verisimilitude to the appearance of a difficult escape were made. (UWE 231)

The parallel is obvious between Razumov’s deployment of verisimilitude to construct a narrative for leaving Russia and Conrad’s establishing an alibi for publishing his memoirs. Both feints apply the tools of fiction in an extraliterary context, capitalising on “a lucky conourse of circumstances” – “the mysterious conjunctions of the planets” – to suggest plausible motives. In Bourdieusian terms, the existence of an impossibly purist journal like the English Review caused a realignment in the space of possibles, which, while it may not have determined the serialisation of Conrad’s memoir, did fulfill a necessary condition of its possibility. Conrad’s assertion to E.V. Lucas that “my own contributions ... I could not have placed elsewhere” is an exaggeration unless taken to

\(^{152}\) OED
mean that he could not have placed them elsewhere without dishonour – without being seen to compete with Hall Caine. (CL 4: 243) (Conrad naturally assured Pinker that, should Ford’s review fold, an alternative venue would be easy to find.) (CL 4: 139) The illustrious contents page of the *English Review*, where “Some Reminiscences” appeared from December 1908 to June 1909, was a cordon sanitaire against the vulgar associations of publicity; as the *Pall Mall Gazette* observed of the first issue, “[t]he names embossed upon the cover speak for themselves”.¹⁵² Unlike personal interviews, personal reminiscences, published in such a setting, were consistent with the image of conscientious authorship recognised by J.M. Kennedy. Ford’s preliminary circular positioned the review rather priggishly as a disinterested venture, rewarding “literary gifts or earnestness of purpose” rather than commercial potential, and appealing to “grown-up minds whose leisure can be interested by something else than the crispness and glitter of a popular statement.”¹⁵⁴ Bennett ratified the journal’s self-interpretation in *The New Age*, anointing the second number as the closest thing to the ideal as any magazine of pure letters is likely to get. Difficult to take a page of this monthly and say: “That is not literature”! Among the contributors to the first two numbers – H.G. Wells, D.G. Rossetti, Anatole France, Thomas Hardy, Cunninghame Graham, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and Tolstoy[,]¹⁵⁵

Conrad had an interest in the *English Review’s* disinterestedness: its rarefied atmosphere put his excursion into explicit self-fashioning beyond reproach. In such company, no-one could point to it and say “That is not literature!”

In the case of “Some Reminiscences”, then, Ford’s insight that Conrad’s career unfolded like a novel was accurate. Ford was drafted into service as, precisely, one of Conrad’s “subordinate characters”, as were Wells and Pinker, in different capacities. The psychological moments of a career do not occur within the artist’s consciousness alone, as the Aestheticist myth maintained, but rather in the *symbolic alchemy* created by a fluid “team” of interested agents: colleagues like Wells, editors like Ford, literary agents like

¹⁵² Quoted in Harvey, *Ford Madox Ford*, p. 196.
Pinker, progressive columnists like Bennett, as well as the extended field of mainstream reviewers, whose high opinion convinced Conrad that the psychological moment for his self-fashioning had arrived. Moreover, in order to execute this performance, we recall, Conrad required a feel for the game of letters, the habitus for which the significance of Ford’s elite review, and the dishonour of self-advertisement, were instinctively apparent. At moments like these, Jessie Conrad’s observation that Conrad “lived life as a novel” might well be extended to his career.156

Impressionism – the technique of giving impressions – is not confined to texts, but aptly describes the way in which literary careers unfold, propelled not only by conscious design but also by the collective momentum of the interactional modus vivendi, and the conjunction of unforeseen circumstances. Goffman defines the maintenance of these performances as a collective investment in trust – in, that is, the mutual definition of social situations, and this insight can usefully be extended to the relationship between authors and readers, highlighting the fact that trust in an author is not a one-to-one relationship, but occurs within a web of supporting roles and institutions. Trust, I propose in the following chapter, is a crucial category for understanding modernist authorship, and especially so in a professional society.

156 Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 16.
CHAPTER 1

Trusting professionals: certification and *Lord Jim*

In his memoir *Return to Yesterday* (1931), Ford recounts an anecdote of being treated for agoraphobic symptoms by one Doctor Tebb, Conrad’s physician (Tebby-Tebb, as he was known).1 Attest ing to Tebb’s professional probity, Ford adds that “I hope Tebb is still practising and may thus receive an advertisement that the British Medical Association would prevent his giving himself.” (RY 206) This remark points up one evident parallel between purist literature and professionalism: the sale of professional services is mediated by a code of professional practice, which supervenes in the market logic of supply and demand. Like J.M. Kennedy’s Mr. Conrad, doctors don’t advertise, operating at a remove from the basic imperatives of capitalism. Adherence to this code, of course, compensates professionals for their avoidance of advertisement, giving them access to a restricted market for their services; similarly, Conrad’s reputation for not advertising factored in the esteem of critics like Kennedy, although it did not generate the direct financial benefit that derived from a medical qualification. In this chapter, I consider the way in which the restricted market for professional services is sustained by consumer trust in a system of qualification. Professionals dissociate their labour from other commodities in part by replacing the market dynamic of desire with one of trust: performing a function deemed vital to society, professionals need to establish the trustworthiness, rather than the desirability, of their product. The professional model provided a way of imagining authorship as the provision of a trusted service rather than a consumer item; for Conrad, I suggest, trustworthiness was a key consideration in the performance of authorship. Tracing these ideas in *Lord Jim*, however, will involve a certain amount of preliminary historical groundwork, which will occupy me in the following sections.

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THE RISE OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY

The proliferation of qualifying associations during the nineteenth century traces in outline the rise of professional society. From just seven in 1800, catering to surgeons, physicians, apothecaries and barristers, professional qualifying associations grew steadily in number to twenty-seven in 1880. In the period leading up to the First World War, however, there was a sharp increase in the number of occupations seeking the advantages of corporate organisation, and by 1914 another thirty-nine associations had been formed.2 The template for these qualifying bodies was stamped in 1815 by the Apothecaries Act, which empowered the Society of Apothecaries to evaluate applicants by examination, and award or withhold licenses accordingly. Legitimate and illegitimate practitioners were now (in theory) clearly distinguishable, and the former came guaranteed by a single collective body. Although a universal medical license was not instituted until 1858, the concessions obtained under the Apothecaries Act were the basic ingredients of successful professionalization: examinable expertise, ensuring uniform competence and selection by merit, and a state-sanctioned monopoly.3

Professional status is usefully understood as a form of symbolic capital, as influential studies by the sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson and the historian Harold Perkin have demonstrated. Since the service sold by a professional is

esoteric, evanescent and fiduciary – beyond the knowledge of the laity, not (with some partial exceptions like architects and civil engineers) productive of concrete objects, and thus having to be taken on trust – they could not accept a market valuation of their skill but demanded that


society should accept their own valuation, guaranteed by exclusive education and certification.  

The ability of a professional to impose his or her valuation depends, of course, less on the individual than on the extended “team” of other professionals, on the institutions they represent, and on the collective work done in the past to induce recognition of professional prestige. As Bourdieu writes,

For the symbolic act to exert, without a visible expenditure of energy, this sort of magical efficacy, it is necessary for prior work – often invisible, and in any case forgotten or repressed – to have produced, among those who submit to the act of imposition or injunction, the dispositions necessary for them to feel they have obeyed without even posing the question of obedience.  

Perkin charts the evolution of the “professional social ideal” in the ideas of a range of nineteenth-century intellectuals, culminating in “a series of organized assaults on the concept of absolute property” between about 1880 and 1914. The professional alternative was a logic of “contingent property”; the legitimation of income by service to society, implying a disinterested motive for professional labour. H.G. Wells, whose antipathy to laissez-faire capitalism and faith in expertise made him an influential exponent of professional values, deployed this argument in defence of his state-sponsored intellectuals in Mankind in the Making (1903):

And here is the peculiar point in this problem: they are men who put, or who wish to put, the best of themselves into occupations and interests that do not lead to practical results, that often for the

individual in open competition and the market fail more or less completely to ‘pay.’ Their activities, of course, pay tremendously at last for the race, but that is not their personal point of application.⁷

Professionals, especially those employed in the public sector, justify their exemption from market forces – the artificial scarcity their status creates – by emphasising the importance of their particular service to society, as opposed to the self-interested motives of business and trade.

The nineteenth-century rise of professionalism is a familiar story in modernist studies, so I want to focus on two aspects in particular.⁸ As I have said, in this chapter I will consider professionalism’s “fiduciary” character, and the centrality of trust to an understanding of modernity, whereas in chapter two I will be more concerned with the high value placed on training in the Edwardian era and its significance to Henry James’s New York Edition Prefaces.

Trust in professionals is underwritten by abstract systems of knowledge and certification, regulated by the interlocking institutions of professional corporations and universities. As Larson notes, the modernisation of the professions was “oriented toward a society in which community and aristocratic tradition were no longer sufficient to guarantee credit and credibility.” She argues that the nineteenth-century modernisation of the professions transformed the old elitist corporations – the Royal College of Physicians and the Inns of Court – into meritocratic organizations intent on gaining a “‘monopoly of credibility’ with the larger public.” Whereas professional training had previously been a mark of prestige rather than a guarantee of competence, the goal of “cognitive

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exclusiveness” within a particular market required that instruction and examination become more systematic and rigorous. Larson’s economic reading of professionalism, and her idea of a “monopoly of credibility”, highlights how professional qualifications are an abstract medium of trust, irreducible to individual producers and oriented towards a dispersed market of unknown consumers. The sociologist Anthony Giddens has given the name “disembedding” to this feature of modern societies, in which trust increasingly circulates via abstract systems of expertise rather than sustained personal contact. “An expert system disembeds ... by providing ‘guarantees’ of expectations across distanciated time-space. This ‘stretching’ of social systems is achieved via the impersonal nature of tests applied to evaluate technical knowledge and by public critique (upon which the production of technical knowledge is based), used to control its form.” To a large extent, the symbolic capital of professionals is measured in public trust in these systems, which guarantee their probity and competence.

The Edwardian conflict between doctors and the proprietary medicine trade dramatises the precariousness of this monopoly of trust. Mail order treatments were perceived by doctors at the turn of the century as a virulent threat to medicine’s “cognitive exclusiveness”, so much so that the British Medical Authority (BMA) conducted a vigorous campaign to stamp out patent medicines, denouncing them in the British Medical Journal in 1911 and attempting to influence public opinion directly with a series of exposés. This archetypal opposition, fiercely contested in the period that Ford and Conrad established themselves in the literary field, will serve here as a small case study of abstract mechanisms of trust, but also as an oblique illustration of the conditions of authorship in the era of mass literacy. The rise of advertising and the boom in mail-order quack remedies were facets of an emergent mass culture, of which Conrad’s polar opposites Marie Corelli and Hall Caine, and the popular fiction they represent, were equally a part. The BMA’s attempt to assert its scientific authority, and the more lurid appeals of patent medicines, were essentially two different approaches to mass

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communication, attempts to control the behaviour of consumers. Like all commerce, these efforts operated through the medium of trust. In what follows I will briefly consider H.G. Wells’s satire of patent medicines and speculative capitalism, *Tono-Bungay* (1909), for its insights into the disembedded nature of modernity, and draw certain parallels with Conrad’s attitudes to advertising, on the one hand, and expert qualifications, on the other. These parameters in place, I will conclude with a discussion of professionalism in *Lord Jim*, Conrad’s most elaborate reflection on abstract systems as repositories of trust.

**DOCTORS AND QUACKS**

Patent medicines are the proverbial butt in satires of anomic capitalism. R.H. Tawney, for example, made use of this saw in his 1920 defence of the professional ethos, arguing that professionals “recognize … that it is wrong to make money by deliberately deceiving the public, as is done by makers of patent medicines, however much the public may clamor to be deceived”.\(^\text{12}\) The authors of *Modern Advertising* (1907), an attempt to secure professional status for the advertising industry, found themselves obliged to dissociate their profession from its origins in “the exploitation of patent remedies”, “a time when nearly all advertising was untrustworthy”. This branch of the industry is renounced as irredeemable; it is, rather, on “manufactured articles” that “[y]oung men of the sort who do things, who, in any other country [than America], would fill places in the church, or state, in diplomacy or the army” are focusing their energy and expertise.\(^\text{13}\) In order to constitute this civic-minded cadre as a profession, the “untrustworthy” and nakedly exploitative marketing of proprietary medicines had to be condemned.

*Secret Remedies* (1909) and *More Secret Remedies* (1911), the BMA’s series of sceptical consumer handbooks, set out to debunk patent medicines with the authority of science, submitting a sample of nostrums to the sober light of analytical chemistry and blandly juxtaposing retail price with estimated cost of production. Combining ostentatious scientific rigour with disinterested concern for the public health, they were

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paradigmatic statements of professional rhetoric. As Conrad’s trust in his own doctor R.B. Mackintosh demonstrates, scientific authority was the shibboleth separating experts from quacks. “I abhor quackery”, he wrote curtly to J.B. Pinker, “but when a man of scientific attainments assures me that there are 9 chances in ten of getting rid of that horrible clog on my faculties or on my free exercise of them I am anxious enough to let him prove his assertion”. (CL 4: 217) Quack advertisements, quoted extensively in Secret Remedies, often themselves invoked the mystique of science to bolster their appeal: “Figuroids”, for example, promised “A Scientific Obesity Cure discovered through an accident while making Scientific Investigations in the Laboratory”.14 This appeal to science highlights the common ground between quackery and medical expertise: it may well be that “[o]ne of the reasons for the popularity of secret remedies is their secrecy”, but the same can be said, mutatis mutandis, of the authority of experts.15 As Perkin puts it, a professional’s function lies “beyond the layman’s knowledge or judgment, impossible to pin down or fault even when it fails, and … must therefore be taken on trust”.16 For the consumer, the pseudo-science of patent medicines was distinguished from the bona fides of licensed medical practice only by the imprimatur of the licensing body, and, as the cultural historian David Vincent observes, even “[a]fter a half-century of statutory professional development, the doctors were still a long way short of establishing the kind of hegemony which they sought”.17

The Edwardian controversy over patent medicines was a flashpoint in the conflict between professionalism, with its rhetoric of service and dependence on a sheltered market, and laissez-faire capitalism. Importantly for my purpose here, the rise of the proprietary medicine trade also highlights two changes of great significance to the Edwardian literary field: the emergence of mass circulation newspapers, and the large expansion of working-class literacy following the 1870 Education Act, key events in the arrival of the mass market for literature.18 Literacy, of course, was the precondition for

15 Secret Remedies, What They Cost and What They Contain, v.
18 The mid-Victorian era was the cradle of the modern newspaper, when stamp duty, paper duty and the tax on advertisements were abolished (1855, 1861 and 1853). Subsequent advances in
mail-order quackery on a large scale: Vincent notes that “the basic functions of reading and writing, the codification of information and its transmission over time and distance, were at least as attractive to the supposed enemies of scientific medicine as to its increasingly self-confident proponents.” Giddens argues that modernity is characterised by such disembedding, the “lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space.” Expert systems underpin this “lifting out”, guaranteeing the uniformity of competence across time and space, laying the impersonal infrastructure of disembedded trust. “[T]he nature of modern institutions is deeply bound up with the mechanisms of trust in abstract systems, especially trust in expert systems”.

paper and printing technology, together with the gradual introduction of compulsory elementary education from 1870, completed the conditions for the mass market newspaper. The halfpenny Evening News was the first paper to popularise its format, in 1881, and the mass circulation daily is usually thought to have come of age with Alfred Harmsworth’s (Lord Northcliffe) Daily Mail in 1896. W. Hamish Fraser, The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914 (Hamden: Archon Books, 1981), pp. 227-9. Scholars such as Raymond Williams have cautioned against overestimating the pre-1870 illiteracy of the working class, but Peter Keating concludes that “it is undoubtedly the case that at the turn of the century a far higher proportion of the population could read and write than at any other time in British history.” Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 295. Peter Keating, The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875 - 1914 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p. 400.


20 Secret Remedies, What They Cost and What They Contain, p. 134.
and this trust “takes the form of faceless commitments, in which faith is sustained in the workings of knowledge of which the lay person is largely ignorant.”²² The structure of the professions – especially the examination of expertise and sanctions on misconduct – was geared to disembedding: as Giddens points out, the “‘stretching’ of social systems is achieved via the impersonal nature of tests applied to evaluate technical knowledge”.²³

Proprietary medicines, then, were the BMA’s evil twin, its arch-enemy but also its doppelgänger. They, too, distended their appeal to public credulity widely across the “distanced time-space” of modernity, but did so indiscriminately, using advertising to exploit the concupiscence of consumers, unlike the doctors’ discreet and rational appeal to trust. It was for this reason that Wells chose patent medicines to embody his satire of unregulated capitalism in Tono-Bungay (1909), as opposed to the expert-run utopias that he proselytised in his non-fiction. The nostrum Tono-Bungay, “slightly injurious rubbish”, is transformed by skilful advertising – the “poetry of commerce” – into a valuable commodity; as the bohemian farceur Ewart observes, the modern merchant “creates values” rather than products.²⁴ To the scientifically minded narrator George, nephew of the quack entrepreneur Teddy Ponderevo, advertising is a sign of capitalism’s failure, its irremediable disorganisation and waste, epitomised in Ponderevo’s efforts to compromise the institutions of professional medicine by buying the Lancet. “It still amazes me ... that such a thing can be possible in a modern state”, George marvels.²⁵ Thwarted in his assault on the medical establishment, Ponderevo does succeed in acquiring control of an austere literary journal and infiltrating it with garish advertisements, a corruption his nephew finds no less pernicious than that of the Lancet. “[A] country that leaves its medical and literary criticism, entirely to private enterprise and open to the advances of any purchaser”, George declaims, “must be in a frankly hopeless condition.”²⁶ Professionalism, with its dependence on an objective regulating body, is the opposite of advertising, and is no less vital in literature than in medicine.

²³ Quoted above.
²⁴ Wells, Tono-Bungay, pp. 147, 158, 159.
²⁵ Wells, Tono-Bungay, p. 229.
²⁶ Wells, Tono-Bungay, pp. 229-30.
As it happens, Wells had himself described a form of disembedding in a Fabian Society lecture on “Administrative Areas”, in which he diagnosed the distinctly modern phenomenon of “delocalization”. This particular “lifting out” of social relations from local contexts of interaction” (in Giddens’s phrase) was a function of “means of locomotion” and communication, which had produced a “community of a new sort”, no longer confined by the precincts of a town or village. “[E]very improvement in your omnibus services, in your telephonic services, in your organization of credit increases the proportion of your de-localized class.”

Just as consumers were getting medical advice “at a distance” via the mass media, so their lives were becoming integrated in a widening web of invisible relations and dependencies, of consumption, of labour, of banking, even of social interaction.

Although Wells’s original speech on delocalization is sanguine enough, Tono-Bungay gestures towards the concept’s dystopian potential: Ponderevo’s commercial empire and his financial speculations are a grotesque abuse of delocalising technologies.

His own restless social mobility is a travesty of the elastic “Administrative Areas” Wells had painted for the Fabians, “a passion for locomotion for its own sake” which drives him from middle-class villas in Beckenham and Chislehurst to a country estate and eventually a futuristic, never-to-be-completed folly, Crest Hill.28 His investments are underpinned by the disembedding technologies of telecommunication – “threads, wires, stretching out and out, George, from that little office of ours ... Running the world practically” – but spread chaos rather than efficiency.29 The unholy alliance between delocalization and patent medicines is made explicit when the narrator mocks his uncle’s desire for social distinction:

“Why not take a leaf from a socialist tract I came upon yesterday. Chap says we’re all getting delocalized. Beautiful word – delocalized! Why not be the first delocalized peer? That gives you – Tono-Bungay! There is a Bungay, you know. Lord Tono of Bungay – in bottles everywhere. Eh?”

27 Wells, Mankind in the Making, pp. 405, 407, 409-10.
29 Wells, Tono-Bungay, p. 262.
This is delocalization in a more radical sense than the formation of dormitory suburbs. Ponderevo's identity is to be dissolved into his product, and a title that had once been geographically anchored now signifies the ultimate disembedding. The awesome reach of advertising had evidently awakened Wells to an unpleasant connotation of delocalization, which blasts commerce out of its concrete context and into a reified world of appearances. If delocalization enabled such salutary expert services as the efficient administration of mega-communities (as Wells argued in "Administrative Areas"), it could also refer to the mass production and distribution of identical commodities in a consumer society.\textsuperscript{31} Edward Ponderevo disappears as a human producer in order to acquire a phantasmal, fetishised identity as a commodity, as Lord Tono of Bungay – the genie in the bottle. Commerce, of which professional services are a highly mystified form, depends in the end on confidence ("We mint Faith"), and delocalization denotes the conditions under which confidence, or trust, becomes a commodity in a mass market.\textsuperscript{32}

As Vincent points out, "[t]he growth of a self-regulating capitalist economy meant that an increasing number of transactions were taking place at a distance, placing an ever-greater premium on mutual confidence."\textsuperscript{33} Expert systems and advertising were two facets of the process of disembedding, two rival ways to disembody an ethical appeal (in Aristotle’s sense of trustworthiness) – hence the urgency of the BMA’s campaign for legislative intervention.\textsuperscript{34}

I want to suggest that authors faced a homologous choice, between accreditation – symbolic capital, affording access to a small, sheltered market – and a direct appeal to the public. Of course, the institutions of literary accreditation were usually much more fluid and informal than in the case of medicine, consisting of prestigious journals (like the one suborned by Teddy Ponderevo in \textit{Tono-Bungay}), publishing houses, the esteem of critics, and so on. However, an illustrative example of an Edwardian attempt to formalise literary accreditation is provided by the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature.

\textsuperscript{31} Wells, \textit{Mankind in the Making}, p. 415.
\textsuperscript{32} Wells, \textit{Tono-Bungay}, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{33} Vincent, \textit{The Culture of Secrecy: Britain, 1832 - 1998}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{34} On this one of Aristotle’s three appeals, see Seymour Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 226.
Founded in 1910 at the initiative of the historical romancer Maurice Hewlett to confer state recognition on the art's leading practitioners, the forty-member strong Academic Committee can be seen as a kind of hyper-exclusive professional corporation. The Committee organised lectures, awarded medals and generally endeavoured to burnish the public face of literature and foster collegiality among its practitioners, much as an actual professional corporation would do for its particular calling. Henry Newbolt saw in it a chance to develop the "Corporate Life" of letters.\textsuperscript{35} Conrad, Newbolt, George Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats, Henry James and Edmund Gosse were among the committee's first members. Wells, however, declined to join the committee, perhaps deterred by its pomp and decorum, and the phrasing of his refusal is suggestive in the context of my discussion. Wells invoked not only the popular press, but also uncertified medicine to characterise his preferred extra-institutional position: "Better the wild rush of Boomster and Quack than the cold politeness of the established thing."\textsuperscript{36} Rogue writers were quacks, staking their livelihood on popular appeal rather than an impersonal mechanism of trust.

Mass literacy and the growth of popular print culture – conditions that drove the BMA to publish \textit{Secret Remedies} – changed the shape of authorship in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. When the creaking Victorian triple-decker finally collapsed in 1897, a new relationship opened up between authors and readers, leading novelists to attempt, not always successfully, to "make direct contact with the portion of the reading-public sympathetic to [their] work", as Peter Keating puts it.\textsuperscript{37} For most of the nineteenth century circulating libraries had artificially stabilised the market, censoring content, homogenising form, and regulating the production of single volume reprints: "before a book could appear in a form inexpensive enough to allow for anything like mass distribution", explains Michael Anesko, "it had to pass the litmus test of library

\textsuperscript{35} Henry Newbolt, \textit{The Later Life and Letters of Sir Henry Newbolt} (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), p. 165. See pp. 159-69 for an account of the society's foundation and early activities.
\textsuperscript{37} Keating, \textit{The Haunted Study}, p. 405.
circulation." As Allon White observes, "[t]he circulating libraries, especially the two giants, Mudie's and W.H. Smith, had kept authors, readers and publishers tied into an extremely stable and predictable structure of expectation about novels and novel-reading." At the *fin de siècle*, however, authors became "increasingly resentful at the attempts by librarians and publishers to impose a mechanical and largely arbitrary form onto fiction", and were more than ready to switch to the one-volume format already customary for adventure romances and thrillers. As Keating explains, the transition from the 32s 6d triple-decker to the 6s single-volume novel meant that low- and middling-selling authors needed to supplement library sales with public consumption, making the taste of the mass market of more immediate concern than previously. The power and volatility of this market was highlighted by spectacular disparities in the sales of novels, producing the phenomenon of the best-seller, those blockbusting successes by the likes of Corelli and Caine that Conrad found so galling. Furthermore, many authors now perceived their audience as fragmented, not only into high and low, but into demographic compartments, the heterogeneous market that Henry James described as a "chess-board". Hence Conrad refers to "[m]y publice", a club of readers sympathetic to his methods and intentions, and Ford, in *Ancient Lights*, sardonically describes the discrete kinds of reader – Jewish, socialist and Christian – to whom his writing appeals: "All the support I get comes from these accidental labels." (CL 4: 442, AL 295) The institutions of criticism – sources of symbolic capital – mediated the relationships of authors with these minority publics, affording them some measure of shelter from the market for literary commodities. By appealing to these institutions, authors could approach the economic situation of professionals, their services guaranteed by an abstract mechanism of trust.

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40 Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 27.
42 On the turn of the century best-seller (50,000 copies or more), see Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 424.
LE PUBLIC INTROUVABLE

These changes in publishing practice gave added force to the image of le public introuvable, a cross between a leviathan and a sphinx, dispensing its favour and its indifference according to an unfathomable logic. The literary editor of the Daily News, R.A. Scott-James, despaired of anatomising the “great public which devours contemporary literature”, concluding in 1908 that

it is hopeless to generalise, unless it be to say that as our popular taste, based upon a crude and hitherto unsatisfactory popular education, is still in the making, so it is that our popular literature, in its present state of perpetual transition, must continue to fluctuate ... It remains to be seen whether the common mind will ever cease to be commonplace.44

Canny authors on the make, like George Gissing’s Jasper Milvain, were tantalised by the buying power of the new mass readership, and fascinated by its obscurity: “it’s obvious what an immense field there is for anyone who can just hit the taste of the new generation of Board school children. Mustn’t be too goody-goody; that kind of thing is falling out of date. But you’d have to cultivate a particular kind of vulgarity.”45 Writing to John Galsworthy apropos his The Windlesstraw – a fable of disenchantment with the market – Conrad found something almost supernatural in the combined ubiquity and elusiveness of the public: “That chose introuvable the public finds us out in many shapes. We can’t find it we can’t avoid it.” Everywhere and nowhere, the public “will swallow anything. It will swallow Hall Caine and John Galsworthy, Victor Hugo and Martin Tupper.” (CL 4: 384-5) Like Scott-James, Conrad uses the metaphor of ingestion to figure the breadness of the public’s taste. Just as Tono-Bungay is shipped out in bulk to “the Great Stomach of the People”, books in a mass society are destined (Conrad implies) to be consumed rather

44 R.A. Scott-James, Modernism and Romance (London: John Lane, 1908), p. 124.
than read. This theme of the public’s omnivorousness highlights the parallel in Conrad’s thinking between the mass market for literature and more invidious forms of consumerism like proprietary medicine, both of which exploit the gullibility of the man in the street (or, as was thought to be the case for popular novels, the woman in the parlour). As is evident from Tawney’s patronising air of saving consumers from themselves, “however much [they] may clamor to be deceived”, this attitude was characteristic of experts. The market for patent medicines exists because consumers sometimes trust advertising and hearsay instead of expert systems.

The narrator of Conrad’s story “The Anarchist” (1906) is depressed by the public’s propensity to put their trust in advertisements. As if in answer to the starry-eyed bustle of Modern Advertising, he confesses lugubriously that “I am saddened by the modern system of advertising. Whatever evidence it offers of enterprise, ingenuity, impudence and resource in certain individuals, it proves to my mind the wide prevalence of that form of mental degradation which is called gullibility.” (SS 109) Conrad tended to associate patent nostrums with quick-fix political remedies – the agent provocateur Verloc of The Secret Agent is compared to “the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors of patent medicines” – and indeed, the market’s susceptibility to suggestion was cognate with the crowd’s vulnerability to demagogues: as the narrator of Nostromo world-wearily observes, “[t]he popular mind is incapable of scepticism; and that incapacity delivers their helpless strength to the wiles of swindlers and to the pitiless enthusiasms of leaders inspired by visions of a high destiny.” (SA 52, N 353) The wiles of swindlers were exceptionally virulent, for they appealed to cupidity, in the narrator’s view the most befuddling of human drives: “There is no credulity so eager and blind as the credulity of covetousness, which, in its universal extent, measures the moral misery and the intellectual destitution of mankind.” (N 377) Advertising, as a technique of arousing desire, was directly opposed to the rational investment of trust in expert systems promoted by professionals. Conrad’s performance of authorship was in many ways an attempt to activate literary substitutes for these systems. As we have seen, his professed

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46 Wells, Tono-Bungay, p. 149.
disdain for advertising can be seen in this light, confirming J.M. Kennedy’s opinion of his technical knowledge; and, as I show in chapter three, Conrad also sought accreditation from peers and experts as a professional rather than a producer of commodities. As we will see with regard to Lord Jim, however, professional ideology informs not only Conrad’s self-construction as an author, but also the internal features of his literary practice. There was, in other words, an objective element in Conrad’s professional self-interpretation.

Unlike quack entrepreneurs, whose trust-claims were in direct competition with one another, professionals collaborated at sustaining trust in their group identity, but were consequently vulnerable to collective dishonour should a straggler break ranks. As Goffman notes, professional colleagues form a disembedded “team”, “so closely identified in the eyes of other people that the good reputation of one practitioner depends on the good conduct of the others. If one member is exposed and causes a scandal, then all lose some public repute.”48 Vincent recounts how, unhappily for the BMA, the 1913 Select Committee on Patent Medicines revealed that “by no means all the signatures on endorsements for proprietary medicines were bogus. Doctors were selling their names for products about which they knew little or nothing.”49 Such renegades endangered what Larson calls the “negotiation of cognitive exclusiveness”, the rigorous segregation of us and them.50 This porous border accounts for Captain Brierly’s distress in Lord Jim when one of us steps out of line: “We’ve got all kinds amongst us – some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but, hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many tinkers going about loose. We are trusted. Do you understand? – trusted!” (LJ 93) Brierly’s distress seems to confirm Giddens’s and Perkin’s belief that trust is fundamental to expertise and professionalism: among other things, professional corporations are engaged in the collective manufacture of trust. His shrill over-reaction, however, points up the ambivalence in Conrad’s attitude to abstract systems of certification, suggesting their brittleness in the face of unruly reality. The nature of this

ambivalence is illuminated by Conrad’s autobiographical accounts of his own ordeals of qualification as an officer of the Merchant Service.

CONRAD AND CERTIFICATION

Conrad found something absurd in the idea of a professional qualification. Indeed, the whole bureaucratic apparatus of the Merchant Service, the data bank on which certification depends, was difficult for him to reconcile with the work itself: in *Chance*, Charles Powell is astonished to realise that a clerk in the Shipping Office “must be connected in some way with ships and sailors and the sea”, and the narrator of *The Shadow-Line* (1917) opines savagely that the “atmosphere of officialdom” in which he is appointed to his first command “would kill anything that breathes the air of human endeavour”. (C 21, SL 63) Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Weber specified writing as the technological condition of all bureaucracy, and it is this technology that separates sailing from its administrative structure in *The Shadow-Line*: “I was”, the narrator reflects, “in common with the other seamen of the port, merely a subject for official writing ... Mere symbols to juggle with in books and heavy registers”.^51 (SL 68) These symbols are, nonetheless, crucial to a sailor’s career, as Conrad discovered when he accidentally confused the compass points W and E in a written examination. (LE 63) In the event, a kind examiner alerted Conrad to his slip of the pen, and he succeeded in becoming “officially certified” to handle another expert sign-system, the Notices to Mariners conveying general directives from the Admiralty. (LE 65) The essay in which he relates this anecdote, “Outside Literature” (1922), reflects wryly on the consolations of juggling symbols, extolling Notices to Mariners for their “ideal of perfect accuracy”, but poking fun at the autistic pedantry of examinations, the disproportionate influence of semiotic minutiae on a professional career. (LE 61) This ambivalence is characteristic of Conrad’s attitude to these abstract systems of expertise, whose unliterary exactitude he both admired and distrusted. As Michael Greaney notes,
"Conrad was powerfully attracted by the idea of the sea as the place where language is in good order; but his maritime fiction tends to focus on the idea of 'sea-talk' in crisis."\textsuperscript{52}

Conrad's examination for master mariner, described in \textit{A Personal Record}, also impressed him with the purely graphic level of accreditation, and its close involvement with the arbitrariness of signifying systems. In what might be called a drama of \textit{différance}, Conrad's Polish surname is present as an absence in the text, written - "it has twelve letters" - but never spoken, as if Conrad had wanted to point up the inaudible differences on which language - and certification - are founded. (PR 117) Unable to pronounce or aurally decipher either Conrad's name or that of the only other Polish sailor in the service, the examiner fixates on their respective lengths ("Not quite. Shorter by two letters, sir") just as the earlier examination had hinged on the arbitrary difference between two abbreviations, W and E, marks that one would write but not say. (PR 119) Conrad's certificate - on which the examiner inscribes his Polish name "with laborious care" - alludes to an absent event, a speech act that never happened. (PR 117) Writing renders expert accreditation transmissible - an essential condition of trust in expert systems - but also subjects it to this symbolic order, translating identities into words (the great foes of reality). (UWE 5)

David Trotter reads \textit{Lord Jim} as "Conrad's meditation, at a time when he did not yet possess in authorship an equivalent to the certificates which had made him a seaman, on professional identity."\textsuperscript{53} As Trotter shows, Conrad's anxiety about "certification's aboriginal failure to mean as much as it ought to mean" in \textit{Lord Jim} is metafictional, pertaining to his own situation as a professional writer.\textsuperscript{54} Conrad, Trotter argues, ultimately locates his uniqueness, above and beyond mere expertise, in his possession of a "dangerous supplement" of literariness; so too, Jim relocates to a "parallel universe" where "charisma counts more than certificates", and his sense of inimitable, privileged individuality is confirmed.\textsuperscript{55} I would agree with Trotter that in \textit{Lord Jim}, Conrad renounces conventional professionalism in favour of an idiosyncratic alternative;


\textsuperscript{53} Trotter, \textit{Paranoid Modernism}, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{54} Trotter, \textit{Paranoid Modernism}, p. 169.

\textsuperscript{55} Trotter, \textit{Paranoid Modernism}, pp. 177-8.
however, my inquiry will be concerned with Conrad’s ambivalence about certification, and his attempt to define an alternative mechanism of transmitting trustworthiness to *le public introxvavle*. Critics have noted that Marlow’s own discourse situates itself competitively within a range of competing registers: as Greaney puts it, “[h]aving queried the authority of collective speech (gossip) and bureaucratic writing (the law), Marlow launches his own inquiry, which aims to navigate scrupulously between these two extremes.” Robert Hampson observes the novel’s trope of “competing narratives”, the myriad of parallel stories, both overt and implicit, that exist side by side in the text, and the fact that “Marlow’s inquiries within the European community continually gesture towards areas of privileged discourse”. In what follows, I will be particularly concerned with what distinguishes Marlow’s narrative from these other discourses, and how his role as narrator dramatises Conrad’s feelings about the limitations of certification and the possibilities of narrative as a more robust medium of trust.

**LORD JIM: CERTIFICATION**

The mechanisms of disembedded trust become more tenuous the farther one gets from European industrial society. If the authority of science and accreditation was difficult for the BMA to sustain against the blandishments of quack medicine at *home*, how much less secure was the edifice of professional credibility against the “cross-cultural” beliefs and interpretations at work in a non-European population. *Lord Jim* refers explicitly to the conflict between doctors and quacks, and the inability of the medical profession to enforce their trust-claims in colonial hospitals: among Jim’s fellow patients at an “Eastern port” is “a kind of railway contractor ... afflicted by some mysterious tropical disease, who held the doctor for an ass, and indulged in secret debaucheries of patent medicine which his Tamil servant used to smuggle in with unwearied devotion”. (51) These “debaucheries”, abetted by an indigenous assistant, are a comic reflection of Kurtz’s “unspeakable rites” in the contemporaneous *Heart of

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56 Greaney, *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*, p. 79.
Darkness (1899), suggesting a connection between the “tropical” locale and the decay of trust in expertise; the railway contractor, it is implied, succumbs to the “mental degradation which is called gullibility” (HD 50, SS 109). In Lord Jim, the romance stereotype of “the degeneracy of the white man under the influences of the South Sea islands”, as one of Conrad’s early reviewers put it, is focused on degeneracy of a professional kind, the various attenuations of a “fixed standard of conduct” possible on the imperial periphery.58 (80) What with the high incidence of lapses from this standard – of “place[s] of decay” and “hidden plague spots” – amongst the European population, it is no wonder that Captain Brierly is wound so tight. (52, 68) “The worst of it”, as he complains bitterly to Marlow, “is that all you fellows have no sense of dignity; you don’t think enough of what you are supposed to be.” (92) Marlow ironically observes that these words are spoken on “the very spot from which the immense captain of the Patna had vanished”, accenting their ring of solemn understatement. (93) What distresses Brierly, of course, is not the lapses themselves, but rather their impact on the fabric of public trust in the profession. Degeneration affects not only the conduct of professionals in imperial outposts, but also the way their conduct is perceived, chipping away at the symbolic integrity of abstract systems of expertise.

The kind of certificate Conrad describes in “Notices to Mariners” and A Personal Record, inscribed in “the atmosphere of officialdom” with phonemes the writer can’t pronounce, and awarded for distinguishing between graphemes one doesn’t say, seems a fragile vessel for transporting symbolic capital to Conrad’s heteroglot East, one profoundly susceptible, like the rust-eaten Patna, to decay. (53) Verbal assaults on the value of certificates come from two main quarters in Lord Jim: the raffish profiteer Chester, and the Patna’s obese German commander. Chester, an early competitor for custody of Jim’s narrative, embraces the decadence of qualification, subjecting the mythology of the “bit of ass’s skin” to “rigorous criticism”: Jim’s taking the cancellation of his certificate “to heart” is a failure to “see things exactly as they are”. (162, 170) Chester’s scheme of harvesting manure on a guano island is a grotesque allegory of unromantic, unprofessional capitalism, graphically illustrating the

indifference of market forces to such symbolic commodities as dignity and glamour. Britain was importing 300,000 tons of guano a year by 1858, mainly from Peru, but by 1890 its annual intake had dropped to 20,000 tons, the resultant fertiliser shortfall being met by the growing trade in nitrate.\textsuperscript{59} By the end of the century guano was a primitive commodity left over from a more adventurous and individualistic era of capitalism, amenable to the ad hoc methods of small operators but quickly depleted, and foreign to the moment of professionalism; if Montague Brierly is the novel’s super-professional, Chester is its unreconstructed capitalist. The occupation Chester envisages for Jim – overseer on a manure farm – is still less susceptible “of being invested with a spark of glamour” than more than that of water-clerk or of insurance canvasser; Chester’s faecal atoll is the antipodes of \textit{Treasure Island}. (153) Among other things, the trust quotient of such a position is precisely nil: Jim’s eligibility stems from his very lack of accreditation – “He is no earthly good for anything … He would have just done for me” – and the job in any case presents no opportunities for betrayal: “I could guarantee the island wouldn’t sink under him” says Chester maliciously, parodying the vocabulary of certification. (166)

The German captain’s disdain for certification bears more directly on the fragile arbitrariness of signifying systems. As Bourdieu notes, “symbolic capital assumes the existence of social agents whose modes of thought are constituted in such a way that they know and recognize what is proposed to them”.\textsuperscript{60} The captain of the \textit{Patna} truculently refuses to commit this act of recognition, exposing the precariousness of the symbolic order on which trust in abstract systems depends: “‘That’s what you English always make – make a tam’ fuss – for any little thing, because I was not born in your tam’ country. Take away my certificate. Take it. I don’t want the certificate. A man like me don’t want your verfluchte certificate. I shpit on it.’” (73-4) Unlike the speech of Stein, whose misplaced plosives Marlow tactfully corrects (“poet” for “boet”), and of the French lieutenant, whose translated French has a certain quaint gravitas (“One has done one’s

\textsuperscript{59} G.J. Leigh, \textit{The World’s Greatest Fix: A History of Nitrogen and Agriculture} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 81, 85. In \textit{Nostromo}, Holroyd alludes to the nitrate trade with his mention of the Atacama nitrate fields, over which Chile and a Peruvian-Bolivian alliance went to war in 1879. (N 93-4)

\textsuperscript{60} Bourdieu, \textit{Practical Reason}, p. 104.
possible”), the captain’s mutilated diction and childish idiom are cartoonishly transcribed, ensuring that his indifference to merely symbolic distinctions is not only stated but also enacted. (197, 146) Like Chester, who threatens to maroon Marlow’s fallen professional on an island of excrement, the captain defiles the symbol of a “fixed standard of conduct”, shitting on it. (80) If, as Conrad’s wry anecdotes of accreditation suggest, professional qualifications are essentially semiotic, founded on arbitrary differences, the captain embodies the threat posed to such signifying systems outside the controlled graphic environment of, say, Notices to Mariners, those hermetic documents “[a]ddressed to a special public, limited to a very definite special subject, having no connection with the intellectual culture of mankind”. (61) With his barbarously accented English, no less than his disdain for professional prestige, the captain chews up and spits out the discriminations on which symbolic capital depends.

With his scepticism of certification, Chester threatens to corrupt not only Jim’s standing as “one of us” but also Marlow’s function as mentor-narrator, his image appearing “on the blank page, under the very point of the pen”, as Marlow sits at his desk wondering what to do with his protégé. As Chester realises, he and Marlow are rivals for control of Jim’s story: “See what you will do with him”, he jeers shrewdly. (167) Marlow rejects Chester’s capitalist plot on the grounds of verisimilitude – “No! They were too phantasmal and extravagant to enter into any one’s fate” – foreshadowing the nature of his own quasi-professional involvement with Jim’s case, which is, ultimately, as narrator, the one who will remember Jim “at length, in detail, and audibly”. (171, 67) Marlow discharges this function with considerable fastidiousness: he is morbidly sensitive to yellow dogs and other narrative improprieties, “the kind of thing that by devious, unexpected, truly diabolical ways causes me to run up against men with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots, by Jove!”, and evidently relishes conferring “blessed finality” on Chester’s “extravagant” story, scouring it and him from the face of the novel with nothing less than a hurricane. “Finis!” (68, 172) The captain of the Patna also strikes Marlow as outlandish, an “extravagantly gorgeous” narrative contaminant, and he, too, will be purged with satisfying finality: “[h]e departed, disappeared, vanished, absconded”, Marlow declares, stacking synonyms gleefully, “and absurdly enough it looked as though he had taken that gharry with him, for never again did I come across a
sorrel pony with a slit ear and a lackadaisical Tamil driver afflicted by a sore foot”. (78) He vanishes, like Chester, “as utterly as a tiny feather blown away in a hurricane”, erased from the text with excessive force, obliterated forever along with the objects in his immediate vicinity. (93)

LORD JIM: ABJECURITY

As Trotter points out, the captain of the Patna is one of several images of abjection in the novel, against which Jim’s professional ego ideal is defined.61 In Trotter’s compelling analysis of paranoia and professionalism, the nausea aroused by abjection is a tool of paranoid system-making, “a kind of direction-finder”. Paranoia – “the psychopathy of expertise” – imagines nausea as persecution, and “[i]n so far as disgust makes it possible to locate and identify a diabolical persecutor, it becomes a source of meaning.”62 Hence Jim feels his heroic, professional destiny confirmed by the captain’s persecutory grossness. Engaging with ideas of the abject and professionalism on a more modest scale than Trotter’s powerful study, I will be concerned here with abjection as a threat to trust in abstract systems. In Lord Jim figures of the abject unsettle the certification of expertise by corrupting symbolic boundaries, like that between shitting and spitting, or between certification and its lack.

The superlative vileness of the captain of the Patna may account for the enthusiasm with which Marlow banishes him from the novel. This quality is most vividly evoked when he first appears on the bridge, shortly before the collision, the clammy dampness of his “obscene … naked flesh” making it seem permeable, blurring the distinction between the body’s plasmatic contents and its outer membrane: “His bared breast glistened soft and greasy as though he had sweated out his fat in his sleep.” (58) This inbetweeness is, Julia Kristeva argues, characteristic of the abject, an ambivalent “braid of affects and thoughts” without “a definable object.”63 In the experience of abjection – the disgust aroused by excreta, corpses, filth, certain foods, and so on –

61 Trotter, Paranoid Modernism, p. 174.
62 Trotter, Paranoid Modernism, pp. 70, 82, 70.
Kristeva finds a phenomenon that cuts across traditional psychoanalytic categories of subject and object, rooted, she hypothesises, in a process of “primal repression” that precedes the formation of the ego and the acquisition of language.\textsuperscript{64} This moment has, nevertheless, “discovered an intrinsically corporeal and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection.”\textsuperscript{65} What is interesting about Kristeva’s analysis in relation to the question of certification is the link she makes between the abject and a disruption of the symbolic order. The abject is that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”\textsuperscript{66} What revolts us also invades or pervades us. Drawing on the anthropology of Mary Douglas, Kristeva argues that the culturally determined “danger of filth represents for the subject the risk to which the very symbolic order is permanently exposed, to the extent that it is a device of discriminations, differences.”\textsuperscript{67} The abject captain of the \textit{Patna} certainly seems to pose such a danger, with his grotesque pronunciation and antipathy to the difference marked by certification.

Both Chester and the captain – professionalism’s most vituperative critics – are an affront to Marlow’s sense of verisimilitude as well as Jim’s professional dignity, the one “phantasmal and extravagant”, the other “troubl[ing] one’s sense of probability with a droll and fearsome effect, like one of those grotesque and distinct visions that scare and fascinate one in a fever”. (77) They are also both related to filth, via the captain’s “sewer”-like speech and Chester’s island of dung, and both are annihilated with extreme thoroughness, foreclosing, in Chester’s case, a potential trajectory for Jim’s narrative. (59) I would suggest that the vindictive firmness with which Marlow erases these

\textsuperscript{64} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, pp. 7, 11.
\textsuperscript{65} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{66} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{67} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, p. 69. Kristeva reasons that in defilement rituals, which expel filth in order to constitute a social group, the substance thus expelled from the system of meanings cannot then be assimilated to the system. She finds a homology between this ambiguous separation and the Freudian import of separation from the mother; the maternal body is the psychoanalytic basis for the pre-symbolic significance of disgust. “The symbolic ‘exclusory prohibition’ that, as a matter of fact, constitutes collective existence does not seem to have, in such cases, sufficient strength to dam up the object or demoniacal potential of the feminine.” (65) In Trotter’s lucid paraphrase, “disgust and horror endlessly recapitulate a moment before the subject’s entry into the symbolic (into language) when it first distinguishes itself from what it is not (from the maternal entity it is still a part of).” Trotter, \textit{Paranoid Modernism}, p. 72.
characters is related to their abjectness, which seems to compromise both verisimilitude and professionalism.

Having rescued Jim from a life of guano farming, Marlow is soon obliged to save him from himself, breaking the rhythm of his increasingly mortifying retreats from the “ghost of a fact” by sending him to Patusan, a remote settlement in the Malay archipelago. (187) As critics have noted, this also involves a generic relocation, from naturalism to romance, but the abject follows Jim even to this heroic discursive environment. Abjectness is usually an auxiliary qualifier rather than a quality in its own right, more a relational than an absolute state, but Marlow offers up the pestiferous recreant Cornelius as Abjectness in the abstract. “That was his characteristic; he was fundamentally and outwardly abject, as other men are markedly of a generous, distinguished, or venerable appearance.” (253-4) Marlow is inspired to scholastic heights of subtlety by his abhorrence of Cornelius, discriminating between mere “loathsomeness” and loathsomeness combined with abjectness, “so that a simply disgusting person would have appeared noble by his side.” (254) Moreover, in common with Chester and the captain of the *Patna*, Cornelius’s abjectness marks a certain unseemliness for Marlow in his role of story-teller. “He has his place neither in the background nor in the foreground of the story; he is simply seen skulking on its outskirts, enigmatical and unclean, tainting the fragrance of its youth and its naiveness.” (254) Marlow regards Cornelius as a narrative aporia, neither agent nor onlooker, neither subject nor object, and he is still in denial about Cornelius’s role in Jim’s downfall as he narrates the tale, remonstrating with himself incredulously: “He couldn’t possibly matter”. (282) Marlow’s assiduous collation of Jim’s narrative, however, his retrieval of both Tamb’ Itam’s and Gentleman Brown’s accounts, ensures that this abject supplement can’t be quarantined from Jim’s story as are Chester and the captain of the *Patna*: he lingers balefully, “tainting” it. Marlow’s narrative dutifully, if reluctantly, records how Cornelius engineers the Ragnarok of Jim’s Valhalla, in spite of his abject, marginal status.

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68 Linda Dryden, however, argues that “the tropes of imperial romance” are also subversively deployed in the novel “from the very beginning.” Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000), p. 137.
LORD JIM: VERISIMILITUDE

“Classical verisimilitude”, says Gerard Genette, enshrined a “principle of explication”: every action exemplified a maxim. “Inversely, conduct is incomprehensible, extravagant, when no received maxim can account for it.” An “action sans maxime” becomes, by default, an inscription of necessity – Aristotelian anankaion – but “necessity is not very high in psychological dignity”. 69 The single most significant departure from classical verisimilitude in Lord Jim – the action for which no maxim is ever settled – is, of course, Jim’s leap from the Patna, which is both the modernist opacity at the heart of the narrative, and the action which disturbs Marlow’s faith in a “fixed standard of conduct.” (56) Jim’s abandonment of the Patna exemplifies a “crisis of the centre”, which Harpham formulates as “a failure not to leap.” (59) Marlow’s struggle to reconstruct the psychology of this moment seems to replace, indeed, the “centre” of agency (to adopt Harpham’s spatial metaphor) with a vicious circle, adding one more image of encirclement to an œuvre ridden, as Con Coroneos says, “by troubled interiors (hollow men, void mines, burst eardrums, windy idealisms, and rotting cargoes)”. 70 One of the novel’s obscurest passages, in which Marlow attempts unsuccessfully to communicate “the mixed nature of my feelings” about Jim’s culpability, spirals urgently through a series of contradictions, Marlow tearing round and round the serried circle of facts until he makes his audience dizzy. “You are so subtle, Marlow.” (111)

Marlow insists, in this passage, that Jim’s leap transcends the economy of explicable behaviour, of maxims, an irruption of the “Inconceivable” that falls “beyond the competency of a court of inquiry”. (111) In keeping with the pattern established by those other exorbitant figures, the captain of the Patna, Chester, and Cornelius, this irreducible event is also marked by abjectness. Jim’s leap disgusts him, of course, so that

he gags or the word itself — "I" ... he shivered as if about to swallow some nauseous drug... 'jumped'" — and he narrates the experience in terms of force-feeding: "[t]he infernal joke was being crammed devilishly down his throat, but — look you — he was not going to admit of any sort of swallowing motion in his gullet." (138-9, 123) It is Marlow, however, who diagnoses Jim's revulsion as a reaction to abjectness: "there was something abject which made the isolation more complete — there was a villainy of circumstances that cut these men off more completely from the rest of mankind, whose ideal of conduct had never undergone the trial of a fiendish and appalling joke." (132) The oft-remarked absence of agency at the origin of Lord Jim is also a deposit of abjection, an action that is both inraiseemblable and indigestible. The indetermination of Jim's jump is hard to swallow.

The Marxist critic Georg Lukács would probably have condemned this moment of abyssal subjectivity as decadent solipsism. In his anti-modernist polemic The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (1957), Lukács wrote that "[e]very human action is based on a presupposition of its inherent meaningfulness, at least to the subject. Absence of meaning makes a mockery of action and reduces art to naturalistic description."71 The negative, modern form of verisimilitude that Genette describes as "zero motivation", or "the absence of motivation as motivation", is for Lukács a symptom of reification, of failing to grasp the immanent, historical-materialist meaning of social phenomena.72 In an early essay on Stefan George, however, Lukács conceded that an apparently opaque form of verisimilitude might simply be ahead of its time, reflecting historical conditions not yet generally recognised, grasping "a causality which [the] public does not yet spontaneously feel". As the modernist poet's "shocking accidents or blows of fate, come to be felt [by the reader] as natural necessities", so he "must immediately cease to appear cold".73 Conrad, whom contemporary readers accused of coldness or "sècheresse du coeur", as well as over-descriptiveness and lack of incident, seems to have imagined his own practice of verisimilitude in precisely these terms, as a function of his modernity. (PR xv)

72 Genette, Figures II, p. 98.
In a long, expository letter to William Blackwood he defends his creeping plots and abundance of “descriptive detail”, pleading his adherence to a “method based on deliberate conviction”, and offering *Lord Jim* as the work in which “the method is fully developed”. “I am modern”, he argues: like Whistler and Rodin he expects to “suffer for being ‘new’.” (CL 2: 417-8) As in Lukács’s estimation of Stefan George, Conrad defends his descriptive method by reference to modernity: if his truth seems strange, it is due to its novelty.

Conrad had expounded his doctrine of descriptive verisimilitude more explicitly to another of his publishers, T. Fisher Unwin, in 1896, nine months before starting work on “Jim: A Sketch”:

Everything is possible – but the note of truth is not in the possibility of things but in their inevitableness. Inevitableness is the only certitude; it is the very essence of life – as it is of dreams. A picture of life is saved from failure by the merciless vividness of detail. ... Our captivity within the incomprehensible logic of accident is the only fact of the universe. (CL 1: 302)

*Lord Jim*, I think, itself contains a *mise en abyme* of this method of “inevitableness”: Conrad’s “merciless vividness of detail” is something like the strategy adopted by Jim at the official inquiry into the *Patna* affair, where he tries futilely to convey the “something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition” behind the facts of the case by means of a “meticulous precision of statement”. (65) This metaphysical intimation of the “fundamental why” lies, of course, “beyond the competency of a court of inquiry”. (84. 111) If the method of “meticulous precision” – “merciless vividness” – is legally inadmissible, however, it is not without its uses in a trial by media, as the lanky, liverish, altogether Marlovian Assistant Commissioner realises in *The Secret Agent*.

“The prosecution of this Verloc will demonstrate to the public both the danger and the indecency.”
“Nobody will believe what a man of that sort says,” said Mr Vladimir, contemptuously.

“The wealth and precision of detail will carry conviction to the great mass of the public,” advanced the Assistant Commissioner gently. (SA 208)

The facts of Verloc’s evidence, like Jim’s, may not be admitted to the public record, but his story will have sufficient verisimilitude — indeed, “inevitableness” — to convince an audience of its veracity. These four passages — Conrad’s letters to Blackwood describing his “deliberate method” of “descriptive detail”, to Unwin espousing the “merciless vividness of detail”, Jim’s intention of expressing fatefulness through “meticulous precision of statement”, and the Assistant Commissioner’s confidence in Verloc’s “wealth and precision of detail” — all allude to a form of verisimilitude, one which, if The Secret Agent can be taken as a guide, might be expected to “carry conviction to the great mass of the public.” In a sense, a novel is also a vehicle for this purpose; as Conrad told Edward Garnett in 1911, “the control of the public’s (audience, readers) attention is in a sense the beginning and end of artistic method”. (CL 4: 422)

At this point I want to borrow a term from the narratologist Seymour Chatman to make this relationship between verisimilitude and trust a little more concrete. Chatman adopts Aristotle’s term ethos to denote a narrator’s or an author’s fund of verisimilitude. For Aristotle in the Rhetoric, ethos designated trustworthiness, the credibility of a speaker considered apart from the pathetic or logical appeal of a speech. “The character [ethos] of a speaker is a cause of persuasion when the speech is so uttered as to make him worthy of belief”. In fictional genres, Chatman argues, the standard of ethos is “not truth but verisimilitude, the semblance of veracity. How best to show this semblance varies by style and era.”

I want to take advantage of the Aristotelian connotations of Chatman’s term to point out that fictional verisimilitude and rhetorical trustworthiness function in very similar ways, at least if fiction-writing is approached with Conrad’s professional seriousness. Insofar as Conrad’s meticulous precision, merciless vividness, and wealth and precision of detail were designed to “carry conviction to the great mass of the

74 Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film, p. 226-7.
public”, his self-consciously modern technique of verisimilitude was a disembedded ethical appeal: an abstract mechanism of trust.

As the “access point” to this alternative mechanism, the figure of Marlow as master narrator both draws upon and transcends the tropes of professionalism.\(^{75}\) On the one hand, Conrad’s device of multiple intradiegetic narrators constructs an image of Marlow as a kind of professional manqué, both managing a complex narrative with aplomb and taking part in a colloquy of experts. His command of the source materials of Jim’s case resembles, as Michael Greaney notes, the expertise of the textual scholar, aiming at “a kind of variorum edition with apocrypha and corruptions properly subordinated.”\(^{76}\) Moreover, as Robert Hampson observes, Marlow’s procedure of discussing Jim with a circle of privileged characters is couched in the vocabulary of professionalism. “Marlow’s inquiries within the European community continually gesture towards areas of privileged discourse, professional contexts in which oral exchanges remain confidential, outside the circuits of gossip: the confessional; lawyer-client relations; and doctor-patient relations.”\(^{77}\) Marlow’s interview with the French lieutenant is like “taking professional opinion on the case. His imperturbable and mature calmness was that of an expert in possession of the facts, and to whom one’s perplexities are mere child’s-play.” (150) Stein, on the other hand, is a doctor – “and indeed our conference resembled so much a medical consultation” – who diagnoses Jim with a case of literature: “He is romantic.” (199) Marlow’s letter to the “privileged reader”, in which is contained the denouement of Jim’s story, is another of Marlow’s professional communications. (302) With this gesture Conrad likens Marlow to Stein, whose expert knowledge of butterflies enrols him in the disembedded community of scientific experts, “corresponding with entomologists in Europe”. (195)

The orthodox, literal professionalism of Captain Brierly, on the other hand, is less a mirror than a foil to Marlow’s more supple form of expertise. Whereas Brierly’s panicked reaction to Jim’s scandal is to try to hush it up, Marlow recognises it as the call of duty: “There was nothing but myself between him and the dark ocean. I had a sense of responsibility.” (92, 170) As Chester realises, Marlow finds something to do with Jim, a

\(^{75}\) Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, p. 81.  
\(^{76}\) Greaney, Conrad, Language, and Narrative, p. 82.  
\(^{77}\) Hampson, Cross-Cultural Encounters in Conrad’s Malay Fiction, p. 131.
way of putting his scandal to work, much as an obscure planet is of interest only to specialists, "the astronomers who are paid to talk learnedly about its composition, weight, path — the irregularities of its conduct, the aberrations of its light — a sort of scientific scandal-mongering." (203) Although motivated by the "honour of the craft" and his membership of the "obscene body of men", Marlow's interest in telling Jim's story transcends the rigorously orthodox professionalism exemplified by Brierly, precisely because it comes to terms with exorbitant and unseemly events like Jim's unnecessary leap. (76, 144)

In *Lord Jim*, Marlow invests affronts to verisimilitude with the affect of disgust, reacting with revulsion to fantastic or grotesque elements in the narrative like Chester and his guano island, the captain and his garish sleeping suit, the slinking abjectness of Cornelius and the "burlesque" flavour of the *Patna* incident itself. (120) It is, perhaps, just such extravagant people and events that constitute Conrad's desideratum of "inevitableness", the dream-like atmosphere of existential drollery that has become one of the hallmarks of his canon. The robustness of Marlow's response to Jim's betrayal of the professional code, as opposed to Captain Brierly's complete ontological breakdown, consists in just this capacity to accommodate the abject and the extravagant, to narrate it in spite of his disgust. The mascot of this robustness in Conrad's oeuvre is surely the yellow dog that so vexes Marlow with its arbitrariness, and which is, of course, another image of abjectness, of "wretched[ness]", skulking like Cornelius on the edge of the narrative. (94) The yellow dog, one might imagine, "couldn't possibly matter" either, and yet it does, exemplifying the "narrative logic of the aleatory and the accidental", as Fredric Jameson puts it (echoing the "incomprehensible logic of accident" invoked in Conrad's letter to Unwin): "what was secondary and inessential in one moment becomes the center and the dominant, the figure against the ground, in the next."78 The abject, we recall, is that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." As well as combining, once again, the abject and the accidental, the *inraisemblable*, this incident also dramatises Conrad's scepticism about the linguistic mechanics on which certification depends, illustrating the catastrophic

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indignities that talking animals are heir to. If even so childishly simple a word as “cur” was subject to misprision, what chance did the unpronounceable name on Conrad’s certificate stand of retaining its meaning on the other side of the world? The communal code that could cope with such “fiendish and appalling joke[s]” is found not in “Notices to Mariners”, but rather in the circulation of narrative, Marlow’s “inconclusive tales”. (HD 11)

In a sense, narrative in Lord Jim performs the same function as certification. The story of the Patna, with its “extraordinary power of defying the shortness of memories and the length of time”, is an ad hoc mechanism of disembedding, forging its own “obscure body of men” across vast swathes of “distanciated time-space”, in Giddens’s phrase: “I’ve had the questionable pleasure of meeting it often, years afterwards, thousands of miles away”, Marlow muses. (144, 80) In a novel much concerned with systems of personal verification, from the piece of ass’s skin to Marlow’s letter of recommencement and Stein’s ring, “a sort of credential” borrowed from a heteronomous genre and social formation, the Patna narrative is itself a means of mutual recognition: “if two men who, unknown to each other, knew of this affair met accidentally on any spot of this earth, the thing would pop up between them as sure as fate, before they parted”. (215, 144) Stories, like certification, knit together a dispersed community, the elastic sodality of “us”. 79

As Edward Ponderevo realises in Tono-Bungay, the currency of advertising is confidence: “We mint Faith, George … We been making human confidence ever since I drove the first cork of Tono-Bungay.” In the opinion of his more cynical nephew, the confidence business is closely related to literature, its profits “a monstrous payment for courageous fiction, a gratuity in return for the one reality of human life – illusion.” 80

79 Like actual professional communities, this one is founded on relations of power and exclusion, most problematically of the novel’s non-European characters. As Hampson observes, Marlow’s last glimpse of Jim implies that he “alone, it seems, has a subjectivity complex enough to make him an object of psychological or moral interest.” Hampson, Cross-Cultural Encounters in Conrad’s Malay Fiction, p. 141. The Malayan characters’ lack of complex subjectivity makes them unable to grasp Jim’s subtle character: for the indigenous population, Jim “shall always remain … an insoluble mystery” (269). For Jewell, a girl of mixed race but no experience of European society, the obscurest point of Jim’s nature is the very professional failing that makes him so fascinating to Marlow, and which he is incapable of communicating to her. (278)
80 Wells, Tono-Bungay, p. 221.
Advertising superadds the mass production of confidence to the mass production of commodities: the identity of the producer becomes "delocalized", as we have seen, transformed into a brand. Professionalism was an alternative, indeed an antagonistic way of negotiating the mass market, shoring up a national monopoly by instituting an abstract (delocalized) guarantee of expertise; as the narrator of Tono-Bungay points out, advertising and objective criticism, whether in medicine or in literature, are diametrically opposed systems of communication. Novels, as a mass produced commodity, are caught up in this matrix of trust-creation, doubly so for the expert novels Conrad wanted to write, which depend both on confidence at the point of sale, and on a sustained relationship of trust during the reading process. It is Marlow's intention, after all, to convey "the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion", and not illusion for its own sake. (281) Marlow's "inconclusive tales" are emphatically not desirable commodities; indeed, in Heart of Darkness they are expressly defined against the author interviews and cult of personality associated with the machinery of publicity: "I don't want to bother you much with what happened to me personally," he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear." (HD 11) Instead of giving readers what they wanted to hear, I suggest, Conrad defined authorship in the professional terms invoked by Captain Brierly, offering fiction as a trustworthy service rather than a desirable commodity. In Lord Jim, this professional model of narrative is written into the text's architecture of embedded stories and narrators, with Marlow providing an image of expert narration.

Lord Jim is a novel obsessed with trust and mistrust, and the ways in which trustworthiness can be verified outside of knowable communities, in Raymond Williams's useful phrase.\(^{81}\) As Gentleman Brown demands of Jim, one straggler to another, "What do you know more of me than I know of you?" (326) Words fly through time like bullets through space, loosed into the abyss of le public introuvable, but their reception is uncertain: as Marlow says bluntly, "it is not my words that I mistrust, but your minds." (209) As an author seeking, if not a mass readership, then at least a viable audience, the question of how to "carry conviction to the great mass of the public" was of the utmost importance to Conrad; Ford Madox Ford believed that this ambition stod

behind Conrad’s dictum of making you see: “Seeing is believing for all the doubters of this planet, from Thomas to the end.” (JC 178) Manufacturing credibility lies, of course, somewhere on the agenda for all realist fiction, and is a basic premise of impressionism for Ford, Conrad and James. In the context of professional society, however, we can see that Conrad’s verisimilar ethos, formulated self-consciously as an expert “method”, also implied a position vis-à-vis the mass market. Lord Jim, by exploring the possibilities of a trustworthy narrative that would function along the lines of certification, also imagines itself as an act of expert narration rather than a commodity: Conrad’s professional artefact appeals to trust rather than desire. In chapter three, I extend this consideration of Conrad’s ethos, addressing the ways in which his authorial persona bolstered his textual appeals for trust. First, however, I will resume my account of the rise of professional society, focusing not on trust this time, but on training.
CHAPTER 2

Training professionals: the idea of the calling in Henry James’s New York Edition Prefaces

Henry James’s New York Edition and its Prefaces were hailed by Ford Madox Ford in December 1908 as “an event at least as important in the history of a civilisation as the recording of the will of a sovereign people”.¹ Percy Lubbock greeted them with similar solemnity as “an event, indeed the first event” in the history of the novel.² Although, to James’s profound disappointment, consumers did not share Ford’s and Lubbock’s estimation of the edition’s importance, their hyperbole gives some measure of the edition’s prestige among Edwardian literati.³ James himself saw the Prefaces as a deliberate effort to modernise the genre, both as a “plea for Criticism” and a protest against the obtuseness of English readers, their “wondrous property of caring for the displayed tangle of human relations without caring for its intelligibility”.⁴ (AN 63) These estimates of the edition’s importance, by author and critics, suggest it as an exemplary instance of authorial self-fashioning; indeed, of impressionist self-fashioning: in his 1913 monograph Ford inducted James into his own school, writing that “the supreme function of Impressionism is selection, and ... Mr. James has carried the power of selection so far that he can create an impression with nothing at all.” (HJ 152) Several critics have taken Ford’s lead in discussing James as an impressionist, although Eloise Knapp Hay prefers the term Post-Impressionist to accommodate James’s emphasis – shared by Conrad and

⁴ James to W.D. Howells, 17 August 1908, quoted in Anesko, "Friction with the Market", p. 4.
Proust—on the transformation of impressions into “a truth or reality more real, powerful, and essential than any accessible to simple sensations.” In this chapter I too will be concerned with what happened to impressions, in James’s rhetoric of writing, when they were transformed into art, but also with what kind of disposition was necessary to collect the “direct impression or perception of life” in the first place. (AN 45) First, however, in order to see the accumulation of impressions in the way I will propose—as a form of professional experience and a valorisation of human capital—an account of the rhetoric of training in professional society is in order.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Its seeds planted by the Industrial Revolution, the rise of professionalism in the Victorian era was propelled by the rapid pace of scientific and technological progress, and the consequent demand for ever narrower occupational specialisation. As Perkin puts it, “[t]he connecting link between industrial and professional society is the familiar principle of the division of labour.” With the entrenchment and exfoliation of this principle, and the pressure of technological progress, education came increasingly to be valued as preparation for a specialised function. The historian Sheldon Rothblatt has shown how the nineteenth-century rise of specialisation transformed the idea of a liberal education: “by the end of the nineteenth century ... as the newer universities registered real advances in the solution of scientific and technological problems, the model of the man of general education was being superseded.” Thus H.G. Wells could write in 1903 that “[w]e are all agreed in theory, at any rate, that to know one subject or group of subjects exhaustively is far better than a universal smattering, that the ideal of education is more particularly ‘all about something’ with ‘something about everything’ in a very

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Training professionals

subordinate place.” The educational ideal of self-realisation, of Bildung, was overtaken during the course of the nineteenth century by the model of functional training, a shift that catered to the interest of the professional class. “[T]he concrete core of the professions’ organizational task, was systematic training”, as Magali Sarfatti Larson observes. In The Division of Labour, a defence of specialisation and professional ethics, Émile Durkheim inveighed against the Romantic goal of “trying to make ourselves a sort of creative masterpiece”: true enhancement of the natural organism occurred through specialisation. The faculties of the modern specialist are “submitted to active elaboration, they must acquire a whole world of ideas, movements, habits, they must coordinate them, systematize them, recast their nature, give a new form and new face to it.” (Due to their highly complex nature, Durkheim reasoned, professional skills were probably not hereditary.) The idea of training as the permanent inscription of expertise was crucial to the definition of professional identity. As Larson writes, “[a] knowledge that was inseparable from the person of the expert could thus be gradually constructed into a special kind of property.” As we will see, James’s construction of novelist as a professional both resisted the pressure to specialise – the denaturing effect of Weber’s “iron cage” – and redefined the novelist’s calling as a uniquely humanistic specialisation, an investment in “human expertness”.

Expertise and the training it presupposed were tropes in a powerful turn of the century rhetoric. The well-rounded “model of a modern major general”, sparkling with miscellaneous knowledge but devoid of specialised expertise in “modern gunnery”,

8 H.G. Wells, Mankind in the Making (London: Grant Richards, 1903), p. 326. T.W. Heyck has traced the roots of this process to the university reform movement of the 1820s and 1830s, when utilitarian reformers began their campaign to “make all institutions conform to the middle-class values of work, productivity and efficiency.” T.W. Heyck, The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 156.
“elemental strategy” and “tactics”, was already risible when The Pirates of Penzance was first performed in 1879, nine years after the system of purchase in the military academies had been supplanted by competitive examination.\textsuperscript{14} George Gissing satirises the meritocratic revolution in New Grub Street, caricaturing the ludicrous aspirations it aroused in clergies and mechanics, but his mockery only underlines the extent to which examinations and abstract expertise had transformed the popular perception of career paths in late Victorian England.\textsuperscript{15} As we have seen, the 1815 Apothecaries Act had established that examinable expertise was the basis of the modernisation of the professions, and the principle achieved perhaps its most significant single victory in 1855 when competitive examinations were implemented (albeit tentatively) by the Civil Service. Wells envisioned examinations as a cornerstone of utopia, defending them as a test of character as well as of knowledge: “[p]assing an examination is a proof of a certain steadiness of purpose, a certain self-control and submission”.\textsuperscript{16}

In the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, the demand for education reform was often phrased in the vocabulary of efficiency, as a campaign against the “waste” of human resources.\textsuperscript{17} As the economist Alfred Marshall wrote in 1889,

\begin{quote}
 in the world’s history there has been one waste product so much more important than all the others, that it has a right to be called THE Waste Product. It is the higher abilities of many of the working classes; the latent, the undeveloped, the choked-up and wasted faculties for higher work, that for lack of opportunity have come to nothing.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Britain, threatened in her industrial and imperial self-confidence by German competition and the embarrassments of the Boer War, needed to optimise human resources by making

\textsuperscript{14} On the professionalization of the armed forces, see David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 276.
education more technical and more meritocratic. The Edwardian cult of National Efficiency expanded this aim into a program of national training: Lord Rosebery, a leader of the Efficiency movement, proclaimed the need for “administrative, parliamentary, commercial, educational, physical, moral, naval, and military fitness – so that we should make the best of our admirable raw material.”

Wells’s political novel *The New Machiavelli* (1911) includes a typically vituporative account of inefficient education, a legacy of Victorian muddle. Talents that languished in mediocre careers for want of “a more effective selective process for the privilege of higher education” were like spilt seed, “as much waste as the driftage of superfluous pollen in a pine forest is waste.” The archetypal wasted life in the novel is that of the protagonist Richard Remington’s father, who was “never ... trained to do anything in his life properly”, and consequently goes in for a series of crank hobbies. His grotesque death, accidentally killed while pruning a grapevine from a jerry-rigged ladder, is a primal scene of Victorian disorganisation, and his amateurishness is literally associated in Remington’s mind with waste: “[a]t one time he nearly gave up his classes for intensive culture ... the peculiar pungency of the manure he got, in pursuit of a chemical theory of his own, has scarred my olfactory memories for a lifetime.” The opposite of expertise is shit, and it is with the odour of Victorian waste in his nostrils that Remington advances towards utopia.

If waste is the opposite of expertise, babies are the opposite of experts. The fear and disgust that Wells feels for Victorian waste is directed, in *Mankind in the Making* (1903), at the raw material of education. Babies, he wrote, were the “soft little creatures that we have figured grotesquely as dropping from an inexorable spout into our world; those weak and wailing lumps of pink flesh, more helpless than any animal ... those larval souls, who are at first helpless clay in our hands”, who arrive in the world “with a discomfited writhing little body, with a weak and wailing outcry that stirs the heart”

19 On the Edwardian fear of German efficiency and expansionism, see Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*, pp. 5-12.
22 Wells, *The New Machiavelli*, pp. 21, 34.
and, seemingly, turns the stomach.\textsuperscript{23} Wells imagines babies – the unmade – as formless blobs of protoplasm, screaming, writhing larvae. They are, in themselves, a variety of waste; Wells’s “spout” recalls the infantile belief that, as Freud writes, “babies must be born through the bowel; they must make their appearance like lumps of faeces.”\textsuperscript{24} The starting-point of man-making is the abject, the basely organic, as far as possible from the physically disciplined \textit{samurai} of \textit{A Modern Utopia} (1905), whose bodies “must be in health, the skin and muscles and nerves in perfect tone”.\textsuperscript{25} Wells’s evident disgust for what Rosebery called “our admirable raw material”, and his horror of Victorian amateurishness, indicates the potency of the idea of training in the Edwardian imaginary.

\textbf{THE ART OF FICTION}

In this atmosphere, it was imperative for any aspiring profession to demonstrate its reliance on knowledge that could only be acquired by intensive training. Accordingly, when Walte\-r\-s Besant sought professional status for authorship in his lecture on “The Art of Fiction” in 1883, he had to account for the absence of training institutions.\textsuperscript{26} “How can that be an Art, [sceptics] might ask, which has no lecturers or teachers, no school or college or Academy, no recognised rules, no text-books, and is not taught in any Universities?”\textsuperscript{27} This is the point at which the ideologies of art and professionalism are usually taken to diverge. Louis Menand explains that “[b]y the end of the century ... the terms of the problem had become clear: putting the literary vocation on a respectable standing among occupations ... risked sacrificing all the advantages derived from the general perception of its essential difference from respectable kinds of work”, which consisted in “[s]pontaneity, originality, inspiration”.\textsuperscript{28} Professionalism and Romantic mystique were incompatible. Hence Aaron Jaffe challenges the modernist-professional

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Wells, \textit{Mankind in the Making}, pp. 394, 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Wells, \textit{A Modern Utopia}, p. 297.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} On Besant’s founding of the Society of Authors, see Peter Keating, \textit{The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875 - 1914} (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), pp. 27-30.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Walter Besant, \textit{The Art of Fiction} (London: Chatto and Windus, 1884), p. 7.
\end{itemize}
analogy, arguing that the modernists’ fetish of individuality differentiates them from “writer-professionals” who merely comply with “professional standards”. 29 Similarly, Jesse Matz thinks James mobilised the “impression’s vagueness” against Besant’s “step-by-step rules through which anybody might enter the profession.” 30 However, as Jonathan Freedman points out, “James’s disavowal of Besant’s unsubtle professionalism is itself, of course, a cannily professional move”. 31 The danger of reducing expertise to mere mechanical routines confronts, I would suggest, every project of professionalization, which must resolve the problem of making expertise teachable without destroying its mystique. What is interesting about the Prefaces to the New York Edition in the context of professional society is how they negotiate this rhetorical conundrum; how, that is, they improve on Besant’s attempt to professionalise the art of fiction.

Besant himself had not been unmindful of the danger of step-by-step rules. However much his paper reads like a self-help manual, he was careful to stipulate that “[r]ules will not make a man a novelist, any more than a knowledge of grammar makes a man know a language”. 32 To enforce this principle, Besant attempted to refashion existing publishing practices along professional lines. In the absence of any examining body, Besant hoped authors and (especially) prospective authors would act professionally by regulating their own market, adjuring them “never, NEVER, NEVER” to self-publish, and to regard a select group of publishers as the equivalent of a qualifying association: “If you have tried the half-dozen best publishers, and been refused by all, realize that the work will not do.” 33 Rather than do business with a less exacting imprint, prospective authors should go back to the drawing board. To the extent that it incorporates a principle of exclusivity, Besant’s model of authorship is in accordance with James’s, but whereas Besant looked to the publishing industry as a regulator of professional standards, James, as we will see, bestowed the function of quality control on the institution of criticism.

A DIRECT IMPRESSION OF LIFE

Elaborating the complex interrelationships between impressionist writing and impressionist living in Ford’s career, Max Saunders cites a famous passage from Henry James’s correspondence with H.G. Wells:

[I]t is not a question of “art rather than life”. Henry James wrote a magnificent letter to H.G. Wells after Wells had satirized his aestheticism in Boon. For Ford, as for James: “It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and applications of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process.”

James is the touchstone for a reading of impressionism that addresses the relation between writing and not-writing in impressionist work, as opposed to analysis of the textual surface alone. James’s dazzling riposte to Wells, and the letter in which it appears, usefully foreground the point I want to make about James’s performance of authorship in the New York Edition Prefaces, which is that James constructed art as a whole way of life. The tripartite verb suggests that being an artist involved doing something, strenuously, to life; whilst the faintly despairing multiplication of abstractions signifies that it was hard for non-artists to grasp what this something was. The process of life making art, moreover, also operated in reverse: in the same letter James observes that literature is “admirable exactly by ... its fairly living on the sincere and shifting experience of the individual.” As I will show, this tight knot entwining artistic living and lively writing allows James to present the writer’s life as a profession – something worked at, something made; indeed, something fashioned.

My understanding of James’s self-fashioning is indebted to Jonathan Freedman’s important study *Professions of Taste* (1990). Freedman sees James as perfecting a social role first sketched out by the British Aesthetic movement, which had discovered a source of symbolic capital in “the very assertion of alienation.” Freedman, however, defined himself against the Wildean artist, who is “dilettantish and dandyish where the Jamesian artist is dedicated”, whilst also presenting himself as more disinterested – more purely a professional – than Besant. James’s rhetorical fashioning of an identity that was professional both in its “dedicated” rigour and in its withdrawal from “commodity culture” taught later modernists that “the career of mystified professionalism that Rossetti, Peter, Ruskin, and Wilde had all sought to craft for themselves was a viable possibility”. Freedman situates James’s performance of authorship in a broader fabric of significance for modernist culture; I aim here to draw out some specific features of that performance of particular relevance to his impressionism.

I diverge here from Aaron Jaffe’s account, which enrols James as a proto-modernist, but denies that he was a professional. Modernist impersonality, Jaffe argues, effectively replaced conventional models of authorship with the logic of the “imprimatur”. Starting with James – “a logical beginning point for this genealogy” – modernists displaced the business of Being onto their textual appendages: instead of living modernists, there were signature styles – “exaggerated forms of authorial immanence” – that paradoxically effaced their dependence on anybody (any body). This autonomous text then “offers itself as a functional replacement for the biographical self”, reinscribing the author function qua “exemplary artistic consciousness”.

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36 Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. 54.
38 Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. 131. There has been a recent surge of critical interest in James’s self-fashioning in the Prefaces; I have found particularly useful the essays in David McWhirter’s edited collection, *Henry James’s New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship* (1995), and John H. Pearson’s contribution to Marysa Demoor, ed., *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves, and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2004). The trend here is to unsettle “the title of ‘Master’ that James sought for himself and that Leon Edel ultimately bestowed on him”, as Pearson puts it (40), often building on Michael Anesko’s watershed argument that “[t]he disparities between James’s last announced intentions and the published form of each volume resulted from his ultimate surrender to the frictions of the market.” Anesko, “Friction with the Market”, p. 160.
thinks that “bodies-in-texts, signatures of value, imprimatur[s]” and not authors were the repositories of cultural capital, Jaffe rejects Thomas Strychacz’s analogy of modernism and professionalism.41 “[U]nlike professionals – yet partly because of them – modernists had no reason to play the role of agents of knowledge”.42

Even apart from the implicit voluntarism of the phrasing (did modernists always act rationally and presciently?), this seems to me misleading as a description of James’s performance of authorship. To address only James’s “exaggerated forms of authorial immanence” is, I would suggest, to read James not only through his stories of literary life, which Jaffe does adroitly, but also to read him through his evangelist Percy Lubbock: in other words, to construe James’s critical reception teleologically, as a desired end. It was above all Lubbock, as Dorothy J. Hale shows, who bracketed out James’s account of the embodied creative process, assuming in The Craft of Fiction (1921) that, as Hale puts it, “authorial identity can be defined as a feature of something that can be studied objectively – if it can be theorized as one of the stone- or woodlike substances of the novel.”43 Without wishing to deny that James’s formalism ministered to such interpretations, I want to recover the image of lived impressionism that Lubbock left out. James may not have been an “agent of knowledge”, but his rhetoric of authorship surely includes a logic of human capital, the experiences accumulated over a lifetime of being “one of those on whom nothing is lost”.44 By approaching James as an impressionist in this sense, we can see how he self-consciously constructed impressionism as a systematic lifestyle – what Max Weber called a Lebensführung, organised around a particular Beruf, or calling.

The habit of factoring extramural work into James’s artistic value is, of course, far from foreign to James criticism. Leon Edel and Gordon Ray’s preface to the influential correspondence of James and H.G. Wells, for example, suggests that the debate

41 Jaffe, Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity, p. 14.
42 Jaffe, Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity, p. 20.
involved also two ways of life: the way of the writer like Wells or Bernard Shaw who subordinates his art to his social message, and the way of the dedicated artist like James or Proust for whom art is the only valid means of encompassing and preserving human experience.45

Evaluating Henry James has entailed assumptions about his extra-textual persona – his exacting, absorbing "way of life". Not all such valuations have been positive. F.R. Leavis attacked James for letting his profession dominate his whole sensibility:

The obvious constatation to start from, when the diagnosis of his queer development is in question, is that he suffered from being too much a professional novelist: being a novelist came to be too large a part of his living; that is, he did not live enough.46

Similarly, in The Golden Bowl,

his interest in his material had been too specialized, too much concentrated on certain limited kinds of possible development, as if in the technical elaboration expressing this specialized interest he had lost his full sense of life and let his moral taste slip into abeyance.47

Again, James's technical preoccupation, to put it another way, lost its balance, and ... became something that took his intelligence out of its true focus and

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47 Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 178.
blunted his sensitiveness. ... Correlated with this tendency is that manifested in the extraordinarily specialized living of his characters.\textsuperscript{48}

Leavis implies that James's studies of "specialized living" are portraits of the artist, symptoms of his own decadence. I want to take up Leavis's charge that James let his profession colonise his life – that the broadest of biological verbs became for him "extraordinarily specialized". The section of \textit{The Great Tradition} devoted to James's faults is much concerned with the Prefaces, which Leavis found annoying: "the developed and done is exasperatingly disproportionate to the laboured doing and the labour of doing."\textsuperscript{49} Leavis clearly associates them with James's "queer development" – "the James of the Prefaces ... is so much not the James of the early books" – suggesting that their rarefied convolutions were, in his estimation, a consequence of "being too much a professional", of losing touch with life.\textsuperscript{50} It is easy to see what Leavis was responding to in the Prefaces, although his reaction was coloured by his ideological commitment to generalist humanism. (As Carol Atherton writes, "Leavis's school of criticism was ultimately generalist in aim.\textsuperscript{51}) The most prominent professional feature of James's self-presentation was precisely this claim that authorship was an all-consuming way of life, a self-sufficient calling in which one might legitimately specialise.

James wrote his essay on "The Art of Fiction" (1883) in response to Besant's lecture, which now enjoys an ignominious afterlife as James's palimpsest. James's reservations about Besant's mechanical model of authorship are well known: novels are irreducibly individual ("They are as various as the temperament of man") and integral ("I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks"), the injunction to write from experience is tautological ("What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end?"); and there is, in the end, no substitute for talent: "the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer."\textsuperscript{52} James and Besant were alike, however, in their construction of authorship as a full-time occupation. Besant had

\textsuperscript{48} Leavis, \textit{The Great Tradition}, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{49} Leavis, \textit{The Great Tradition}, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{50} Leavis, \textit{The Great Tradition}, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{52} James, \textit{Selected Literary Criticism}, pp. 54, 58, 56, 66.
figured the author as a super-professional, “as inquisitive and as watchful as a detective, as suspicious as a criminal lawyer, as eager for knowledge as a physicist”, sensitive to all shades of the human drama.\textsuperscript{53} The Prefaces, with their theme of \textit{données} – of retracing “the story of one’s story itself” – emphasise the author’s constant “habit of vigilance”– of “never missing an opportunity to add a drop … to the bucket of my impressions”. (AN 319, 77, 122)

James subjects Besant’s model to a cunning inversion, however. The place where professional discipline rubs hardest on an author is not the compulsion to gather raw material, but the fortitude to refuse it. James’s “habit of vigilance” involved an ascetic regimen, submission to a “law which somehow always makes the minimum of valid suggestion serve the man of imagination better than the maximum.” (161) Notoriously, his “vigilance” often took the form of warding off excessive stimulation. Violet Hunt recalled that

I used to suffer, as other people did who told him anything that might amuse him, from the summarily truncated anecdote. He would hold up a story as soon as he had got all he needed out of it; extend a finger – “Thank you, I’ve got as much – all I want” – and leave you with the point of your anecdote on your hands.\textsuperscript{54}

James called Hunt his “purple patch”, aptly capturing the sense that, to him, Hunt was a text in need of pruning.\textsuperscript{55} In the Preface to \textit{The Spoils of Poynton} James relates a similar scene, again with the “man of imagination” fending off a prodigal female narrator. The “interesting truth about the stray suggestion”, James explains, is its “minuteness”,

at touch of which the novelist’s imagination winces as at the prick of some sharp point: its virtue is all in its needle-like quality, the power to penetrate as finely as possible. This fineness it is that communicates the virus of

\textsuperscript{55} Hunt, \textit{The Flurried Years}, p. 40.
suggestion, anything more than the minimum of which spoils the operation. (119)

When social (sexual?) etiquette obliged him to sit through a story until his partner had reached her climax, James was wryly appalled by the exorbitant and irrelevant demands made on his attention by “clumsy Life at her stupid work”. The “needle-like quality” of inspiration highlights the element of self-mortification in James’s fastidiousness, as does its figuration as a refusal of female affection: James imagines clumsy Life heterophobically, as a narrative infanticide. “[S]he’ll strangle it in the cradle, even while she pretends, all so cheeringly, to rock it”. (120-1) Figuring his ascetic habit of vigilance in this homoerotic imagery of pricks and penetration, James excludes connotations both of maternal softness and – Hunt’s anecdote suggests – of excessive, insatiable feminine sensuality.

**IMPRESSIONISM AND ASCETICISM**

James’s construction of authorship as a consistent attitude of self-denial echoes Max Weber’s interpretation of the ascetic tradition of Protestantism. In 1905 Weber published *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*, where he controversially argued that bourgeois acquisitiveness had its roots in Puritan asceticism, but also analysed the modern idea of the calling, essential to the professional ethos. A consideration of Weber’s essay will enable us to grasp the link between this idea and the value of ascesis, both essential to James’s performance of authorship in the Prefaces. Like Émile Durkheim, the other towering figure of turn of the century sociology, Weber located the division of labour at the heart of modernity. Central to the Protestant ethic was “[t]he idea, so familiar to us today and yet in reality far from obvious, that *one’s duty consists in pursuing one’s calling*, and that the individual should have a commitment to his ‘professional’ activity”.56 The ideal of the calling was crucial, Weber argues, to the process of “rationalisation” that began with the industrial revolution: the systematic

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reordering of the means of production and the structure of the labour force to maximise productivity.\textsuperscript{57} Weber’s concept of the divinely sanctioned calling encompassed not only capitalists per se, but all occupations, including trained experts: “the emphasis on the ascetic significance of the ‘certain calling’ ethically transforms \textit{modern professional practice} \[\text{Fachmenschentum}\]”.\textsuperscript{58} Famously, Weber concluded his essay with a bitter diagnosis of the “iron cage” of rationalised civilisation, the necessity of “restricting oneself to specialized work, with the inevitable consequence of the abandonment of the Faustian universality of humankind”.\textsuperscript{59} “Where ‘doing one’s job’ cannot be directly linked to the highest spiritual and cultural values … the individual today usually makes no attempt to find any meaning in it.”\textsuperscript{60} The professional ethos was the exception to this anomic division of labour, as Durkheim recognised. Professional ideology \textit{did} furnish a link between doing one’s job and the highest spiritual and cultural values, imbuing the iron cage of specialisation with a substitute for the Protestant ethical spirit.

Structured around a secular calling, “[t]he ethical practice of ordinary people was divested of its random and unsystematic nature and built up into a consistent \textit{method} for the whole conduct of one’s life.”\textsuperscript{61} Puritan asceticism, in short, submitted religious conduct to the logic of scientific training: it aimed “to \textit{train} [the elect] … to lead a watchful, aware, alert life.”\textsuperscript{62} The focus of religious censure shifted from wealth to waste, pointing up the parallel between Weber’s Protestant ethic and the Edwardian cult of Efficiency. “\textit{Wasting time} is therefore the first and most serious of all sins. The span of life is infinitely short and precious, and must be used to ‘secure’ one’s own calling.”\textsuperscript{63} Within this ethos, with its valuation of “ceaseless, constant, systematic labor in a secular calling” and acceptance of profit, “the \textit{creation of capital} through the \textit{ascetic compulsion to save}” acquired salvific significance. “The inhibitions which stood in the way of

\textsuperscript{58} Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{59} Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, pp. 120-1.
\textsuperscript{60} Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{61} Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{62} Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{63} Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, p. 106.
consumption of what had been acquired favored its productive use: as investment capital.\textsuperscript{64}

For Weber the values of specialisation and the division of labour originated in the compulsion to confirm one’s state of grace, but outlasted their religious foundations to become the iron cage of capitalism. The ideals of systematic self-monitoring and the rational ordering of each life around a calling were readily adaptable to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture of training and expertise. Indeed, the protestant drive to invest was directly transferable from financial to human capital, sanctioning the investment of time to acquire skills rather than wasting it in recreation. Conrad, for example, seems to refer to this idea at the climax of “The Duel” (1907), interrupting the narrative to reflect on the theory of training:

Instinct, of course, is irreflective. It is its very definition. But it may be an inquiry worth pursuing whether in reflective mankind the mechanical promptings of instinct are not affected by the customary mode of thought. In his young days, Armand D’Hubert, the reflective, promising officer, had emitted the opinion that in warfare one should ‘never cast back on the lines of a mistake.’ This idea, defended and developed in many discussions, had settled into one of the stock notions of his brain, had become a part of his mental individuality. (SS 211)

Conrad’s story satirises the chevalier ethos, which is coloured by “the high-spirited but fanciful animal which carries men into battle”, and does not appeal to modern experts, “gunners or engineers, whose heads are kept cool on a diet of mathematics”. (SS 133)

But of the two duellists, the “reflective” D’Hubert is most detached from the feudal ritual of the duel, a careerist who cleaves to his profession irrespective of France’s political ruptures. Conrad’s odd, temporising aside on the theory of training seems to mark D’Hubert as a prototype of the modern professional, who prevails not because of innate bravery but through a lifelong investment of time in the acquisition of skill.

\textsuperscript{64} Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, pp. 116-7.
Conrad had read the works of William James with admiration. Thanking John Quinn for a copy of James’s *Memories and Studies* (1911), he wrote “[a]s everything that Professor James ever wrote it’s most suggestive and interesting and morally valuable” (CL 4: 514). He may, then, have been thinking of James’s own theory of the cultivation of instincts when he wrote “The Duel”. James’s discussion of habit in *The Principles of Psychology* explicitly adapts systematic asceticism and the “compulsion to save” to the idea of expertise. James’s research confirmed Conrad’s speculation that instincts could be artificially implanted in the brain, providing a neurological basis for the benefits of specialisation. Just as Durkheim held up specialisation as a social panacea, James saw neural habituation as a secular vindication of morality, using it to proselytise training and specialisation. “The physiological study of mental conditions is thus the most powerful ally of hortatory ethics. ... As we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we become saints in the moral, and authorities and experts in the practical and scientific spheres, by so many separate acts and hours of work.” The diligent “youth”, therefore,

> can with perfect certainty count on waking up some fine morning, to find himself one of the competent ones of his generation, in whatever pursuit he may have singled out. Silently, between the details of his business, the power of judging in all that class of matter will have built itself up within him as a possession that will never pass away.\(^{65}\)

James applies Protestant asceticism and Benjamin Franklin’s admonition that “Time is money” to the accumulation of human capital: time, in the theory of neural habituation, is character. One should “be systematically ascetic or heroic in little unnecessary points”, not in order to be assured of divine election or to acquire wealth, but to fortify the self: “Asceticism of this sort is like the insurance which a man pays on his house and goods.”\(^{66}\) James’s use of economic tropes highlights his appropriation of the Protestant ethic. Automating the performance of skilled tasks “is to fund and capitalize our

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\(^{66}\) James, *The Principles of Psychology*, p. 126.
acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund”, whereas “[i]f practice did not make perfect, nor habit economize the expense of nervous and muscular energy, he would therefore be in a sorry plight.”

James enjoins the Protestant _Lebensführung_ of systematic self-monitoring, but translates its rhetoric into the order of human capital, emphasising the secular benefits of the investment of time in training.

The rationalised asceticism that Weber identified in the idea of the calling was also a central tenet of professional ideology. Undergoing professional training in the first place requires self-control, a deferral of present satisfaction in view of future rewards (or a higher good): as Larson observes, professionalism “depends upon inducing new recruits to accept the economic and social sacrifices of training.” But professionalism also idealised self-control in one’s life and work, particularly if, as Perkin argues, the public school ethos is taken to be one of its formulations. In his prescription for expert _samurai_, H.G. Wells exaggerated this tendency, adopting William James’s dictum of habitual abstemiousness:

> We think that a constant resistance to little seductions is good for a man’s quality. At any rate, it shows that a man is prepared to pay something for his honour and privileges. We prescribe a regimen of food, forbid tobacco, wine, or any alcoholic drink, all narcotic drugs …

Wells’s orcer of _samurai_ formalises the ethical code of behaviour implicit in being a professional, combining the fetishisation of “Technique” with the rituals of a traditional society.

Suzanne Raitt argues that both Wells and James show traces of the Edwardian preoccupation with efficiency, each invoking economy as an aesthetic value. James, she maintains, “believed passionately — at least after 1906, when he began to write the prefaces to the New York edition of his novels — that he was pioneering a newly

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67 James, _The Principles of Psychology_, pp. 122, 113.
68 Larson, _The Rise of Professionalism_, p. 15.
70 Wells, _A Modern Utopia_, p. 286.
selective kind of art”: “[b]eneath their conflict, then, lay a fundamental but unstated agreement”.\textsuperscript{71} Raitt shows convincingly – if briefly – that James was concerned with economising experience, filtering out its “waste”. What I want to add to Raitt’s analysis is James’s use of the trope of asceticism, his portrayal of authorship as a regimen of self-denial. James’s portrait of the artist draws on the idea of the Beruf – “ceaseless, constant, systematic labor in a secular calling as the very highest ascetic path” – bringing his performance of authorship into line with his brother’s analysis of training and, indeed, with Wells’s samurai.\textsuperscript{72}

To justify its high price, professional labour must be perceived to be not only complex but also onerous. Ford recounts how Conrad once bandied professional burdens with a judge, each asserting the refined suffering of his own form of labour. The judge begins by impugning writing as “easy” money, whereas he “worked all day and most of the night, taking the shortest of intervals for meals” and dosed himself with veronal to cope with the stress of handing down death sentences. Conrad responded with a ready defence of his profession, based on time and suffering: “The writer’s work is never done; if he is conscientious he thinks all day and all night of what he shall say. Even during casual conversations and walks in fields he is for ever turning phrases on his tongue.” His words, moreover, may “influence … a generation”. (RY 218-9) This one-upmanship suggests both a quantitative and a qualitative measure of professional prestige – the portion of life taken up with one’s calling, and the heaviness of responsibility incurred. Conrad compared stress levels with another legal professional in his correspondence with John Quinn. Provoked by Conrad’s complaints, Quinn asserted the hardships of his own profession – “So you will see, my friend, that others have their troubles as well as you with your plots and stories” – obliging Conrad to backtrack: “I am far from ascribing to literary work any sort of special merit – or special difficulty.” (CL 5: 81) Such an intention is, evidently, what Quinn had inferred, and Quinn’s sharp response illustrates the competitive pride that professionals took in the arduousness of their labour. Conrad was not alone in setting store by his ordeals – the surplus value of all professional work could be measured in suffering.

\textsuperscript{72} Wells, A Modern Utopia, pp. 116-7.
James's portrayal of authorial hardship and asceticism is focused primarily on vigilance against life's wantonness, as the self-control needed to refuse the glut of experience and "relations": "[t]he point is so interesting that it can scarce be made too often": "[s]ome real art of representation is, I make out, a controlled and guarded acceptance, in fact a perfect economic mastery of that conflict". (277-8) Whereas in New Grub Street Gissing locates the agonies of authorship in eking out a story to the length of three volumes, James reverses the cliché of authorial suffering, describing instead the difficulty of containing the "explosive principle" in one's material. Like D'Hubert's defeat of Feraud in "The Duel", wresting finitude from experience calls for the strength that comes from expertise: "The very meaning of expertness is acquired courage to brace one's self for the cruel crisis from the moment one sees it grimly loom." (6) James evidently took pleasure in the potentia of "delightful complications", so cutting them short was an act of self-denial. (312) This stoic submission to "cruel[ty]" exemplifies the acceptance of suffering that is, for James, constitutive of authorship. "[t]he effort of labour involved, the torment of expression, of which we have heard in our time so much, being after all but the last refinement of his privilege"; the "master ... must take no tough technical problem for insoluble" (29, 137). Submitting to the exigencies of the short story for the composition of "Europe", for example, James "accepted the rigour of its having, all sternly, in this case, to treat so many of its most appealing values as waste"; overcoming the Edwardian bête noire of waste requires stern self-control, an act of asceticism. Leavis's claim that James "suffered too much from being a professional novelist" is entirely to the point. (240)

Philip Horne has shown that economy ruled James's writing in both the "high metaphorical sense" of the Prefaces and in a more prosaic fashion, as the economic necessity of keeping his stories to a saleable length. "At this point it looks very much as if the art is following the money -- or attempting to." Horne suggests that James's extravagantly laborious process of compacting his material was a form of symbolic capital, a guarantee of the high literary value of his work, as it had been for Flaubert. 74

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want to suggest, once again, that the connotation of asceticism involved in this labour of reduction had a similar effect, constructing the author as an exceptionally hard-working man of the calling. James recurs often to the stress and strain of “economic mastery” – of circumscribing experience – but the Prefaces also dwell on other forms of authorial discipline, suffering and self-denial. One of the several mortifications James accepts as part of his professional “privilege” is “the dire paucity of readers ever recognising or ever missing positive beauty”, the fact that “for the beauty of the thing when done the current editorial mind in particular appears wholly without sense”: in a word, “friction with the market”. Word limits were a great source of friction, operating “as a tax on ingenuity – that ingenuity of the expert craftsman which likes to be taxed very much to the same tune to which a well-bred horse likes to be saddled.” (319, 322, 295) Then there was the increasingly frequent experience of outright rejection, which seems to have afforded James a frisson of privation: “There is fortunately something bracing, ever, in the alpine chill, that of some high icy arête, shed by the cold editorial shoulder”. (295) Even when reflecting on The Ambassadors, his most perfect formal achievement, James’s pride is tempered by consciousness of “the cares begotten, none the less, of that same ‘judicious’ sacrifice to a particular form of interest!” (319-20) Achieving this formal perfection had involved a continual conquest of temptation: “how, as its virtue can be essentially but the virtue of the whole, the wayside traps set in the interest of muddlement and pleading but the cause of the moment, of the particular bit in itself, have to be kicked out of the path!” (320) These themes of asceticism and mortification construct the author as a man of the calling in Weber’s sense, living by a rule of systematic self-denial and devotion to a single task. Notwithstanding his famous aesthetic quarrel with Wells, James’s Prefaces are the autobiography of a samurai, mirroring Wells’s image of the ideal professional.

James’s attitude toward experience – “Thank you, I’ve got as much – all I want” – exemplifies Weber’s rational asceticism and the value of the calling: “The goal of asceticism was, in contrast to many widely held notions, to be able to lead a watchful, aware, alert life. The most urgent task was the eradication of uninhibited indulgence in instinctive pleasure.” James’s alertness guards against the uninhibited pleasure of Violet Hunt’s consummated anecdote. And just as, in his brother’s analysis, habituation “is to

fund and capitalize our acquisitions”, to “economize the expense of nervous and muscular energy”, so James figures his “habit of vigilance” as an economic measure, a variation on Weber’s Protestant “ascetic compulsion to save”: an investment in human capital. By abstaining from the full narrative satisfaction of Hunt’s story, James capitalises experience:

life has no direct sense whatever for the subject and is capable, luckily for us, of nothing but splendid waste. Hence the opportunity for the sublime economy of art, which rescues, which saves, and hoards and ‘banks,’ investing and reinvesting these fruits of toil in wondrous useful ‘works’ and thus making up for us, desperate spendthrifts that we all naturally are, the most princely of incomes. (120)

Unlike the fraudulent tycoon of Tono-Bungay, Edward Ponderevo, who “economized nothing”, the author’s ceaseless vigilance subjects the “splendid waste” of life to a “sublime economy”. James eschews a scientific register, but this idea of building literary value assiduously over time resonates with two physiological texts I have discussed: William James’s theory of habit, and Gourmont’s theory of style. Gourmont, we have seen, argued that “[s]tyle is a physiological product”: “[a] sensorial style, an imaged style, is never precocious. It asserts itself in proportion as sensations accumulate in the neural cells and make the archives of memory denser, richer, and more complex.” Like Gourmont’s style, James’s art of fiction is not “precocious”, but rather rests on the lifetime of “notes” he “couldn’t not take”, a logic that is implicit in the dictum: “Tell me what [the author] is and I will tell you of what he has been conscious”.

commonest phenomena of modern life, and one of the least understood.” Like William in his discussion of habit, Henry James draws on the mystique of capital in his image of a “sublime economy” yielding a “princely income”, the process by which accumulated impressions are valorised, becoming art.

James’s decision to structure the Prefaces as a recovery of données, then, was entirely in keeping with the culture of expertise – with its censure of human waste and emphasis on capitalising “raw materials”. Although James’s performance of authorship is in some ways a humanist refusal of specialisation, his use of the tropes of the Beruf – asceticism and the systematic devotion to a task – and his rhetoric of human capital – “investing and reinvesting” experience instead of wasting it – are distinctively professional tropes, fully intelligible only in the context of professional society.

James also used the economic metaphor to describe how his technique actually worked: “economic mastery” of the “explosive principle” comes, precisely, through the use of a “reflector” – through, that is, internal focalisation. “There is no economy of treatment without an adopted, a related point of view”, James asserates. (300) In the Prefaces, James repeatedly figures his use of point of view as a process of economisation. Restricted third person narrative is even described as a kind of double-entry bookkeeping, the “blest wisdom that no expense should be incurred or met, in any corner of picture of mine, without some concrete image of the account kept of it, that is of its being organically re-economised” – being, in other words, refracted through one or another character’s consciousness. (305) Like the cult of National Efficiency and prophets of expertise like Wells, James proposes technique as the road to economy, the elimination of waste. Professional knowledge makes art more economical, provided the artist is disciplined enough to endure its regimen of deprivations.

TRUST IN EXPERTISE

The same process that economises the novel renders it susceptible to critical analysis: “[i]ts value is most discussable when that economy has most operated”. (37) In other words, this method subjects the author to a code of practice, rendering him

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accountable to peer review. Jamesian *discutabilité* parallels the logic of professionalism, not only in its capitalising of past experience, but also in its responsibility to an abstract code, enforceable by a community of experts: James submitted himself to the method that would maximise his professional accountability. Feeling that “the painter of the picture can never be responsible *enough*”, James is pleased to find in reviewing *The Golden Bowl* that “the whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of the two characters.” (328-9) A situation expertly “shown” in this way went “beyond the compass of even one’s most emphasised ‘word of honour’”, one’s “comparatively cold affirmation or thin guarantee” (297, 301); the “appreciable rendering of sought effects” must replace “the author’s answering for them on his more or less gentlemanly honour” (255); in short, “[w]orking out economically almost anything is the very life of the art of representation; just as the request to take on trust, tinged with the least extravagance, is the very death of the same.” (224) James’s disparagement of “gentlemanly honour” is symptomatic of the rise of professional society: the gentleman’s traditional currency of character and breeding had been eroded over the course of the nineteenth century by the culture of expertise. As the historian David Cannadine writes, by the end of the nineteenth century, “[i]n every profession, the old, amateur, traditional, gentlemanly ethos was in retreat.”79 The reason certification by examination had arisen first among the lower professions, with the Apothecaries Act of 1815, was that their members were more numerous, more dispersed and more diverse in class background than members of the Inns of Court and the Royal College of Physicians. These ancient professions were small enough to be run as upper-class clubs; it was the surgeons and apothecaries who needed a way of protecting their market share from unqualified practice, and who had most to gain in terms of status.80 James appeals to this modern form of professionalism when he bases his trustworthiness on mastery of a technique rather than his word of honour.

As Fredric Jameson has noted, James’s “transformation of [point of view] into the most fundamental of narrative categories” can be construed as a form of reification, the misrecognition of relationships between people as relationships between things. The

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79 Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 238.
fetishised text displaces the storyteller: "[t]he subject having been by the logic of social
development stripped from its textual object, the latter must now be constructed in such a
way as to bear the place of the former within itself". But this is not a Marxist
demystification of Jamesian narrative, as Jameson seems to imply; James and early James
critics like Percy Lubbock overtly addressed the impoverishment of the feudal
convention of the "word of honour", and the consequent need for technical protocols.
Lubbock pre-empted Jameson’s observation in 1921:

After all, the book is torn away from its author and given out to the world;
the author is no longer a wandering jongleur ... retaining his book as his
own inalienable possession, himself and his actual presence and his real
voice indivisibly a part of it. The book that we read has no such support; it
must bring its own recognisances. And in the fictitious picture of life the
effect of validity is all in all and there can be no appeal to an external
authority; and so there is an inherent weakness in it if the mind that knows
the story and the eye that sees it remain unaccountable.82

The reader now invests trust not in the presence of the author, but in the book’s
“recognisances”, its adherence to an impersonal code of narrative expertise. Furnished
with a theoretical backbone, the novel becomes an “access point”, as Anthony Giddens
puts it: “the real repository of trust is in the abstract system, rather than the individuals
who in specific contexts ‘represent’ it”.83 The system of point of view – internal
focalisation – replaces the “external authority” of the author, his word of honour.
Significantly, both the Prefaces and The Craft of Fiction are pleas for expert reading as
well as expert writing: as James wrote to W.D. Howells, the Prefaces were “a sort of plea
for Criticism, for Discrimination, for Appreciation on other than infantile lines – as
against the so almost universal Anglo-Saxon absence of these things; which tends so, in

81 Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London:
83 Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press,
our general trade, it seems to me, to break the heart.”\textsuperscript{84} Lubbock, similarly, adjured critics to “study the craft, to follow the process, to read constructively.”\textsuperscript{85} The symbolic capital of experts, we recall, must be recognised in order to wield power, becoming “symbolically efficient” only when it is “perceived by social agents endowed with the categories of perception and appreciation permitting them to perceive, know and recognize it”\textsuperscript{86}. A key premise in James’s professionalization of authorship is the existence of a sympathetic institution of criticism; unlike Besant, who had left regulation to the publishers, James invokes criticism as a system of peer review.

Jameson’s hypothesis needs to be adjusted in light of the rise of professional society. Jamesian texts were not just fetishised commodities, inscribed with a simulacrum of authorial presence and set adrift in the marketplace. Rather, the trustworthiness of technique was sustained by the opinion of experts – “rendered exact by professional opinion”, as Conrad put it in \textit{The Mirror of the Sea} (MS 24). Building the hierarchy of masterpieces required teamwork, in Goffman’s terms. In the Preface to \textit{The Ambassadors}, James refers wistfully to this mediated relationship between author and public, contrasting it with the nineteenth-century tradition of direct authorial address:

> The ‘first person’ then, so employed, is addressed by the author directly to ourselves, his possible readers, whom he has to reckon with, at the best, by our English tradition, so loosely and vaguely after all, so little respectfully, on so scant a presumption of exposure to criticism. (321)

The ideal institution of criticism – for which the Prefaces are a blueprint – would mediate between the expert (third person) novel and the consumer, regulating their interaction, rendering it less loose and vague, installing protocols of respect. James’s adherence to a set of rules allowed his fiction to be judged by experts like Lubbock on its technical soundness, instead of being “addressed … directly to ourselves” to be taken “on trust.”

\textsuperscript{84} Quoted in Aeske, \textit{Friction with the Market}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{85} Lubbock, \textit{The Craft of Fiction}, p. 274.
The crux of *The Ambassadors* famously occurs in Book Fifth, with Lambert Strether’s “irrepressible outbreak to little Bilham on the Sunday afternoon in Gloriani’s garden”, as James described it in the Preface. (307) “Live all you can”, Strether admonishes the younger man: “it’s a mistake not to.” 87 This access of sentimental frankness is prompted by many things, by the sheer overload, indeed, of Strether’s Paris impressions, but Strether’s acute sense of “belatedness”, as Eric Haralson puts it, may have been brought to a head by his meeting with the sculptor Gloriani himself. 88 James’s gushing description of Gloriani is filtered through Strether’s puppyish impressionability, but it seems, nonetheless, to provide an idealised summa of the professional artist. Gloriani’s “medal-like” face is the insigne of a lifetime spent in service to the muse, a badge of unalloyed human capital “in which time told only as tone and consecration”. (138) Strether reads the two faces of art in this medallion, the two directions of its economy: its function as “aesthetic torch”, making life by the force and beauty of its process, and its capacity for penetrating experience, the “long straight shaft sunk by a personal acuteness that life had seasoned to steel”. (138) This hypodermic image constructs the artist as a potent extractor of life’s essence, one on whom nothing is lost, an expert, as Strether realises, in living all you can: “[t]he deep human expertness in Gloriani’s charming smile — oh the terrible stuff behind it! — was flashed upon him as a test of his stuff.” (138) Whatever ironies may lurk beneath the surface of this eulogy, I think that Gloriani’s hyperbolic surfeit of experience, written vividly on his body, expresses the same ideal of artistic professionalism as the one set out in the Prefaces. For one who lives all he can, life itself is a kind of ceaseless training, arching not towards any particular proficiency, but rather an expertness in the human. “It doesn’t so much matter what you do in particular”, Strether tells the “little artist-man”, “so long as you have your life.” (153) As Haralson argues, Strether can be read as “the perfect bearer of the novel’s argument, its necessarily gentle dissent from uniform masculinity and compulsory sexuality”, and his subtle “envy” of little Bilham focuses on the latter’s “immun[ity] to the inner promptings of the protestant work ethic and the outer pressures of the cult of

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manly achievement." Strether's receptiveness to impressions involves, however, a great deal of hard — if pleasurable — labour, for himself and for the reader, and his Bartleby-esque reluctance to invest himself manfully in a single calling opens the possibility, not of idleness, but of the pursuit of "human expertness". The protestant work ethic that Bilham seems to avoid nonetheless haunts James’s artistic ideal.

It is this elusive possibility of human expertness that James develops in the Prefaces, which both react against the division of labour and appropriate the rhetoric of professionalism. James constructs authorship as an alternative to specialisation, and in this sense he rehearses the classic claim of bourgeois art to reserve a sphere of humanist self-realisation in a reified capitalist world — to be a “saving clause in a bad treaty”, as Raymond Williams says. However, reading back from Leavis’s humanist objection that James “suffered too much from being a professional novelist”, we can see how James rephrased this argument in the language of professionalism, construing his life as a calling, his impressions as capital, and his expertise as a means of securing trust.

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Professional self-fashioning: Conrad, human capital, and the “sailor-mentality”

Readers of Conrad come up against a dense matrix of professional semes, strung continuously across his fiction and his biography. Conrad’s famous dicta of the honour and solidarity of the craft, the fixed standard of conduct, the intrinsic virtue of work, the honesty of technique and the buttress of tradition are all signal tropes of professional rhetoric, cogent values in a professional society. ¹ As well as the rich representation of a particular profession contained in many of his novels and stories, Conrad’s prefaces, letters, memoirs and essays couch his second career in the terms of professionalism, emphasising his technical rigour, probity and dedication to a non-pecuniary objective. These three commitments were, indeed, intertwined: as he wrote in The Mirror of the Sea,

the moral side of an industry, productive or unproductive, the redeeming and ideal aspect of this bread-winning, is the attainment and preservation of the highest possible skill on the part of the craftsmen. Such skill, the skill of technique, is more than honesty; it is something wider, embracing honesty and grace and rule in an elevated and clear sentiment, not altogether utilitarian, which may be called the honour of labour. (MS 24)

¹ See, for example, the “fellowship of the craft” that amateur sailing lacks, in Youth (Y 9); Marlow’s desire to see Jim “squirm for the honour of the craft” and his ideal of the task “whose only reward is the perfect love of the work” in Lord Jim (LJ 50, 76); the value placed, not on work, “but what is in the work – the chance to find yourself” in Heart of Darkness (HD 31); the accretion “in a given profession” of “a certain tradition, or, in other words, a standard of conduct” in “The Dover Patrol” (1921) (LE 87), and the famous essay on “Tradition” (1918) in Notes on Life and Letters.
Mercenary bread-winning acquires an ideal supplement through the perfection of technique: the professional’s expertise itself ensures a kind of disinterestedness. The success of Conrad’s professional self-fashioning, at least among his colleagues, can be gauged by Ezra Pound’s use of this passage as a touchstone in a 1912 essay on technique. In the ninth instalment of “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris”, a twelve part series in The New Age, Pound proposes technique as proof of an assiduous investment of time in the acquisition of mastery, distinguishing the “man who ... will work, year in year out, to find the perfect expression” from the jotters of occasional verses. This shibboleth is also a consumer safeguard: “technique is ... the protection of the public, the sign-manual by which it distinguishes between the serious artist and the disagreeable young person expressing its haedinus egotism”. Pound’s argument, which joins the logic of human capital with the professional appeal to trust in expertise, opens with a (mis)quotation from The Mirror of the Sea: “‘Skill in technique,’ says Joseph Conrad, ‘is something more than honesty.’”

The knowledge that Conrad was a professional sailor, confirmed by the naturalistic power of his sea fiction, has inevitably informed how he is read. As Joyce Piell Wexler notes, although Conrad and other modernist authors “strived to make their fiction impersonal, their personal lives have become part of the myth of modernism. Conrad’s years at sea, Joyce’s bohemian exile, and Lawrence’s autobiographical references make readers feel that these authors’ narratives are authentic representations of real life.” My premise in this chapter is the truism that Conrad’s deep thematic and biographical involvement with the sea was integral to his ethos. The Aristotelian origin of Seymour Chatman’s term is peculiarly apt in the case of Conrad, because his professionalism signifies conscientiousness and, precisely, trustworthiness, the quality that a rhetor’s ethos was supposed to convey. But whereas in chapter one I assessed how this appeal was encoded formally and thematically in Lord Jim, here I will be mainly concerned with the intertextual construction of this ethos, as a function of Conrad’s


public identity. In what follows I will suggest some of the ways in which this identity functions rhetorically, building on the categories sketched out in chapter two. First, as William James’s discussion of habit demonstrates, an important premise of the culture of expertise was the permanence of training: minds and bodies were restructured by specialised education, just as they were degraded by sloth. It would have been natural for readers to suppose that Conrad’s professional past was ingrained in his character, instilling a durable disposition for conscientiousness and probity. Secondly, Conrad’s impressionism emphasised recollected experience, mirroring the professional concept of human capital. As David Trotter has noted, Conrad looked upon his exotic experiences as a valuable resource, aiming to “redploy the symbolic capital amassed during one career in the advancement of another.”

Conrad’s value as an author was predicated on the investment of time in the accumulation of impressions, and his arduous professional labour consisted of retrieving these impressions, as much as in hunting *le mot juste*. My mode of argument here will construe Conrad as a professional in a dual sense: primarily, I am concerned with how he deployed his identity as an ex-officer of the Merchant Service to build an image of professional probity, conscientiousness, and so on. Implicitly, however, in presenting this image to his professional peers in the literary world—publishers, critics, and so on—Conrad conducts his second career within de facto professional institutions, seeking accreditation from experts rather than outright commercial success.

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British Master Mariner.” More methodical, Jacques Berthoud infers three distinct parallels from the argument of Conrad’s memoir A Personal Record: restraint, solidarity and fidelity. Berthoud endorses Conrad’s abstraction of the values of the Merchant Service from their original context, to the extent of assimilating marine tropes to his own discussion of ethics: “For a man to whom temporal life presents itself as unreliable and even destructive, the degree of fidelity must take on a particular importance, for it is his main bulwark against the drift of dissolution.” More recently, Geoffrey Harpham has postulated that “when [Conrad] is not a seaman writer, he is no writer at all.” Given its shifting, essentially specular nature, “tropes constitute the only form of language truly proper to the sea, which summons forth style with the same imperativity as it had summoned the young Conrad.” This image of summoning recalls Leavis’s analogy between the call of the sea and that of language itself: Harpham’s interpretation of the mirror of the sea as the endless deferral of meaning – “the great fact that cannot be described” – exemplifies, in a sophisticated way, the habit of reading Conrad’s writing and his years at sea as vehicle and tenor in a critical metaphor.

Although reflection on how Conrad’s experience at sea “marked him for life” had been going on for some time, Frederick Karl opined in his 1979 biography that Too little has been made of those years at sea which Conrad experienced, years not consumed by reading or shipboard activities but filled with staring and boredom and tediousness, all those hours spent between rather than doing. Conrad’s metabolism must have become reconstituted to take these long days and nights into account.

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7 Harpham, One of Us, p. 89.
Karl relates "the passive strain of Conrad's imagination", "its lack of thrust, its paucity or trivialization of movement", to the physiological reconditioning effected by the sailor's daily duties, "the unfolding of his imagination in those years of staring into sea and sky while he sought another dimension of space and time." This line of thought yields valuable insights into the trope of passivity in Conrad's fiction. But Karl's hypothesis of metabolic reconstitution also instances a rhetoric with which we are familiar from Gourmont, Durkheim, and William James: the idea that following a profession results in a cellular rebuilding of the body, a rewiring of the nervous system. Erving Goffman identifies this rhetoric as a feature of professional performances:

[T]here is a kind of 'rhetoric of training,' whereby labor unions, universities, trade associations, and other licensing bodies require practitioners to absorb a mystical range and period of training, in part to maintain a monopoly, but in part to foster the impression that the licensed practitioner is someone who has been reconstituted by his learning experience and is now set apart from other men.12

Karl's image of the "reconstituted" sailor's body is identical to the impression fostered by professionals of being "reconstituted" by training, permanently transfigured by exper. knowledge. The relation between Conrad's two careers, such readings suggest, was more fundamental than mere access to an exotic subject (although, of course, this figured in Conrad's market appeal). Conrad's sea career determined not only the content but also the conduct of his writing. The implied relation is not metonymic -- the accidental contiguity of any writer and his or her past -- but metaphoric: the deep ethical, technical and even metabolic affinity between Conrad's writing practice and his experience as a master mariner. Essentially, I would agree with Karl's reading of Conrad's "reconstitution". However, the way in which the habitus of professionalism that Conrad acquired at sea, among other places, could be turned to account as a form of symbolic capital is not sufficiently noted in such accounts.

Three examples from the correspondence will serve to illustrate how Conrad’s performance of authorship solicited such readings. In an autobiographical sketch written for a Polish historian in 1903, Conrad briskly iterated his record of meritorious service in the Merchant Service. “During my life as a seaman ... I was conscientious ... I always remained faithful to the traditions of the profession I had chosen”. This information was not without relevance to his current occupation: defining writing in these same professional terms of conscientious work – “You may judge if I make use of [my talent] conscientiously. All I know is that I am striving after a writer’s honesty” (CL 3: 89-90) – Conrad transposes his curriculum vitae from one professional context to another. In conducting the affairs of his writing life, Conrad sometimes appealed explicitly to his professional record as proof of his practical good sense. When his agent J.B. Pinker impugned his work ethic, for example, Conrad exploded, “beg[ging] to point out that I am not a literary man”, and reeling off a resumé of his practical credentials, including the percentage increase in the profitability of the Otago while she was under his command (16%). (CL 4: 21) Conrad’s most eloquent fusion of the two lives, perhaps, is the explanation given to Arthur Quiller-Couch of his tendency to pace as he worked: “a quarter-deck habit”. (CL 2: 108) This image deftly condenses at least three connotations relevant to Conrad’s deeply entrenched professional ethic: the indelible, physiological imprint left by his sailing life, the dependence of his writing on near-hallucinatory reminiscence, and the embodied nature of impressionist writing, which involves strolling around as well as actual scribbling. Ford reiterates both the habit and Conrad’s explanation of it in A Personal Remembrance, underlining how apt this biographeme was for inclusion in Conrad’s legend. (IC 35, 52) With degrees of self-consciousness varying from the overt argument presented to Pinker, to the more subtle self-presentation offered to Quiller-Couch, Conrad’s letters show him both displaying his professional past and, I suggest, emphasising its continuity with his present occupation.

Conrad formulated this analogy most explicitly in A Personal Record, his account, as Albert Guerard puts it, of “two great adventures: the initiation to the sea, the initiation to the life of a writer”.13 The memoir marshals a sophisticated array of parallelisms to weave the two phases of his life together, extending sometimes to the

syntactic level. As Lynda Prescott observes, "the continuity between his two occupations is emphasised by parallels of phrasing", such as Conrad’s being “compelled ... to write volume after volume, as in past years I was compelled to go to sea, voyage after voyage.”

I have already touched on Conrad’s self-conscious stage-management of this project, his wariness of self-revelation and the importance of the English Review as a rarefying medium, elevating the seven parts of “Some Reminiscences” (December 1908 to June 1909) above the self-aggrandising or opportunistic connotations of literary memoir. When the original essays were to be collected into a volume, he explained to J.B. Pinker that the autobiography was intended to establish a continuity beneath the surface disparity of Under Western Eyes (1911) and his earlier work.

I wished to explain (in a sense) how I came to write such a novel as Under Western Eyes (I shall say that much in the preface) so utterly unlike in subject and treatment from anything I had done before. That Personal Note will make it intelligible to such people – my public – who care for and attach some importance to my work. (CL 4: 477-8)

Conrad did indeed present this motive publicly in the memoir’s “Familiar Preface”, explaining his intention of constructing “a coherent and justifiable personality” from the heterogeneous materials of his life. (PR xxi) If The Secret Agent (1907) could be written off as a pastiche, an exercice de style, Under Western Eyes (1911) was evidently a major piece of work, three years in the writing, which seemed to confirm the evidence of Nostromo: Conrad had broken away from the maritime subject matter of the early period. Conrad had felt pressure from his audience to recreate the milieu of The Nigger of the Narcissus” (1897), “Youth” (1898), Lord Jim (1900), “The End of the Tether” (1902) and “Typhoon” (1902) at least as early as Nostromo (1904), which he thought had been “buried” by the critics, whereas The Mirror of the Sea (1906) had been hailed as a homecoming. “They want to exile me to the middle of the ocean”, he complained to his French translator Henry-Durand Davray. (CL 3: 372) Conrad envisions his memoir as a

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circular to his readership, tutoring them in the underlying unity of his oeuvre. The method of this self-fashioning was, I suggest, to *allegorise* his professional experiences, translating his “notion of good service ... from the decks of ships to the more circumscribed space of my desk”, regardless of genre or setting. (PR xvii) According to this logic, *Under Western Eyes* was no less informed by his first profession than his more literally maritime works.

Commentary on Conrad’s transfer of professional attributes from sailing to writing has focused on this overtly synthetic memoir. In a perceptive article, Byron Caminero-Santangelo shows that “Conrad’s suggestion that this first profession is related to and even prepared him for his second is part of a larger strategy of legitimation to establish that novel-writing ... requires rigorous training.” As Caminero-Santangelo notes, Conrad “explicitly links the professionalism that he developed as a sea officer with his writing”: “A Familiar Preface” asserts that his *impassibilité* is a result of his “sea-training”. Indeed, Conrad had already made this point in the main text, weaving an analogy between the certified sobriety of his sea career and the “asceticism of sentiment” in his fiction: “I have tried to be a sober worker all my life – all my two lives.” (PR 111-2) Stoicism and self-control were qualities readily transferable from sailing to writing.

The anecdote of the general’s daughter that Conrad relates in *A Personal Record* contains a somewhat more oblique formulation of professional authorship, but one which bears directly on the professional’s dependence on trust examined in chapter one. The daughter in question, a curious representative of local society intrigued to inspect the neighbourhood’s resident scribbler, interrupts Conrad as he is composing *Nostromo* – or terraforming it, rather, building it from scratch. Her unannounced arrival reduces the whole complex system of Costaguanian society – of the soil which “there was not a single brick, stone, or grain of sand of its soil I had not placed in position with my own hands” – to a heap of neural rubble, leaving no visible sign for her “amused glance” but a litter of manuscript pages. The labour of composition “must be perfectly delightful”, she remarks, and only the eruption of a dog fight in the garden saves Conrad from “a fit of apoplexy.” (PR 100, 102) In *Lord Jim* Conrad had formulated the dialectic of trust in

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expertise, somewhat melodramatically, in the relationship of the human cargo of the
*Patna* to their professional service-providers: “everything on board to that ignorant and
pious multitude”, Marlow says, “was strange alike, and as trustworthy as it would for
ever remain incomprehensible.” (LJ 106) In this anecdote in *A Personal Record*, Conrad
underlines, again with an element of melodrama, the extent to which a novelist’s
expertise is of this unverifiable kind, describing the pathos that proceeds from performing
arduous but invisible labour, as trustworthy as it is incomprehensible to the layperson
(and particularly, he implies, to the young women often thought to consume popular
fiction). The episode ends with a more explicit evocation of the parallel between
Conrad’s two careers: by responding with outward equanimity to this nerve-wracking
intrusion, Conrad demonstrates the durability of his “sea-training”: “The sea is strong
medicine. Be told what the quarter-deck training even in a merchant ship will do!” (PR
100) (This medicine failed to prevent Conrad from throttling Ford at Charing Cross,
however, in response to a similar interruption.)

*A Personal Record* also reflects ruefully on the difference between Conrad’s two
careers, paying particular attention to the lack of objective evaluation in his second life.
As Trotter puts it, “Conrad was brought if not into being, then at least into full self-
consciousness, by certification”, but “he found in his second career-move, from
certificated seaman to writer, a radical discontinuity.” Authoritative criticism was
16 crucial to Conrad’s version of the professional ethos, but in the life of a writer this
ingredient was sporadic at best: “it may happen to one’s work to be condemned without
being read at all”, he observes stoically. (PR 107) Nor was popularity any substitute for
criticism: Conrad regarded the commercial mass media as depressing proof that success
was perfectly compatible with shoddy workmanship. Jacques Berthoud summarises his
reasoning: “[i]n a craft in which the merest slip can produce a catastrophe it is not
difficult to see why this demand [of restraint] should be made. But what of the novelist’s
vocation, where the test is not the impartial ocean but a notoriously deceivable public?”

Conrad addressed this disparity in *The Mirror of the Sea*, contrasting the exactitude of

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17 Good work is “rendered exact by professional opinion”, he wrote in *The Mirror of the Sea* (MS
24); the “criticism of men” is a key element of sea life in *Lord Jim* (LJ 50).
nautical slang with the carelessness of journalese. He praises the expression “How does the cable grow?” as an “impressionistic phrase”, redolent with the “imagery of technical language that, created by simple men with keen eyes for the real aspect of the things they see in their trade, achieves the just expression seizing upon the essential, which is the ambition of the artist in words.” (MS 21) The commercial press, on the other hand, travesty this professional language, inventing jargon with “the affectation of being a sea-phrase”, which the public swallow just as readily as the impostures of “Mr. X, the popular statesman, or Mr. Y, the Popular scientist.” (MS 15, 28) Similarly, in Chance, the master mariner Charles Powell contrasts the exacting work of the sea with “newspaper men … who never by any chance give a correct version of the simplest affair”, safe in the knowledge that “this tight little island won’t turn turtle” as a result of their ineptitude. (C 15-16) Conrad’s professional past here gives an idiosyncratic form to the characteristic modernist caginess about commodification, defining “the ambition of the artist in words” against popular culture. How indeed could Conrad, who published sections of The Mirror of the Sea in the Daily Mail, assure both his readers and himself that his use of language was imbued with a nautical conscientiousness, as distinct from the commercial product purveyed in the general run of popular journalism? As Trotter suggests, one source of assurance was the approbation of experts, the “ring of men who write”, and I will examine Conrad’s appeal to professional opinion in my discussion of The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’. First, however, I want to consider how the rhetoric of durable training that I discussed in chapter three could be brought to bear on this ostensible discontinuity in Conrad’s career path.

In Conrad’s own most systematic reflection on practical education, he argued that training instilled ability in the Abstract, above and beyond any particular skill. In 1919 the Ocean Steamship Company solicited Conrad’s opinion of a proposed sailing ship to train officers for the Merchant Service. Conrad responded warmly to the company’s invitation, furnishing an extensive memorandum of recommendations “especially as regards the actual training as distinguished from mere imparting of knowledge”. (LE 149) Expressing a sentiment that would have met with the approval of William James, Conrad advised against the use of “labour-saving devices” on the ship, and approved a certain degree of asceticism: “the comfort of the boys should be cared for strictly within
the limits of due regard for their health, physical development and opportunity for study, and no more.” (LE 108) Although the manual tasks of a sailing ship were obsolete at the level of professional procedure, they were essential to the formation of professional character: “any physical work intelligently done develops a special mentality; in this case it would be the sailor-mentality; surely a valuable acquisition for a sea officer either in sail or steam.” (LE 105) The sailor mentality, acquired by physical “training” rather than mere study, remains with the trainee regardless of his subsequent career-path. Professional training promised, indeed, a boilerplate for the soul: “Believing in heredity in moderation,” explains Marlow in Chance, “I knew well how sea-life fashions a man outwardly and stamps his soul with the mark of a certain prosaic fitness”. (C 50) Conrad’s theory of training suggests one answer to Berthoud’s question: ideally – that is, according to the ideology of professionalism – the discipline of the sea was durable enough to survive its institutional context. Once a professional, always a professional.

TRANSPOSABLE TECHNIQUE

Conrad’s sea-writing is, of course, saturated with his professional knowledge, replete with concrete technical detail and expert terminology. Early readers of The Nigger of the “Narcissus” were struck by his mastery of the milieu: in the opinion of the Daily Mail reviewer, Conrad possessed an “intimate knowledge of seamanship unrivalled by Dana or Clark Russell.”19 In addition to this thematic demonstration of maritime experience, however, Conrad’s impressionist technique also functioned as a proof of his “intimate knowledge of seamanship”: the assiduous attention to point of view characteristic of his fiction manifests the indelible “sailor-mentality”. In this sense, Conrad’s impressionism can be construed as a gesture in his professional self-presentation: these vicarious schemes of perception demonstrate a familiarity with embodied space, suggesting the kind of physical memory inscribed by work and training, rather than the mere recollection of images: point of view, too, was a way of writing with one’s whole body (as Remy De Gourmont put it). Gourmont, once again, supplies the cue

for this line of inquiry, with his thesis that style, rather than content, was a product of stored experience, maturing “as sensations accumulate in the neural cells ... It is life, the habit of sensation, that will create the stylistic image”. 20 Conrad’s Berkeleyan rule – no object without an observer – can be read as a way of translating his sea training onto the page, redeeming his cultural capital as fictional technique.

This embodiment of different viewpoints bears upon the trustworthiness of Conrad’s use of language, its approximation of a sailor’s “impressionistic” sincerity. As Bernard Williams notes, under certain conditions the virtues of truthfulness – sincerity and accuracy – coincide with self-interest. Proposing a genealogy of truthfulness, Williams imagines a simple social system in which individuals have a “purely positional advantage” with respect to one another: “This is the idea that a speaker can tell someone else about a situation because he is or was in it, while his hearer is not or was not.” The good of the collective in such cases depends on the verbal pooling of information, an “epistemic division of labour”, so that truthfulness is expedient, whatever its ethical significance. 21 The ship exemplifies Williams’s hypothetical simple system, a microcosm dependent on the accuracy and sincerity of information relayed orally among captain and crew, epitomised in the function of the look-out. 22 In The Rescue, for example, the chief mate Mr. Shaw’s failure to perceive Carter’s boat (a failure of accuracy), and the look-out Badroon’s failure to report his sighting of it (a failure of sincerity), creates a pocket of ignorance in the pool of information, leaving Lingard unaware of the boat’s approach. (R 33-4) Conversely, in “Youth”, Marlow rather irresponsibly fails to inform the crew of his small boat of “the upper sails of a ship” spotted on the horizon; under the conditions of positional advantage that obtain at sea, this breach of sincerity breaks the chain of information, leaving the men ignorant of a potential rescuer. (Y 38)

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22 Geoffrey Harpham uses Conrad to challenge a similar thought experiment put by Michel Serres in Le Contrat naturel (1990). Serres, Harpham says, infers “the principles of an ideal civil or social law from the sea, or rather from the conditions of life at sea.” Harpham convincingly shows the inadequacy of this model to Conrad’s fiction, pointing to the important role played by authority in upholding law. Whereas Harpham’s critique focuses on the political context, Williams is concerned with a hypothetical speech community, focusing on the problem of sincerity that concerns me here. Harpham, One of Us, p. 89.
Conrad’s realistic evocation of this environment depends on his scrupulous simulation of *position*al advantages, his impressionist method of embedded perception and differential knowledge. As John G. Peters argues, the basic premise of Conrad’s perceptual impressionism is that “[t]he object cannot be experienced except at a particular place, at a particular time, by a particular person.”[^23] This premise gives rise to what might be called the instants of tunnel vision in Conrad’s fiction, those “sudden holes in space and time” of which the grisly head that appears suddenly in the lens of Marlow’s telescope is perhaps the canonical instance. (SA 105, HD 57) The climax of *Chance* hinges on such an accident of perspective, fortuitously aligning Powell’s eye-line, the window of Captain Anthony’s saloon and the brandy-and-water that his father-in-law laces with poison as Powell looks on. As Peters observes, this scene illustrates a general principle of Conrad’s perceptual theory: “[t]he reader can see no more than Powell, and Conrad implies that such is true of all perception.”[^24] Importantly for my purpose here, however, it is Powell, a sailor to his boots, who appreciates the marvellous improbability of this alignment of object and perceiver, and who takes care to reproduce its spatial conditions for Marlow, his listener: “‘Our friend Powell ... was very anxious that I should understand the topography of that cabin’” (whereas Marlow, whose stories are unlike “the yarns of seamen”, “was interested more by its moral atmosphere”). (C 342, HD 9) Implicitly, it is Powell’s “sailor-mentality” that is so struck by the accidents of topography, and that leads him to narrate them so scrupulously. Significantly for Conrad’s fictional recreation of such events, Montague Brierly, the perfect sailor of *Lord Jim*, demonstrates how this expert knowledge of perspectival space is actuated even by imagined scenarios, elegantly solving the puzzle of the *Patna*’s disappearing light with a display of applied geometry: the ship’s lamp disappeared from the life-boat’s line of sight because the *Patna* had rotated on its axis. “By this change in her position”, Marlow explains, “all her lights were in a very few moments shut off from the boat to leeward.” (LJ 143) As it happens, Conrad himself was called upon to display just such a command of virtual space in his chief mate’s examination, and used the terminology of his second career when he came to describe the episode in *A Personal Record*. Presented with a

[^24]: Peters, *Conrad and Impressionism*, p. 36.
hypothetical crisis of escalating complexity, Conrad’s plan of action made a “sufficient approach to verisimilitude” to win him his certificate: accurately imagining the condition of a sailing ship was, in fact, one of Conrad’s certifiable skills. (PR 155) This grasp of relative position – Powell’s anxiety about topography, and Brierly’s geometric acumen – is the height of professionalism; reproducing it in his fiction, Conrad demonstrates his professional expertise. The marvellously “precise workmanship of chance, fate, providence, call it what you will” that Powell finds so striking in the perspectival accident of Chance is, of course, Conrad’s own. (C 338)

As Peters notes, embodied moments of “primitive perception” can be collated into “civic perception”, helping “individuals to function in a social group where consensus exists concerning the identity of a particular object or event.”25 The ability to share private spatial information by translating it into temporal signs – “to interpret into slow speech the instantaneous effect of visual impressions”, as Marlow puts it (LJ 78) – is a point of professional pride among sailors. In The Rescue, Carter’s accurate knowledge of the physical environment exemplifies the mimetic sea language of the “impressionistic phrase”:

He seemed to dole out facts, to disclose with sparing words the features of the coast, but every word showed the minuteness of his observation, the clear vision of a seaman able to master quickly the aspect of a strange land and of a strange sea. He presented, with concise lucidity, the picture of the tangle of reefs and sandbanks, through which the yacht had miraculously blundered in the dark before she took ground. (R 38)

As in Williams’s simple social system, Carter’s sincerity and accuracy are necessary for the common good: Lingard needs this information if he is to rescue Carter’s stranded yacht. Internalising a practical knowledge of topography – as Brierly does in the Patna inquiry – gives rise to a rigorously accurate use of language, the professional exigencies of navigation pinning signs to their referents. This expression of “clear vision”, a

“picture” conveyed with “concise lucidity”, provides a real-world model for Conrad’s own program of making you see.

The painstaking mimesis of perspectival space in Conrad’s sea writing is an act of loyalty to the conditions of the ship; indeed, a simulation of them. His cinematic orchestration of points of view reproduces the sailor’s well-trained spatial imagination and dependence on lines of sight, just as his determination to represent the physical world approximates the sailor’s “impressionistic phrase”. This feature of Conrad’s impressionism gave him the means of translating his professional past publicly into technique, supplementing his treatment of maritime themes with a virtual demonstration of his expertise. Understood as a rhetoric of self-presentation, impressionist point of view is one literary equivalent of maritime professionalism, marking Conrad’s apartness from Powell’s bungling “newspaper men”, and underwriting his assertion that “the art of handling ships ..., like all fine arts, ... must be based upon a broad, solid sincerity”. (MS 28)

THE NIGGER OF THE “Narcissus”

My focus in this section, and for most of the next chapter, is The Nigger of the “Narcissus” and the performance of authorship surrounding its publication. This novel recommends itself to a study of authorial self-fashioning primarily because, as McDonald shows, it was a more than usually self-conscious prise de position, composed with a particular journal, W.E. Henley’s New Review, in mind. Secondly, The Nigger of the “Narcissus” drew more directly than Conrad’s previous work on his personal experience, transfiguring his own voyage on the Narcissus in 1884 into a “vécu” narrative, as he described it to R.B. Cunningham Graham.26 (CL 1: 418) Ian Watt attributes the novel’s power to the fact that its “plot and the characters were drawn from much deeper and more intimate sources in his own past than had been the case with any of his previous works.”27 The letters that Conrad wrote to readers of The Nigger of the “Narcissus”

provide a useful illustration of the rhetorical importance of memory in impressionist self-fashioning. Thirdly, as Conrad’s first published story of the sea, it is essential to any consideration of Conrad’s self-presentation as a professional sailor. Its strong allegorical overtones evidence Conrad’s determination that his sailing experiences should transcend their local context, furnishing not only story ideas but a worldview that would figure largely in his public image. Conrad’s rather heavy-handed figuration of the ship as a microcosm, which he nonetheless took care to gloss for the benefit of an anonymous reviewer, is the most marked sign of this allegorical intention: the ship is “a small planet”, Captain Allistoun the “ruler of that minute world”, and the metaphor is later reversed to describe England as “a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights – a ship carrying the burden of millions of lives”. (NN 35-6, 135) As Levenson notes, “we ought not to be misled by the fact that in Conrad the polis floats”. Conrad’s awkward image of the ship as a “pyramid”, an object not known for its buoyancy, also hammers home his intention of extracting a political lesson from the ship’s hierarchical society. (NN 33) Inter alia, this allegorical purpose proclaims Conrad’s interest in knitting his two careers together in non-linear ways, optimising the potential bearings of his sea experiences on his authorial persona.

Conrad probably began The Nigger of the “Narcissus” in June 1896, and finished it on 17 January 1897. By this time he had published two critically acclaimed novels, Almayer’s Folly (1895) and An Outcast of the Islands (1896), and begun placing stories with respected magazines. The august Cornhill, which had serialised Thomas Hardy, solicited a story from him in June 1896: Conrad was a noteworthy, emergent author, and his books were assured of serious critical attention. The time of writing The Nigger of the “Narcissus”, his first published foray into sea fiction, was another “psychological moment” in his career, when the stage was set for a major prise de position. As McDonald has shown, although Conrad had already attracted the attention and patronage

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28 “I also wanted to connect the small world of the ship with that larger world carrying perplexities, fears, affections, rebellions, in a loneliness greater than that of the ship at sea.” (CL I: 421)
30 “The Idiots” appeared in the Savoy for October 1896, “The Lagoon” in Cornhill for January 1897, and “An Outpost of Progress”, written in July 1896, was eventually serialised in Cosmopolis in June-July 1897.
of publisher's readers like Blackwood's David Meldrum and Unwin's W.H. Chesson and Edward Garnett, he "still needed the public endorsement of an older, more prominent and well-established peer. Of all contemporary 'symbolic bankers', Henley was the most spectacular and successful, so he chose to invest with him."31

Morphological accounts of literary impressionism concentrate on its structural and stylistic features and epistemological framework. However, as we have seen, the rhetoric of impressionism also had a temporal axis, for which James's New York Prefaces provided the most extensive theoretical elaboration. The connotations of impressionism pertained not only to the textual surface, but also to the author's past; as James put it in "The Art of Fiction", "[a] novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression."32 This rootedness in authentic experience was implicit in Conrad's ideal of sincerity. Sensing inauthenticity in a sea story by John Buchan, Conrad wrote to William Blackwood accusing Buchan, rather unfairly, of plagiarism: "One does not expect style, construction, or even common intelligence in the fabrication of story; but one has the right to demand some sort of sincerity and to expect common honesty. When that fails - what remains?" (CL 2: 216) The possibility that authentic experience might be confused with the figments of a fertile imagination struck at the heart of Conrad's literary worth and livelihood.

The sense of impressionism as retrieval of experience was, of course, crucial to Conrad's authorial persona, which inevitably incorporated his first-hand knowledge of the sea and the Malay archipelago. As Susan Jones puts it, "[n]othing is more familiar to readers of Joseph Conrad than the image of the author as a lonely seafarer, drawing on the memories of life on board ship to construct the tales that sustained his career as a writer."33 James doubtless thrilled his junior colleague by complimenting him on this component of his literary distinction in 1906: "[n]o one has known - for intellectual use - the things you know, & you have, as the artist of the whole matter, an authority that no

one has approached.” Conrad’s authority, that is, rested dually on his status as an artist and on his memories, his unique “bucket of impressions” (as James called his own reservoir of experience). Conrad bemoaned this mnemonic dimension of his literary practice to Garnett during the composition of “The Rescuers” (now The Rescue), just as he was beginning work on The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”

I am frightened when I remember that I have to drag it all out of myself. Other writers ... start from an anecdote – from a newspaper paragraph ... They lean on dialect – or on tradition – or on history – or on the prejudice or fad of the hour ... – while I don’t. I have had some impressions, some sensations – in my time: – impressions and sensations of common things ... (CL 1: 288)

Conrad knew that Garnett was receptive to this interpretation of his literary distinction: Garnett had proposed it himself to persuade Conrad to write a second novel. “My thesis”, he recalled, “was that the life Conrad had witnessed on sea and land must vanish away into the mist and fade utterly from memory, did he not set himself to record it in literature.” Garnett may have been drawing on Conrad’s own mythology of temps perdu when he wrote this in 1928, echoing Marlow’s concern to preserve Patusan from the abyss: “This was, indeed, one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth; I had looked under its obscure surface; and I felt that when to-morrow I had left if for ever, it would slip out of existence, to live only in my memory till I myself passed into oblivion.” (LJ 281) Conrad’s letters and fiction, that is, fostered a perception of his value as a repository of experience, a form of symbolic capital that Garnett recognised from the outset. Conrad would soon formulate the image of heroic self-examination more publicly, describing in the Preface to The Nigger of the “Narcissus” the artist’s descent “within himself” to a “lonely region of stress and strife”. (NN 11) He used the same motif in his correspondence with Henley, dissociating his collaboration with Ford from “the right to

descend into my own private little hell – whenever the spirit moved me to do that foolish thing – and produce alone from time to time – verbiage no doubt – my own – and therefore very dear.” (CL 2: 107) This spatter of apohiopesis awkwardly juggles various conflicting rhetorical aims: self-deprecation is uneasily combined with a sense of due dignity, and at the same time the stereotype of suffering for one’s art collides with a discourse of rights and “private” property. The unstable compound of pride and humility comes to rest on the ambiguous word “dear”: Conrad modestly implies that his fiction is of purely sentimental value, dear to him, but also that it is a scarce commodity, constructed from his unusual stock of private impressions, and therefore a costly item in the literary marketplace. In the Author’s Note to Within the Tides, Conrad used this same logic of property to differentiate his work from romance: “My subjects are not medieval and I have a natural right to them because my past is very much my own.” (WT 9) The recovery of experience was a crucial postulate in Conrad’s self-presentation. If Conrad’s past is admitted to be private property, and therefore unique, then his work can be sold in a restricted market, protected from competition with John Buchan’s cheap knock-offs.

John Marx has shown how Conrad’s symbolic use of his (genuine) suffering can be read as a “reembodying project”, resisting commodification by riveting his unique abilities to his suffering body. According to Marx, this was a process of valorization. “Conrad appropriates the stereotype of the suffering artist in order to redefine the professional writer in terms of the difficulty of his labor”: Conrad’s gout becomes “the primary register for measuring the value of the professional services that author performs.”36 We have seen this professional rhetoric of hardship in Conrad’s sparring with the judge in Ford’s anecdote, and in his correspondence with John Quinn, another suffering professional. Conrad proposed this equation between suffering and exchange-value explicitly to his first publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, assuring him that “if you knew the wear and tear of my writing you would understand my desire for some return”. (CL 1: 293) As we have seen, this “wear and tear” proceeded not only from Flaubertian work on style, but also from Conrad’s arduous “rescue work” on his past, the reclamation of his private impressions. Following Marx, we can see Conrad’s imagery of solitary suffering – his private hell, the lonely region of stress, the self-dredging for authentic impressions –

as a further augmentation of his value, sealing his exclusive propriety of his past with the
imprimatur of suffering.

Conrad described *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* as "a seal on that epoch of the
greatest possible perfection which was at the same time the end of the sailing fleet." (CL
3: 89) As his eley to the age of sail, it both constructed and capitalised on its author's
public identity as an ex-master mariner. Conrad reinforced the elegiac mood of the novel
in letters to critics and literary friends, whom he consistently coached to read the story as
distilled experience. His recent acquaintance R.B. Cunninghame Graham (a reviewer
whom “[i]t may do me good to be friendly with”) was the first to be informed that
“[t]here are twenty years of my life, six months of scribbling in that book”. (CL 1: 413,
418) Conrad replied to a letter of congratulation from the influential author and critic
Arthur Quiller-Couch with the same words – “[t]wenty years of life, six months of
scribbling and a lot of fist-grawing and hair tearing went to the making of that book” –
and also repeated the phrase in his response to an anonymous review: “twenty years of
life went to the writing of these last few lines”. (CL 1: 430, 421) As a consistent public
gloss on his first published sea story, this double timeline collates the two phases of
impressionist work: living and writing. As Gourmont wrote, “[a] sensorial style, an
imaged style, is never precocious”: the eidetic vividness and rugged naturalism of *The
Nigger of the "Narcissus"* were, Conrad implied, twenty years in the making. By
fashioning the interdependence of his life and work in this way, Conrad presented his
memories as human capital, just as for professionals “[a] knowledge that was inseparable
from the person of the expert could thus be gradually constructed into a special kind of
property.”37 Stephen Crane explicitly described Conrad's subject matter in these terms,
writing that he “comes nearer to an ownership of the mysterious life on the ocean than
anybody who has written in this century.”38

If the performance of authorship in a mass society can be understood in terms of
trust, then Conrad's ability to convincingly figure forth his professional identity was a
crucial asset in his performance. As his letters suggest, Conrad presented this identity not
only to his audience (itself a select group, in his opinion) but also to a community of

37 Thomas L. Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory*
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 34.
38 “Concerning the English 'Academy'”, *Bookman* (New York) 7, quoted in CL 2: 18.
experts, a team who might then ratify his value before the public. In letters to colleagues, he sometimes traded on this professional past explicitly, as in his angry letter to Pinker asserting his practical acuteness, but in general his *ethos* is better understood as an instinctive performance, participation in the interactional *modus vivendi*, in Goffman’s terms, or a *logic of practice*, in Bourdieu’s. The impression Conrad was able to give of being “reconstituted” by his professional experience, as Karl puts it, was bolstered by the internal features of his aesthetic, such as his punctilious attention to point of view, but also by the icon of his letters and his autobiographical writings. The value of scrupulous anamnesis (“fidelity to the truth of my sensations”) in his impressionism, as well as functioning as symbolic capital in its own right, also supported his self-presentation as a professional, by shoring up his ownership of a professional past, and hence his possession of a “sailor-mentality”. (WT 10) The past that he transformed into fiction (by the application of technical rigour) was itself saturated in the ideology of expertise, and by authoring the “very finest & strongest picture of the sea and sea-life that our language possesses”, as James said of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, he also publicly renewed his early training in the honour of the craft. 30 The array of professional tropes that attached to Conrad’s name attested to his trustworthiness as an author, his commitment to the craft rather than commercial reward, consolidating his status as the opposite pole to Marie Corelli.

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30 Stape and Knowles, *A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad*, p. 36.
CHAPTER 4

Professionalism and masculinity in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"

A SMALL KNOT OF MEN

This chapter begins with a frame tale, or rather, two intersecting tales taken from Conrad’s professional career. The first is his brief correspondence with Arthur Quiller-Couch following the publication of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*; the second is the grant of £500 he received from the Royal Bounty Fund in 1905, a windfall in which the patriotic poet Henry Newbolt played a key role. This kind of state patronage is perhaps the most transparent dividend of symbolic capital, awarded to needy writers precisely because of their lack of commercial success. Quiller-Couch and Newbolt, in addition to playing roles in Conrad’s accumulation and redemption of symbolic capital, will serve here to represent a certain strain of English masculinity, closely associated with the public school ethos. As we will see, a necessary task of the construction of authorship as a profession was the assertion of masculinity, and the public school culture of manly stoicism, in which Quiller-Couch and Newbolt were steeped, will serve here as one privileged Edwardian definition of manhood. Harold Perkin argues that the public school reform movement initiated by Thomas Arnold at Rugby in 1827, and well established as a norm by the end of the century, was a bastion of professional, rather than aristocratic, ideals, expressing “the newly emergent social values of the reforming schoolmasters and dons whose disdain for industry and trade stemmed from their conviction that professional service was in every way superior both to endowed idleness and to what they regarded as ‘money grabbing’.”¹ If the public schools were intended to equip the sons of

businessmen and industrialists with the bearing of a gentleman, they also refashioned this aristocratic idea to suit the economic position and liberal ideology of their predominantly middle-class clients.\(^2\) To the extent that the public school ethos was a product of professional society, it provides a useful framework for considering the interdependence of professionalism and masculinity. The Nigger of the "Narcissus", with its idealisation of selfless labour and manly stoicism, appears in this context as a tabernacle of professional values, and a pivotal gesture in Conrad's self-fashioning as a masculine writer.\(^3\) His dealings with Newbolt, however, will serve to qualify this aspect of his identity, highlighting the vexed relationship with English male taciturnity that would find expression in, for example, Nostromo (1904), with Charles Gould's failed policy of reserve. As Michael Greaney observes, Conrad "never allows any simple antithesis between degraded speech and ideal silence".\(^4\)

First the characters: both Quiller-Couch and Newbolt were figures of considerable influence in the more conservative sectors of the Edwardian literary field. As well as editing the Oxford Book of English Verse (1900), "Q" was a novelist, critic and weekly literary columnist for the respectable Paul Mall Magazine (with which Conrad had a long association, beginning with Typhoon in 1902).\(^5\) W.L. Courtney, who reviewed Quiller-Couch's short story collection Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts alongside Lord Jim in The Daily Telegraph, thought that Conrad could learn a thing or two from Q's "academic

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\(^2\) On the ways in which the nineteenth-century idea of the gentleman was modernised for a capitalist society, bridging the cultural divide between the upper- and middle-classes, see David Vincent, The Culture of Secrecy: Britain, 1832 - 1998 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 36-44.

\(^3\) My understanding of the concepts of "masculinity" and "manliness" is informed by Herbert Sussman's account of the "social construction of what at any historical moment is marked as 'masculine'", as opposed to biological maleness, and his "emphasis on the constructed rather than the innate, and on the multiple rather than the unitary view of the masculine". The public school ethos will function here to designate one such "male gender formation". Herbert Sussman, Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 8-9.


self-restraint”. Newbolt was best known as a patriotic poet. His verses were both best-selling and critically acclaimed: the future poet laureate Robert Bridges wished he “had ever written anything half so good” as Newbolt’s supernatural anthem to British naval supremacy, “Drake’s Drum”, while the volume Admirals All (1896) went through twenty-one editions in a single year. Newbolt also figured prominently on the cultural scene as editor of the toney but morally conservative Monthly Review from 1900 to 1904, where he published Walter de la Mare, W.B. Yeats, Quiller-Couch and the proselyte of Post-Impressionism, Roger Fry (who “disowned” his lectures later, however). In later years, Quiller-Couch and Newbolt consolidated their positions as powerful insiders of the cultural establishment. Inter alia, Newbolt went on to become chairman of the post-war departmental committee on English teaching, whose 1921 report was an influential defence of the centrality of English literature to the national curriculum. Quiller-Couch sat on Newbolt’s committee, but had a greater impact on the institutionalisation of English teaching as the second Edward VII Professor of English at Cambridge. Quiller-Couch and Newbolt were also school chums, both having attended the Bristol public school Clifton (founded 1862) under the headmastership of John Percival.

Their alma mater formed an important part of each man’s identity. Newbolt, in particular, was an energetic propagandist of the public school ethos, most famously as the author of “Vita’s Lampada”, but also in poems such as “Clifton Chapel” and his nostalgic school novel, The Twymans (1911). The novel was dedicated to “My dear Couch”, who responded by accusing the author of memory theft: “But was it you or I, who heard the crack of bat on ball and caught his breath at first sight of the Close? It was I, Sir, and here

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8 Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 241. The review was to shun “what is contrary to good taste, sound morals, and the fullest respect for religious feeling”. (239)
10 On Quiller-Couch’s activities at Cambridge, see Carol Atherton, Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority and the Possession of Literary Knowledge. 1880-2002 (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 48-56.
11 “Vita’s Lampada” appeared in Admirals All; “Clifton Chapel” was collected in The Island Race (1898).
I catch you a-hugging one of my best memories!'” “One of mine too”, Newbolt adds in his memoir: “we are all allowed to hug our Alma Mater.” The profound impact of Clifton on Newbolt, in particular, was due largely to John Percival, its first headmaster. Percival, bitten with a virulent strain of Victorian neo-chivalry, was an unusually zealous promoter of public school esprit de corps, transmitting the ideal of knightly service to generations of middle-class Englishmen. Percival’s dictum that the “whole is greater than the parts” reflected the professional ideal of service to society, as opposed to capitalist acquisitiveness. A war memorial erected at the college in 1904 epitomised the college’s values of manly chivalry: chosen by a committee that included Henry Newbolt, the statue depicted St. George in fourteenth-century armour. “In the head of St. George”, the sculptor explained, “I have endeavoured to express his character of Fortitude and Virtue without effeminacy”. Quiller-Couch and Newbolt were very much men of letters, their sensibilities profoundly shaped by the male environment and chivalric ethos of Percival’s Clifton.

Conrad was excited when The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ caught the eye of so distinguished and influential a critic as Arthur Quiller-Couch. He described Q’s letter in pragmatic terms as “[t]he clearest gain so far from the ‘Nigger’”, and did not hesitate to cement this contact with an eloquent reply. (CL 1: 434) In it, as we have seen, he affirmed his exclusive right to the novel’s vécu material, and also reinforced the analogy between his two lives by comparing his imagined readers to the mariner’s distant friends and family, his solace on long voyages.

Only a small group of human beings – a few friends, relations – remain to the seaman always distinct, indubitable, the only ones who matter. And so to the solitary writer. As he writes he thinks only of a small knot of men – three or four perhaps – the only ones who matter. (CL 1: 430)

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12 Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 47.
Conrad naturally made no mention in this letter of his hope that "the thing – precious as it is to me – is trivial enough on the surface to have some charms for the man in the street." (CL 1: 321) This is not, of course, a question of taking a false position, but rather of participating in the interactional modus vivendi, adapting one's performance to the situation at hand. Such pleasantries between writer and critic instantiate what Bourdieu calls "the relationship of ontological complicity between the habitus and the field". Conrad's words, "according so well with his temperament, had also the merit of servicing his turn", as he writes of Feraud in "The Duel". (SS 159) Conrad could write both sincerely and shrewdly to Quiller-Couch – could both express his temperament and serve his turn – because of his feel for the game of letters, his investment in its values and protocols. Nonetheless, he stood to gain from this exhibition of indifference to commercial success: a reputation for expertise and disinterestedness with the "ones who matter" was a fund of symbolic capital. One direct financial profit of such accreditation was state patronage. In the letters of recommendation written by Henry James and S.S. Pawling on Conrad's behalf to secure his £300 grant from the Royal Literary Fund in 1902, for example, his work's standing with "the expert & the critic" and his own reputation as "a most conscientious artist" who "will never have anything published for the mere sake of making money" were arguments of equal weight.

It is impossible to trace the circulation of the symbolic capital Conrad derived from Quiller-Couch's support – the "clearest gain so far from the 'Nigger'" – but it is tempting to read the saga of his £500 grant from the Royal Bounty as a story of literary prestige communicated via the old boy network. Unlike the Royal Literary Fund, which was administered by committee, the Royal Bounty, like Civil List pensions, was apportioned at the discretion of the Prime Minister. Quiller-Couch's fellow old Cliftonian Henry Newbolt was a crucial node in the network connecting Conrad to A.J. Balfour in 1905: the painter William Rothenstein went to Newbolt for help in obtaining

15 Bourdieu, Practical Reason, p. 79.
financial relief for Conrad, and Newbolt in turn “had no doubt where and by whom it could best be found”: Edmund Gosse.\textsuperscript{18} Gosse brought the matter to the Prime Minister’s attention and, although at first “vaguely favourable to the idea of a pension”, Balfour eventually settled on the less munificent option of a Royal Bounty grant.\textsuperscript{19} Newbolt, who admired Conrad’s work, told him so in their correspondence over the award, adding that “I feel no doubt about my judgment, especially since all my friends agree with it.”\textsuperscript{20} One such friend was, of course, Arthur Quiller-Couch.

Newbolt’s involvement did not end with mobilising Edmund Gosse: he and Rothenstein were appointed trustees of Conrad’s grant, which was intended only for uses of “permanent benefit” to the recipient. This proviso horrified Conrad and occasioned a painful correspondence between him, Gosse and Newbolt, in which Conrad fashioned a precarious identity for himself out of conflicting materials: he was both a suffering, conscientious artist deserving of patronage and, he insisted, a responsible manager of his own finances.\textsuperscript{21} To the extent that he obtained access to all of his money at once, this performance was a success, and did nothing to damage his reputation as a highly strung genius. But in the upper-middle-class male literary culture inhabited by Henry Newbolt, Conrad’s long, distraught letters were faux pas. Newbolt’s response to these letters, and to Conrad’s personality, is illustrative of the form of masculinity I intend him to represent here, and will set the scene for my discussion of The Nigger of “Narcissus”, in which Conrad’s manly self-fashioning was more adroit.

Rothenstein apologised to Gosse for Conrad’s “terribly hysterical” entreaties, and Newbolt took it as a sign of his “genius and simplicity”: “I saw that he had a profound imaginative knowledge of human nature and created his own life every day and every hour, as a great dramatic artist creates his persona.”\textsuperscript{22} For Newbolt, the keynote of

\textsuperscript{18}Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 302. Gosse was librarian of the House of Lords, and had already been instrumental in securing Conrad’s previous grant from the Royal Literary Fund.

\textsuperscript{19}Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 302.

\textsuperscript{20}Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 310.

\textsuperscript{21}See especially his letters to Gosse of 13 March and 19 May 1905, in which he invokes Baudelaire and admits to knowing “the anguished suspension of all power of thought”, but also dissociates himself from “bohemianism, irregularity and general irresponsibility of conduct”. (CL 3: 224, 248-9)

\textsuperscript{22}Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 309, Stape and Knowles, A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad, p. 48.
Conrad's character was given on their first meeting, when Conrad punctuated a conversation at the Saville Club with his impression of a tiger: “He acted the tiger well enough almost to terrify his hearers: but the moment after he was talking again wisely and soberly as if he were an average Englishman with not an irritable nerve in his body.” Newbolt interprets Conrad's behaviour over the grant in light of this anecdote. His patronising equation of Conrad's histrionics with a neurotic malfunction of Englishness highlights the tension between authorship and the social identity of the English gentleman. Performance blows one’s cover as an “average Englishman”: there was, Newbolt implies, something camp about Conrad.

For Henry Newbolt, the antithesis of Conrad’s camp otherness was John Percival, his headmaster at Clifton. Newbolt’s memoir includes an encomium to Percival, or rather to his body, which Newbolt regarded as a paragon of masculine corporeality:

His face was finely chiselled, and invariably free from triviality or self-consciousness: his frame strong but made to appear slender by his height: his general air marmoreal, but saved from coldness by an inward and spiritual intensity, and by a slight and gracious stoop of the head. In short – to my eye – he was the most satisfying figure of a great man that could be found or imagined – he had the grace of a marble statue; not a gesture was free, and yet he was seen to move perfectly.

The phallic hardness of Percival’s body implies a lack of soft interiority, a complete command over one’s emotions: his “chiselled” exterior is consubstantial with his whole being. Such a human sculpture, lacking inner space, is incapable of impersonation, self-dramatisation or any form of doubleness; Conrad’s copious letters, on the other hand, revealed him to be essentially fluid, reinventing “his own life every day and every hour”. Percival’s rigidity is also the objective correlative of stoic self-control, a trait which was at least as central to the public school ethos as community spirit: Newbolt recalled being

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23 Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 301.
24 Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 66.
indoctrinated with “a fine art, almost a religion, of Stoicism”.25 The epiphany of Englishness Conrad recalls in A Personal Record draws on this same motif of English hardness and solidity. Walking in the Swiss alps, the sixteen year old Conrad and his tutor are overtaken by an “unforgettable Englishman”, whose naked calves “dazzled the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory.” (PR 40) This vision fortified Conrad’s determination to go to sea. Although the trope of monolithic Englishness is slightly comic in Conrad’s vignette, anticipating Fyne’s stalwart pedestrianism in Chance, it comes from the same national imaginary as the “marmoreal” rigidity of homo newboliensis.26 Both images connote a stoic and impassive ideal of Englishness, one which Conrad at times celebrated, as here and in The Nigger of the “Narcissus”, but also critiqued in Nostromo.

Conrad was not unaware of the English sanction on effusiveness; it would appear, indeed, that he feared his “Tale of the Forecastle” would be found wanting in this regard. Between finishing the novel in January and its appearance in the New Review for August, he joked to Edward Sanderson about the perversity of “rush[ing] into print whereby my sentimentalism … shall be disclosed to the public gaze.” “Alas!”, he lamented, “I have been born too far East where not many cultivate the virtue of reticence.” (CL 1: 347-8) Conrad, perhaps, was wary of England’s Tietjenses, who might have told him that “[y]ou betray your non-Anglo-Saxon origin by being so vocal…” (PE 454) Given this anxiety about effusiveness, it must have been particularly gratifying when his fervent elegy to the age of sail was approved by Quiller-Couch, a man of letters who was also an irreproachable English gentleman, and his reply subtly encouraged a masculine perception of his work.

Among the “few friends, relations” whose memory Conrad carried with him on his final voyages in the early 1890s, one of the most important was a woman, his aunt Marguerite Poradowska. As Susan Jones writes, “Conrad’s initial intimacy with Poradowska developed rapidly through the correspondence conducted during his trip to Africa in 1890”, giving him “a sense of a strong female presence accompanying him to

25 Newbolt, My World as in My Time, p. 65.
the Congo”.27 In the metaphor that Conrad fashioned for Quiller-Couch, however, he uses a vigorously masculine image to denote the “ones who matter”: he writes for a “small knot of men”, recalling the “dark knot of seamen” who disembark from the Narcissus, a tight-knit male community buffeted by the anonymous London crowd. (NN 141-2) Jones and, more recently, Carola Kaplan have challenged the orthodox view of Conrad as a writer for men, recovering the importance of women both in his fiction and his life.28 Jones notes that “[t]he earlier work ... was published in contexts that supported a largely masculinist tone”: Conrad’s “publishers promoted the image of the author as a writer for a somewhat select, coterie audience, thus initiating his reputation as what would later be termed ‘modernist’”.29 At the risk of a Procrustean regression, I want to re-examine one of these early, masculinist works in the context of self-fashioning, to consider how Conrad’s image as a masculine writer may have been constructed. Conrad himself, of course, was not innocent of this construction. Despite the importance of his personal and artistic relationship with Marguerite Poradowska, Conrad projects an image of a male reading community in his letter to Quiller-Couch, erasing her feminine presence from the “knot of men”. Similarly, the satisfaction Conrad would later express in writing for Blackwood’s “good sort of public” – “There isn’t a single club and messroom and man-of-war in the British Seas and Dominions which hasn’t its copy of Maga” – constructs the author as a writer for men, an image Conrad notoriously confirmed in the Author’s Note to Lord Jim.30 (CL 4: 511)

The Nigger of the “Narcissus” was in many ways a novel for and about men, breaking, as Jones notes, with the less exclusively male concerns of Almayer’s Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. Peter D. MacDonald has shown how the novel conformed to the ideal of “‘manly Realism’” extolled by W.E. Henley’s New Review, where it was serialised; in Ancient Lights (1911) Ford Madox Ford portrayed Henley as the high priest of a cult of virility, and a despiser of effeminate aesthetes. “It was Henley and his friends who introduced into the English writing mind the idea that a man of action was

29 Jones, Conrad and Women, pp. 171, 12.
30 The subject of which was “rather foreign to women’s normal sensibilities” (LJ 44)
something fine and a man of letters a sort of castrato”, Ford wrote.\textsuperscript{31} (AL 241-2) It is not unreasonable to suppose that Conrad’s “rigging” of The Nigger of the “Narcissus” for the New Review included an accentuation of his masculine aesthetic.\textsuperscript{32} In what follows I will argue that The Nigger of the “Narcissus” presents an idealised image of professional masculinity, glorifying the values of reserve and self-control that were central to the public school ethos. As Peter D. McDonald has shown, the values espoused in fictional texts are not without relevance to authorial self-fashioning; in the case of such a self-conscious \textit{prise de position}, reports of the death of the author have been much exaggerated.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{THE NIGGER OF THE “NARCISSUS” AND THE HERO AS MAN OF LETTERS}

Prima facie, The Nigger of the “Narcissus” suggests itself as Conrad’s manliest novel. For one thing, “this masculine narrative”, as the Daily Mail reviewer described it, broke with the important female characters of his early work, Nina Almayer and Aissa; as Jones observes, “Conrad’s reputation for the invention of romance roles for female characters would soon be eclipsed by the publication of The Nigger of the “Narcissus” in 1897”.\textsuperscript{34} Apart from scattered references to absent women, femininity intrudes on the “Tale of the Forecastle” only in the coda, with Captain Allistoun’s “elegant” wife, Charley’s “blubbering” mother, and the ominous “bare-headed” woman who “screamed at the silent ship: ‘Hallo, Jack!’”. (137, 141) Critics, indeed, were quick to note the novel’s unconventional lack of “petticoats”.\textsuperscript{35} Then there is the title, which W.L. Courtney described distastefully at the time as “the ugliest conceivable”.\textsuperscript{36} Courtney’s choice of

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  \item \textsuperscript{31} Peter D. McDonald, \textit{British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice}, 1880-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 56.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} On this process, also see Todd G. Willy, “The Conquest of the Commodore: Conrad’s Rigging of “The Nigger” for the Henley Regatta,” \textit{Conradiana} 17, no. 3 (1985).
  \item \textsuperscript{33} McDonald argues that the novel jibed aesthetically and politically with Henley’s \textit{New Review}, “an avant-garde, impressionistic novella and a reactionary political allegory oriented to a specific purist literary circle”. Peter D. McDonald, \textit{British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice}, 1880-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 66.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Sherry, ed., \textit{Conrad: The Critical Heritage}, p. 95.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Sherry, ed., \textit{Conrad: The Critical Heritage}, p. 85.
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epithet suggests that the racist term would have offended some contemporary readers less by its connotation of white superiority than by its coarseness: the aggressively unphilanthropic slur was continuous with a program of rugged naturalism. Such strong language was a marker of male solidarity, a macho idiom from which women were excluded, and also, for sailing at least, the idiom of professional life. Intolerance of profanity was a sign of emasculation in sailing circles: the foppish “popinjay” who replaces Brierly as master of the Ossa in Lord Jim shows his effeminacy by recoiling from Mr. Jones’s curses. (LJ 89) Conrad certainly saw the manuscript’s use of coarse language as a potential deterrent to female readers. “Heinemann objects to the bloody’s in the book”, he told Edward Garnett. “That Israelite is afraid of women.” (CL 1: 395) Here the anti-Semitic stereotype calls Heinemann’s own masculinity into question. This logic is also inscribed in the novel itself, where coarse language functions as a medium of masculine solidarity (and a lubricant of power): the second mate Creighton is liked for his “gentlemanly way of damning us up and down the deck”, and Mr. Baker quells the rancour of the men by calling them “many unpolite names” in a “hearty and seamanlike” manner. (59, 48) Male sociability occurs in a “tempest of good-humoured and meaningless curses.” (17)

Thomas Carlyle’s defence of professional authorship in Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (1840) is an essential reference point for understanding how The Nigger of the “Narcissus” – an important early prise de position for the sailor-turned-author – affirmed the values of manly professionalism.37 Victorian and Edwardian attempts to obtain professional status for authors needed to establish that writing was hard work, compatible with Victorian norms of masculine vigour and self-help. When Besant put the case in 1884, he had to contend with the masculine prejudice against littérateurs, “the contempt which the practical man feels for the dreamer, the strong man for the weak, the man who can do for the man who can only look on and talk.”38 Similarly, as Herbert Sussman has shown, Carlyle’s proposal of “The Hero as Man of Letters” applied itself to dispelling the effeminate stigma of writing. Sussman argues that

37 On the similarity in Conrad’s and Carlyle’s attitudes to work, see Ian Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 149-51.
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Threatened by what he saw as the increasing feminization of literature, Carlyle sought to reshape ‘The Hero as Man of Letters’ for the industrial era by reaffirming the manliness of literary ‘Labour,’ returning literature to its proper form as the script for the achievement of true manhood, and establishing a literature that would transmit such masculine wisdom to an audience of men within a wholly male community of letters.\(^{39}\) It has not, however, been sufficiently noted that Carlyle’s blueprint for a male literary caste adopts the structure and rhetoric of professionalization. Anticipating Wells’s dismay, in *Tono-Bungay*, that a “modern state” should leave “literary criticism ... to private enterprise”, Carlyle bemoans the waste of social resources through disorganization, and proposes the publishing industry as the most urgent focus of reform: “this anomaly of a disorganised Literary Class [is] the heart of all other anomalies, at once product and parent; some good arrangement for that would be as the punctum saliens of a new vitality and just arrangement for all.”\(^{40}\) Following the classic steps to professional prestige, Carlyle insists that so vital a social service as literature must not be left to the vicissitudes of laissez-faire. Rescuing writers from the free market, by way of “this that we call the Organisation of the Literary Guild”, is in the collective interest, a way of maximising the “profit” of human resources.\(^{41}\) Finally, Carlyle espouses the professional axiom of *la carrière ouverte aux talents*: “The man of intellect at the top of affairs: this is the aim of all constitutions and revolutions, if they have any aim.”\(^{42}\)

As Sussman shows, this plea for professionalization is very much concerned with affirming the manliness of men of letters, a project hampered by the association of manliness with taciturnity. Since “a truly manly man would be silent”, Sussman argues, Carlyle eschewed the “romantic literature of self-expression” and devised textual strategies that glorified silence.\(^{43}\) Carlyle’s ideal of heroic sincerity was non-expressive and unconscious, “[n]ot the sincerity that calls itself sincere; ah no, that is a very poor

\(^{39}\) Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, p. 35.
\(^{41}\) Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, pp. 204, 150.
matter indeed; — a shallow braggart conscious sincerity; oftener self-conceit mainly. The
Great Man’s sincerity is of the kind he cannot speak of, is not conscious of”.44 The hero
as man of letters was to possess the “talent of Silence”, and know when to shut up: “A
man who cannot hold his peace, till the time come for speaking and acting, is no right
man.”45 Conrad relates a parable of precisely this kind of masculine, unconscious
sincerity in The Mirror of the Sea (1906). Illustrating how “the art of handling ships . . .,
like all fine arts, . . . must be based upon a broad, solid sincerity”, Conrad’s anecdote
recounts an unfortunate instance of vanity-sailing, “the meretricious glory of a showy
performance”.46 Conrad’s dramatisation of this event draws attention to the use of
masculinity as a repressive norm of professionalism, a form of discipline. The escapade
ends in social, rather than nautical, disaster, an ordeal of male humiliation: “Afterwards
the master said to me in a shy mumble, ‘She wouldn’t luff up in time, somehow. What’s
the matter with her?’ And I made no answer.” (MS 35) What is painful about this coda is
the shyness of the commander before his inferior, who punishes a melodramatic gesture
with the stigmata of silence. This subtle scene of remorse and reprimand between men
superimposes the masculine stigma of affectation on the professional rule of competence.
Professionalism and manliness were mutually supporting norms; for Carlyle,
professionalising the man of letters had been largely a process of remasculinisation.

Of particular relevance to Conrad’s aesthetic is Carlyle’s elevation of mimesis
over diegesis, of showing over telling. Not eloquence but penetrating vision was the mark
of the poet – “To the Poet, as to every other, we say first of all, See”47 — and the ability to
communicate images in writing distinguished a masculine style: “Find a man whose
words paint you a likeness, you have found a man worth something”.48 Conrad’s Preface
to The Nigger of the “Narcissus”, with its determination “before all, to make you see”,

44 Carlyle, Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, p. 41.
45 Carlyle, Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, pp. 167-8. Ray has discussed the
influence of this value of silence on Conrad; as he notes, Carlyle “may be taken as typical of a
certain Victorian tradition” that also includes Cardinal Newman. Martin Ray, ”Language and
Silence in the Novels of Joseph Conrad,” in Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad (Boston: G.K.
46 Carlyle, Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, pp. 28, 34.
47 Carlyle, Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, p. 96.
echoes Carlyle’s masculine construction of authorship, even following his use of italics to invest the verb with dynamic vigour.

The example of Carlyle suggests that the visual impressionism of The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ and its hymn to stoic taciturnity are continuous not only with the Victorian poetics of masculinity, but also with an early articulation of the professional ethos. Although the novel does, as Brian Richardson notes, provide a sympathetic portrayal of working-class men, the values of stoic endurance and heroic labour they embody are also professional values.49 Sailing was a special kind of labour in Conrad’s mythology, one which transcended class: as he wrote in his “Memorandum” to the Ocean Steamship Company, “no labour done on board ship in the way of duty is ... in any way unworthy of ... the dignity of any youngster wishing to fit himself to be a good officer.” (LE 104) Conrad’s image of masculine community would have been read as symbolic as well as naturalistic, a primitivist figuration of the ideals of professional society as well as a document of a working ship. Indeed, the model for this approach had been provided by Carlyle’s idea of hero-worship, which, in its preference for “unconscious” sincerity over intellectual refinement, is predisposed towards primitive and inarticulate subjects like the “earnest, honest; childlike, and yet manlike” peoples of ancient Scandinavia.50 The primitivist working-class milieu also allows Conrad to bracket out the destructive effects of stoicism and taciturnity apparent in, say, Charles Gould: there is nothing problematic about masking the interiority of sailors like Singleton, who have no interiority to speak of. Nor is there any sense that the crew stand for the working class as a whole. Rather, the ship is a refuge from the modern proletariat and the corruptions of the Labour movement. As Captain Allistoun says disgustedly in reference to the campaign for workers’ rights, “You hear a lot on shore, don’t you?” (114)

This symbolic level of representation is most apparent in Singleton, whose antiquity itself invites a mythological interpretation. Like Charles Gould and John

49 "Conrad has not received sufficient credit for his positive and verisimilar portrayals of working-class characters." Richardson, "Conrad and Posthumanist Narration: Fabricating Class and Consciousness onboard the Narcissus," p. 213.
50 Carlyle, Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, p. 27.
Percival, Singleton, “taciturn and unsmiling”, resembles a statue.\textsuperscript{51} He and his kind are described as “stone caryatides”, and later he will appear as a “a statue of heroic size” looming ove: the “stormy chaos of speech” in the forecastle. (32, 109-10) Singleton exemplifies Carlyle’s manly unreflective heroism. “[P]rofound and unconscious”, radiating “unspeakable wisdom”, his oracular pronouncements are involuntary: “[t]he wisdom of half a century spent in listening to the thunder of the waves had spoken unconsciously through his old lips.” (111, 31) Captain Allistoun, the novel’s other portrait of the stoic ideal, is also described in the imagery of monoliths, compared to “a stone image”. (109) Seeming “to have found his taciturn serenity in the profound depths of a larger experience”, Allistoun compresses his speeches into bullet points: “Know half your work. Do half your duty. Think it too much.” (107, 114) The flawless Allistoun is Conrad’s most romanticised incarnation of the stern patriarch; the image of his suddenly revealing the belaying-pin thrown by Donkin, causing the crew to take a collective step backwards, approaches stage melodrama. (114) As many readers have noted, Conrad establishes a clear-cut dichotomy in The Nigger of the “Narcissus” between speech – Donkin’s “filthy loquacity”, the “sentimental voices” of humanitarian reformers and the “clamour of sages” – and the hyper-competent taciturnity of Singleton and Allistoun, heroes well-endowed with Carlyle’s “talent of Silence”.\textsuperscript{52} (88, 32, 80) In the context that interests me here – that of masculine professionalism – this is also an antithesis between the ideal of stoic manhood upheld by the public school ethos and its lack. Charley’s waggish description of the eloquent Donkin as a “man and a sailor” evokes laughter; as another crew-member observes later, Donkin is “no kind of man, anyhow.” (21, 88) In addition to these thematic correspondences with Carlyle’s masculine poetics, Conrad’s descriptive impressionist style and (general) avoidance of interior monologue fashion the author as a heroic man of letters. The first readers of The Nigger of the “Narcissus” took note of its unusual visual immediacy: “we doubt whether the state of a sailing ship during a storm at sea has ever been described with greater truth and power”,

\textsuperscript{51} Gould is compared to a statue of Charles IV, which he resembles in not “wear[ing] his heart on the sleeve of his English coat,” (N 73)

\textsuperscript{52} As Levenson notes, “[t]he thematic sympathies of the Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ are plainly on the side of duty, obedience, authority and silence, and against individualism, consciousness and loquacity.” Michael Levenson, A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 34.
observed the *Daily Chronicle*. Arnold Bennett demanded to know "[w]here did the man pick up that style, & that synthetic way of gathering up a general impression & flinging it at you?", and E.V. Lucas was probably referring both to Conrad's naturalism and to his vividness when he wrote "[i]t should kill the pasteboard ocean forever." The storm scene was hailed as a tour de force; readers of Carlyle would have recognised in Conrad "a man whose words paint you a likeness, ... a man worth something." Conrad's aim of making you see went, as I have noted, to the heart of Carlyle's masculine poetics.

The ideological adjacency of descriptive style and stoic masculinity is highlighted by Arthur Quiller-Couch's inaugural lectures as the second Edward VII Professor of English at Cambridge in 1913 and 1914, in which he formalises his own criteria of masculine poetics. Quiller-Couch urged his students to cultivate a concrete "masculine" style: "The first virtue, the touchstone of a masculine style, is its use of the active verb and the concrete noun. When you write in the active voice, 'They gave him a silver teapot,' you write as a man." The impersonality of Flaubert, rather than the emotion of Goethe, was to be emulated: "even so far stand the great masculine objective writers above all who appeal to you by parade of personality or private sentiment"; Conrad's dictum of the "impression conveyed through the senses" is codified by Quiller-Couch as intrinsically masculine. (NN 12) Walter Raleigh, the first Merton Professor of English at Oxford and a professional model for Quiller-Couch, took a similarly gendered approach to stylistics, extolling the manly virtue of stoicism in his *Style* (published in the same year as The Nigger of the "Narcissus"):"

It is as if language could not come by its full meaning save on the lips of those who regard it as an evil necessity. Every word is torn from them, as from a reluctant witness. They come to speech as to a last resort, when all other ways have failed. The bane of a literary education is that it induces

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talkativeness, and an overweening confidence in words. But those whose
words are stark and terrible seem almost to despise words.  

Such masculine stylistics, recapitulating Carlyle’s value of visual writing in a pedagogic
context, provided the framework in which Conrad’s style, as well as his subject, could be
interpreted as masculine. In this tradition, the manliness of The Nigger of the
“Narcissus” was overdetermined: depicting taciturn, unselfconscious men from the
outside, Conrad employed a method of “masculine objective” writing, as Quiller-Couch
put it. Singleton, as I have suggested, is the novel’s exemplary object of manly,
impressionist representation. More a totem than a character, he affords Conrad rich
opportunities to monumentalise the marmoreal male physique. He first appears “stripped
to the waist, tattooed like a cannibal chief all over his powerful chest and enormous
biceps”, his “white skin gleam[ing] like satin”, and his “body of an old athlete” figures in
a series of painterly tableaux, his “colossal” frame adorned, no doubt, with silvery
highlights as he stands “with his face to the light and his back to the darkness.” (17, 23,
31) Later, his iconic turn as the ideal helmsman will accentuate his body’s sculptural
hardness: steering with care, his “erect figure” remains “rigidly still”. (80) Even
Singleton’s reading of a “silver fork” novel of manners is translated into a physical
activity: “Every time he turned the book in his enormous and blackened hands the
muscles of his big white arms rolled slightly under the smooth skin.” (18) Here,
interiority – the act of reading – is externalised by Conrad’s lush description of male
surfaces, drawing attention to Singleton’s brawn rather than his brain.

In his groundbreaking study Conrad and Masculinity, Andrew Roberts concludes
that “the commitment of The Nigger of the “Narcissus” to a parable of the value of a
hierarchical society contains and limits the interest of its treatment of masculinity.”  

Roberts notes that as he began to define himself as an author, Conrad’s friendships with
other male writers were a source of both comfort and anxiety, supporting his “new …
way of being a man – through writing – but at the same time [drawing] him into the

structures of a modern, urban, British, middle-class masculinity in a condition of crisis". 58 Although I agree with Roberts that the novel is a relatively monologic engagement with norms of taciturn masculinity when compared with later, more complex works, from the point of view of self-fashioning it remains a pivotal document, precisely for its valency within these “structures of ... middle-class masculinity”. Moreover, not only masculinity, but professional masculinity was at stake in Conrad’s self-fashioning: the system of norms that mediated between this “new ... way of being a man” and these middle-class structures was, I would suggest, professionalism. The novel’s “parable of ... hierarchical society” is also a parable of professional society, one which locates the value of work not only in political stability, but also in freedom from social embarrassment.

PROFESSIONALISM AND EMBARRASSMENT

The theme of the solidarity of labour is often noted in The Nigger of the "Narcissus"; less well appreciated, perhaps, is Conrad’s interest in the sociability of labour, its usefulness as a medium of male getting-along. 59 In the remainder of this discussion, I want to delve a little deeper into Conrad’s depiction of professional masculinity, drawing out this neglected connotation of work in his axiology. As Sheldon Rothblatt has shown, the purpose of higher education had once been to enable social ease, equipping gentlemen with the tools of sociability: “Conversation”, he explains, “was tied to sociability, the foremost purpose of a liberal education. As such, it was given an axiological as well as a functional purpose.” 60 The rise of professional society, however, replaced this aristocratic goal of liberal education with a middle-class utilitarian one: rather than well-rounded conversationalists, professional training turned out competent experts. 61 Nonetheless, professional competence did create its own medium of solidarity,

58 Roberts, Conrad and Masculinity, p. 49.
59 See, for example, Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, pp. 110-15. Watt locates the concept of solidarity in the context of nineteenth-century sociology.
60 Sheldon Rothblatt, Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education: An Essay in History and Culture (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 66.
if not of sociability in the eighteenth-century sense. In a sense, what Conrad called “the solidarity of the craft” compensates for the loss of social ease in less structured environments; the man of the calling may not have the nobleman’s attainment of savoir faire in every situation, but his engrossment in a specialised occupation creates powerful social bonds of collegiality and collaboration. (LJ 139) Conrad’s fiction shows an acute awareness of the potential for social embarrassment and tedium outside of this professional context. As Marlow observes, scenes of uninhibited intercourse like his tête-à-tête with the French lieutenant are fragile and short-lived: “Hang the fellow! he had pricked the bubble. The blight of futility that lies in wait for men’s speeches had fallen upon our conversation, and made it a thing of empty sounds.” (LJ 152) Embarrassment lies in wait for professional men the moment they break with routine; as Greaney has noted, “Lord Jim is a drama – and, in a particularly cruel sense, a comedy – of embarrassment”, lurching from one maladroit conversation to the next.\(^\text{62}\) As a water-clerk, Jim is capable of sailing a small boat with daring and panache, but is unmanned by the social requirements of his job, “blush[ing] like a girl when he came on board” to solicit trade for Egström and Blake. (LJ 185) Even the most routine gestures of male affection are fraught with disaster: Jim’s excruciatingly botched handshake with Marlow is repeated in *The Shadow-Line*, in which Ransome “flushed dusky red” after failing to notice the narrator’s extended hand. (LJ 157, SL 145) Professional competence is a refuge from this ever-present danger of male embarrassment.

Although my reading of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is more concerned with work as a form of *homosociability* than with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s influential formulation of “male homosocial desire”, the “unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” that she proposes is implicated in an analysis of male awkwardness, as one potent source of the embarrassment that work circumvents.\(^\text{63}\) In *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, this dimension figures as the capacity of work to cleanse male friendship of homosexual innuendo. Geoffrey Harpham has noted the novel’s veiled

\(^{156}\) The utilitarians opposed the centrality of classics, demanding that universities recognised “the middle-class values of work, productivity and efficiency” by teaching useful knowledge.


homoeroticism, arguing persuasively that a joke made by “dirty Knowles” during the crew’s discussion of “gentlemen”, whilst ostensibly signifying “the innocent fellowship of the deck”, carries a subversive, homophobic connotation, implying an alternative image of “life at sea as a floating bathhouse where ribald stories of closeted admirals and gentlemen with secrets circulate freely”. I would suggest that homophobic ribaldry of this kind in fact consolidates heterosexual friendship. The need for such rituals of heterosexual solidarity becomes apparent when, during the storm, Charley is comforted by “two bearded shellbacks”, who “flung their arms over and pressed against him”, saying “‘Twill make a bloomin’ man of you, sonny.’” (59) The context of shared hardship and the rough, unsentimental kindness of the sea masks the sexual connotation of this image, transforming what in the dominant order of compulsory heterosexuality would be a shameful and, I suggest, embarrassing display of physical affection into a legitimate expression of solidarity. It lies beyond my scope here to fully assess the importance of male homosocial desire to the phenomenon of embarrassment onboard the Narcissus, but it seems likely that a major component of the ease created between men by a shared task was the neutralisation of homoerotic connotations.

In The Nigger of the “Narcissus”, sublime moments of male communication occur in the context of labour. When Singleton returns to the forecastle after a heroic job of work, his reception is an archetype of practical manly compassion: “the next oldest seaman in the ship (those two understood one another, though they hardly exchanged three words in a day) gazed up at his friend attentively for a moment, then taking a short clay pipe out of his mouth, offered it without a word.” (86) It is hard to imagine a more perfect symbol of stoic solidarity than this silent gift of a smoke, itself a symbol of exclusive male sociability. At this moment, Singleton has just had another exemplary male interaction with Captain Allistoun, a thrillingly phlegmatic exchange between two stoic workers:

“Steering gear works all right?” [Allistoun] asked. There was a noise in the old seaman’s throat, as though the words had been rattling together before

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they could come out. “Steers ... like a little boat,” he said, at last, with hoarse tenderness, without giving the master as much as half a glance – then, watchfully, spun the wheel down, steadied, flung it back again. (81)

There is a palpable frisson of machismo in this combination of bravado and brisk competence, exemplifying the possibilities for felicitous male communication created by absorption in a shared task. The male social equilibrium idealised in these two vignettes underpins “the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship’s company”, and the smooth functioning of the chain of command. (21) Hence, Baker’s mettle as a chief mate is proven not only by his enforcement of discipline, as with his summary beating of Donkin, but also by his ability to maintain this gruff amiability, evident in his raising morale on the capsized ship by “going bald-headed” for Knowles, and exercising “delicate tact” to defuse a power struggle, abusing the crew “in such a hearty and seamanlike manner” that they become “ashamed” of their solicitousness for the ambiguous malingering of James Wait. (44, 70, 48)

Wait is a catalyst not only of insubordination, egoism and excessive consciousness, but also awkwardness and shame: he disrupts the social as well as the political stability of the ship.65 Even the tactful Baker is wrong-footed by Wait’s dramatisation of his illness, his exasperation with Wait’s slackness changing to “disgust” when he hears the melodramatic explanation. (46) The shift from admonition to revulsion leaves Baker “nonplussed”, without a clear course of action, and makes him seem ridiculous; the crew snigger as he lamely dispatches Wait below decks. Belfast later feels embarrassed by Wait’s importunate demands to be reassured, “looking down” in shame as he stutters out “I noticed you getting better this ... last month”, and extricating himself on the most desperate of pretexts: “‘Hallo! What’s this?’ he shouted and ran out.” (105) When Wait is rescued during the storm, the narrator bizarrely yokes together the maladroit and the macabre to describe the feebleness of risking five lives to save a

65 Hampson notes that “it is because of their own fear of death that ... they ... want to believe that he is not really dying”. Wait “represents the burden of self – the tangle of fears and desires, self-doubts and self-questionings.” Robert Hampson, Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 104-5. Levenson sees the conflict of “garrulous insubordination and silent fidelity” as representing “an opposition between consciousness and unconsciousness.” Levenson, A Genealogy of Modernism, p. 32.
dying man: “we tottered together with concealing and absurd gestures, like a lot of drunken men embarrassed with a corpse.” (67) Like Baker and Belfast, the crew find that Wait’s ambiguous illness has a mysterious power to make them feel silly. Even in death, Wait has the power of abashing the crew: Belfast’s trite scolding of their irreverence – “You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!...” – is entirely effective: “We were.” (131) Wait’s embarrassing body endangers the crew’s manliness, casting an “infernal spell” on their “guileless manhood”, impelling them to ask “what kind of men were we – with our thoughts!”, and at the same time disrupts the practical sociability of the ship, the fabric of “unspoken loyalty” to one another and to their task. (41, 68, 21) The unease propagated through the ship by Wait’s presence, manifest in these moments of awkwardness and embarrassment, largely consists of shame.

Unlike Donkin, who excites only contempt and disgust (albeit combined with fascination), Wait evokes an equivocal response in the crew, who ricochet between fear of guilt and fear of shame: “we wished to save ourselves from the pain of remorse, but did not want to be made the contemptible dupes of our sentiment.” (44) As Hampson observes, ambivalence is crucial to Wait’s power over the crew: “[h]e controls them not through their belief, but through their doubts”. 66 According to the affect theorist Silvan Tomkins, ambivalence is crucial to the experience of shame, which he defines broadly to encompass feelings of guilt, shyness and inferiority. 67 All such feelings, Tomkins argues, cause the “incomplete reduction of interest or joy”, of which the tension between shyness and interest in a stranger is perhaps the primal scene. 68 For Tomkins, shame and shyness arise when an impulse is inhibited, without being extinguished: bashfulness signifies a wish to interact and a sense of constraint, rather than a total withdrawal. This double-bind

66 Hampson, Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity, p. 104.
67 The “word ‘shame’ refers more to feelings of inferiority than feelings of guilt”, but Tomkins regards this as a difference in “objects and sources” of the same affect. “Discouragement, shyness, shame, and guilt are identical as affects, though not so experienced because of differential coassembly of perceived causes and consequence.” Thus affect cuts across the differentiation of shame and guilt according to an internalised moral code and a code imposed from without; broadly speaking, this is because Tomkins’s nine “primary” affects are ultimately biological, referring to physiological indicators, although there are an “infinite number” of “affect complexes”, dependent largely on how an affect is perceived and altered by consciousness. E. Virginia Demos, ed., Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of S. Tomkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 397-9, 60-1.
the “continuing unwillingness to renounce” — accounts for the viciousness of shame’s circle: the self can neither “condemn itself whole-heartedly in contempt [nor] meet the scorn of the other with counter-contempt or with hostility.”

On the Narcissus, the crew’s ambivalent attitude towards Wait leaves them in an ignominious double-bind, the absurdity of which becomes painfully apparent when the decidedly single-minded Allistoun confronts their abortive industrial action. This clash between labour and capital fizzes into a contretemps: ashamed to ask for what they want, yet unwilling to back down, the men display all the symptoms of social discomfort. They fidget — “[t]hey shifted from foot to foot, they balanced their bodies; some, pushing back their caps, scratched their heads”, shuffling and swinging their “big tarry” hands — and cudgel their wits for something to say, willing to relinquish neither their professional pride — “There was an offended silence” — nor their vague desires. (113-4) When confronted with the belaying-pin thrown at the captain by Donkin, “they appeared shy, they were embarrassee and shocked as though it had been something horrid, scandalous, or indelicate”. (115) The difference between this decadent modern crew and their more primal forebears is susceptibility to embarrassment: whereas a simple (manly) thirst for grog is dealt with by corporal punishment — “we knocked them about for two days”, recalls the captain wistfully — vague humanitarian resentment is disciplined by social humiliation. (116)

Although both “shame-humiliation” and “contempt-disgust” are “impediments to intimacy and communion”, as Tomkins puts it, only contempt and disgust renounce the object un provisionally, in the same way that a disgusting substance is expelled from the mouth or stomach. The crew unanimously ostracise the abject Donkin — “He was left alone” — but can’t get James Wait out of their system, laying themselves open to the open-ended experience of shame. (43) Wait’s ambiguity is often noted: Jacques Berthoud, for example, describes him as “a source of bafflement from the start”, a puzzle about whom “[e]verything ... is ambiguous”, and Jeremy Hawthorn has enumerated his

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69 Tomkins, Affect Imagery Consciousness, p. 139.
70 Tomkins, Affect Imagery Consciousness, p. 140.
“incoherent” features.71 Even Wait’s name encodes an initial ambiguity, “split between command and a proper name”, as Harpham puts it; highlighting, in the opinion of Greaney, the “equivocality of language that nautical discourse strives to suppress”. (93, 24) This slippage also bears directly on Wait’s competence as a sailor, however, since his name is a homonym for a highly desirable commodity in the labour economy: force. Unlike Donkin, Wait gives every sign of being an exceptionally able seaman, so much so that Baker reserves him for his own watch – “Feel him on a rope. Hey?” – but of course, Wait’s volume is no indication of his weight: as Donkin complains, “You put no more weight on a rope than a bloody sparrer.” (28, 46) Wait’s deceptive weight is a measure of his unsoundness, his “hollow” cough pointing to the reality that “he ain’t no heavier than an empty beef-cask”, as Belfast puts it. (27, 111) The truth of Wait’s condition – its gravity, as it were – is revealed to him in his fever-dreams, coded as hollowness: “He whirled along with the husks, very tired and light. All his inside was gone. He felt lighter than the husks – and more dry.” (97-8) This discrepancy between Wait’s apparent mass and the force he puts on a rope gives his ambiguity a professional face: no-one can decide whether Wait belongs to the sodality of labour or not.

Given the interdependence of masculinity and a professional work ethic, it is no surprise that this professional ambiguity is compounded with doubt about James Wait’s manliness.

We could not get rid of the monstrous suspicion that this astounding black-man was shamming sick, had been malingering heartlessly in the face of our toil, of our scorn, of our patience – and now was malingering in the face of our devotion – in the face of death. Our vague and imperfect morality rose with disgust at his unmanly lie. But he stuck to it manfully – amazingly. (67)

is “manful”. Whereas Donkin is swiftly categorised as “no kind of man” and a fitting object of contempt, Wait’s manliness, like his competence as a sailor, remains subject to nagging doubt, producing the condition of ambivalence which, Tomkins says, is characteristic of shame: the paralysing “unwillingness to renounce”. The farce of Wait’s sea-burial is one last awkward moment for the men, Baker “burying his face in the book, and shuffling his feet nervously” as the ceremony stalls. (133) When Jimmy’s shrouded body – embarrassing to the last – seems reluctant to slide into the sea, Belfast’s distraught entreaty focuses on the masculine aspect of Wait’s obscurity, the question of his manliness. Bearing the whole weight of the crew’s prolonged exposure to shame, Belfast’s plea is a *cri de coeur* for disambiguation: “‘Jimmy, be a man!’ he shrieked, passionately.” (133) This is a vocalised wish, as well as an imperative: Belfast wants closure on the issue of James Wait’s masculinity, a clarity that would legitimate the crew’s compassion, and release them from the paroxysms of shame. As long as Wait’s identity as a work-mate and a man is in doubt, the crew can’t free themselves from this “oscillation”, able neither to despise Wait as they do Donkin nor extend him the brusque sympathy due to a fellow-seaman (exemplified by the laconic offering of the pipe to Singleton). (44)

As is often noted, the crew’s inauthentic sympathy is an agent of disintegration, breeding egoism, corroding discipline and engendering excessive consciousness: narcissism is the most infectious disease on board the *Narcissus*.72 Tomkins’s affect theory offers another perspective on this tendency towards decadent self-consciousness, understood as an effect of shame rather than of pity. Of all affects, Tomkins argues, “shame is the most reflexive ... in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and the object of shame is lost.” It gives rise to “an experience of the self by the self.”73 If this is right, it would account for the crew’s becoming “highly humanized, tender, complex, excessively decadent”, caught in an incessant oscillation between renouncing Jimmy and pitying him, endlessly reviewing their own behaviour. (117)

72 Levenson makes this point about consciousness, and Hampson discusses the fall into egotism (both quoted above). Jacques Berthoud reads the novel in terms of a tension between two kinds of community: that inspired by “a common task”, exemplified in Singleton, and that “based on a demand for individual rights”, represented by Wait and Donkin. Berthoud, *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase*, p. 30.

73 Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, p. 133.
Conrad’s novel clearly idealises work as an effacement of self and a prophylactic against corrosive ideas, the vagabond thieves of substance: the ship’s exacting routine submerges individuality in a rotating shift of “[y]outhful faces, bearded faces, dark faces: faces serene, or faces moody, but all akin with the brotherhood of the sea; all with the same attentive expression of eyes, carefully watching the compass or the sails.” (LJ 75, NN 36) The antithesis of this condition is not only egoism and anomie, however, but also shame and awkwardness, the transformation of the bearers of “guileless manhood” into “criminals conscious of misdeeds”. (39) The opposite of solidarity, indeed, is self-consciousness.

In desabilising the “guileless manhood” of the crew of the Narcissus, James Wait also throws the element of unthinking male sociability out of kilter: it is significant that the first explicit mention of his illness comes at a moment of idyllic conviviality, the hilarious discussion of the attributes of a gentleman in which the men “were forgetting themselves”. (NN 37) Social ease might not have been foremost among the explicit advantages of Henry Newbolt’s ideal of manhood, but Conrad’s portrayal of this dimension of shared labour may have resonated with his public school sensibility nonetheless. Lack of “self-consciousness”, we recall, was one of the traits that defined John Percival as “the most satisfying figure of a great man that could be found or imagined”. On the Narcissus, this condition is attained communally through work, and is transformed into miserable self-reflection by Wait’s ambiguous shirking. More overtly, perhaps, Conrad’s depiction of masculinity mirrors the “religion of Stoicism” central to the public school ethos, celebrating, in Singleton and Allistoun, the marmoreal ideal that Newbolt saw embodied in Percival. This concern with silent heroism, and Conrad’s “masculine objective” impressionism, situates The Nigger of the “Narcissus” in the tradition of Carlyle’s hero as man of letters, fulfilling the condition of manliness that was an essential step in professionalising literature, as Besant and Carlyle both realised. Conrad’s appeal to the “knot of men”, in his letter to Quiller-Couch, suggests that he actively sought acceptance on these masculine terms, and in this instance, at least, his self-presentation was effective: it was doubtless in response to Conrad’s masculine
objectivity and glorification of mute heroism that Quiller-Couch could write: “No man, to my knowledge, has written of the merchant seaman so truthfully or heroically.”

Just as manliness and professional work are intertwined in The Nigger of the “Narcissus”, so the assertion of masculinity was a necessary task in the construction of authorship as a profession, a laborious and expert undertaking not to be confused with the production of commodities. From this point of view, masculinity provides a point of contact between the idea of the professional writer and the general concern of modernist authors to dissociate themselves from the mass market (even as they sought a niche within it). The culture industry was tendentiously gendered female by early twentieth-century intellectuals: the audience for fiction was predominantly comprised of women, and masculinity was freighted with the connotation of aloofness from the taste of the masses. H.G. Wells, for example, thought that the function of criticism was to compensate writers who did not appeal to female readers. He expressed this view to Conrad in May 1896, probably a month before he began writing The Nigger of the “Narcissus”:

Since you don’t make the slightest concessions to the reading young woman who makes or mars the fortunes of authors, it is the manifest duty of a reviewer to differentiate between you and the kind of people we thrust into the ‘Fiction’ at the end, the Maples and Schoolbreds of literature.

Conrad was to become well acquainted with this kind of argument, using it himself to cushion the blow of Norman Douglas’s unpopularity in 1912: “[t]he unmistakable masculinity of [Fountains in the Sand] is the only quality which may stand in the way of its commercial success.” (CL 5: 98) As well as fashioning his authorial persona in the mould of Carlyle’s hero as man of letters, then, the overdetermined manliness of The Nigger of the “Narcissus” also shored up Conrad’s reputation for professionalism by “differentiat[ing]” him from panderers to “the reading young woman”. His disinterested

74 Stape and Knowles, A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad, p. 28.
75 As Andreas Huyssen has influentially argued, in After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
76 Stape and Knowles, A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad, p. 21.
commitment to a professional code, fulsomely articulated in the Preface (which appeared in the New Review as a final instalment), was confirmed by his belonging to the “small knot of men”.
CHAPTER 5

The resistance to specialism: Ford’s *England and the English* and the London Sociological Society

In the final two chapters of this thesis, my discussion of professional society and modernist authorship will take a slightly different tack, solicited in part by the unusual range of Ford’s literary activities. As we have seen, James’s figuration of the *Beryl* in the Prefaces to his New York Edition stressed the imperious nature of the writer’s calling, his absorption in a specialised way of life. Conrad, similarly, professed “complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance” as the condition of good art. (NN 12) Ford’s reputation, on the other hand, has always suffered from the size and heterogeneity of his œuvre, perhaps because it does not invite this interpretation of sober professionalism. In 1949 Mark Schorer felt Ford’s “solid work” needed rescuing from the “mass of books he wrote”, and Douglas Goldring prefaced his eulogic memoir with the acknowledgment that “[I]ke most original and essentially first-rate men, Ford occasionally flopped, sometimes badly”.¹ In the spring of 1904, when Ford was disgruntled with his agent J.B. Pinker’s failure to find a publisher for *The Soul of London* (1905), Conrad tried to placate him by flattering his versatility: “You are for him the man who can write anything at any time – and write it well – he means in a not ordinary way.” (CL 3: 164-5) This ambiguous, rather feeble compliment suggests that Ford’s self-fashioning did not conform to the Jamesian model of single-minded dedication to a monumental life’s work. It also points up the aspect of Ford’s career that will, broadly, be the subject of these chapters: his resistance to specialisation. The couplet of Ford’s diverse literary activities represented here – his venture into impressionist social criticism, and, in chapter six, his editorship of a literary magazine – illustrate an attempt to define a function for literature in the public sphere. This function can be productively

understood as an attempt to articulate social complexity without recourse to expert knowledge.

According to the urban historian Thomas Bender, the baffling complexity of the late nineteenth-century city drove observers to seek more sophisticated techniques of description, spurring the development of sociology. I include the following lengthy quotation from Bender, partly for its apt description of this process, but also because it foregrounds the qualitative dimension of this complexity, its capacity to dispirit contemporary observers.

By the 1880s ... the immensity of the material fact of urban and industrial society threatened to overwhelm intellectuals. The world around them seemed not to be known, and the customary modes of social inquiry did not seem to make it any more comprehensible. The interconnectedness of outwardly discrete social facts could not be grasped by common observation, and without such understanding the mass of social particulars was dispiriting. Professional sociology offered esoteric theory that would demonstrate these connections and force understanding out of the confusion of social facts. ... The perceived need for such esoteric knowledge served, as it always has, as the basis for the creation of privileged intellectual authority.²

The growing complexity of professional society, embodied in the modern city, seemed to make it unimagined to amateurs, creating a demand for expert social researchers. Ford was painfully aware of the city's incomprehensible dynamics; the phrase "the mass of social particulars was dispiriting" could stand as a touchstone for his social imagination. In The Soul of London, the first volume in the trilogy of social criticism collected as England and the English in 1907, he describes feeling distressed by reification, by Bender's opaque "interconnectedness of outwardly discrete social facts": "no thought is

more oppressive than that”, Ford wrote: “a little way away or at a great distance people are unceasingly working to mature new processes that will ruin any one of the works that the eye rests on.” The consciousness that “other influences are working invisible” haunts his flânerie. (SL 102-3) Ford’s city of folded spaces, traversed by processes beyond the grasp of the casual observer, provided yet another theatre for the rise of specialisation, another arena in which laypeople, as Stephen Stich and Richard Nisbett put it, “defer to cognitive authorities.”

The city itself, and the social incoherence it embodied, was more grist to the mill of professionalism and the culture of expertise, visible confirmation of the authority of experts and, as Bender argues, of the need for specialist sociologists.

Early twentieth-century British sociology, however, presents itself as an exception to this wave of specialisation, inclined by its very nature to eschew esoteric discourses and narrowly focused research. Although motivated by an acute awareness of complexity and fragmentation, many sociologists at the turn of the century saw their science as essentially generalist, its function nothing less than the study and direction of “that unfolding process or drama of social evolution”, as one member of the London Sociological Society put it. This exalted duty “profoundly distinguishes the Sociologist from the specialist investigator who occupies himself exclusively with the study of some particular one of the many recognised approaches to social knowledge.”

Far from addressing a clique of experts, the Sociological Review, founded in 1908, sought “to offer common ground for sociological workers to meet upon”, and for this reason encouraged a discourse on “principles and broad results” accessible to generalists. No particular form of expertise or course of training authorised sociological pronouncements, and sociologists cherished the hope that sociology would “percolate into the general mind.”

The yearning of sociology to transcend specialisation, both by grasping society as a whole, and by communicating this vision to non-specialists, resonates with Ford’s social criticism. Although alive to the “dispiriting” effects of modern complexity, and

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4 Sociological Papers, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1905), pp. 15-6. There were three volumes of annual papers, in 1905, 1906 and 1907, replaced in 1908 by a quarterly review.
particularly the bewilderment of the urban experience, Ford did not accept the need for an “esoteric” technique of representation, intelligible only to a limited audience of “privileged” experts. Anti-specialism forms a common thread linking Ford’s response to modernity with that of early twentieth-century sociologists. In what follows, I will focus on two aspects of Ford’s anti-specialist project: his attempt to blur the distinction between literature and science, and his ambivalent engagement with the Edwardian desire to “see life steadily and see it whole”, in Matthew Arnold’s phrase. The London Sociological Society sheds light on the first of these impulses by its own corresponding reluctance to eliminate any mode of social inquiry from the scope of its activities: Ford’s belief that impressionism constituted a form of social knowledge no less valuable to the “Republic” than science becomes intelligible when we consider the ill-defined and, indeed, deliberately eclectic agenda of Edwardian sociology. The second important point of intersection between Ford and the London Sociological Society is their shared will-to-totality, but whereas some sociologists tended to approach this goal with a positivist optimism, Ford’s impressionist doctrine of embodied observation made him painfully aware of its unattainability. *England and the English* is a valuable complement to sociological thought, and also a critique of it, restoring the embodied, affective context of social observation. Given the city’s importance as the concrete embodiment of unknowable modernity, *The Soul of London* will be my main focus here, although I will also consider Ford’s engagement with sociological issues in the volumes dealing with rural England and with Englishness itself.

In the spring of 1904 a diverse group of scientists and writers assembled at London University for the inaugural meeting of the London Sociological Society. The Society’s raison d’être was the institutionalisation of British sociology, which, James Bryce lamented in his Introductory Address, had “fallen conspicuously behind in the provision for teaching and research” by comparison with “Continental and American universities”. The historian Philip Abrams has shown how resources that might have gone into the establishment of a discipline of sociology in the mid-nineteenth century were siphoned off into other types of social inquiry and reform, notably via the London Statistical Society and the National Association for the Promotion of the Social

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7 *Sociological Papers*, vol. 1, xvi.
Sciences.\textsuperscript{8} The one preoccupied with narrow empirical research, and the other committed to concrete social reforms, neither of these institutions was inclined to work at a comprehensive theory of society, and it was the felt need for such an overarching theory that galvanised the generation from which the London Sociological Society would draw its impetus. These \textit{fin de siècle} social thinkers – including Patrick Geddes, Sidney Webb, Seebohm Rowntree and L.T. Hobhouse – were profoundly disturbed by the acute “social problem” of the 1880s, and “felt the urgent need for an account of society which revealed the connectedness of conditions and institutions.”\textsuperscript{9}

Ford was finishing \textit{The Soul of London} when the Society held its first meetings. It continued to meet regularly during the period that he was at work on the second and third volumes, \textit{The Heart of the Country} (1906) and \textit{The Spirit of the People} (1907), and the climax of its initial activities coincided with the completion of the series: in 1907 \textit{England and the English} was published as a single volume in America, and L.T. Hobhouse was appointed to Britain’s first Chair of Sociology. Ford’s project of impressionist social criticism, then, and the genesis of British sociology as an institution, developed concurrently in the years 1904 to 1907. Ford’s sometimes whimsical and always idiosyncratic studies of Englishness may seem far removed from the earnest deliberations of eminent Victorians like, say, the eugenicist Francis Galton or the Positivist philosopher J.H. Bridges.\textsuperscript{10} However, the proceedings of the London Sociological Society reveal that, beyond a certain consensus on moral seriousness, dissent reigned among its participants as to the attributes and subject matter of their aspirant science: Edwardian sociology existed in a state of primordial flux, more a field of contesting definitions than a solid discipline. As Stefan Collini writes, a pattern emerged at the Society “in which the speaker propounded his own definition of the aims and methods of sociology, and his audience, by way of criticism, briefly exercised their own hobby-horses.”\textsuperscript{11} It would be a mistake, in this unsettled climate, to draw the line too sharply between literature and sociology; the Society’s policy of eclecticism – extending

\textsuperscript{8} On these institutions see Abrams, \textit{The Origins of British Sociology: 1834-1914}, pp. 15-52.
\textsuperscript{9} Abrams, \textit{The Origins of British Sociology: 1834-1914}, p. 84.
to H.G. Wells’s paper on “The So-Called Science of Sociology” in 1906 – ensured that sociology, particularly to an outside eye like Ford’s, was by no means a fenced enclosure.

In his 1938 memoir, J.A. Hobson, one of the founding members of the Society, recalled his misgivings about the project’s holistic premises, which seemed to run counter to the prevailing spirit of specialisation:

When a society of sociology was first founded here in the beginning of this century by the efforts of Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford, and a few other active thinkers, it seemed to many of us a precarious project, partly because it appeared to conflict with the tendency to specialize and subdivide which the conception of ‘thoroughness’ involved.\textsuperscript{12}

There was a tension between the Society’s claim to disciplinary legitimacy and its ambition of overarching synthesis, which went against the grain of the expertise culture. As Durkheim observed in \textit{The Division of Labour}, so entrenched was the value of specialisation in the late nineteenth century that failure to specialise attracted moral censure: “public opinion sanctions the division of labour”.\textsuperscript{13} With the rise of the research ideal and diversification of academic disciplines, universalists, as Sheldon Rothblatt has shown, found themselves “overwhelmed by the cumulative mass of information … The integration of the many fields of science and scholarship could not keep pace with the results of compartmentalized research.”\textsuperscript{14} L.T. Hobhouse remarked on this phenomenon at a meeting of the Society in 1905: “[w]e have”, he announced,

in … the second half of the nineteenth century, the rise and predominance of specialism. We have the fact that knowledge is pursued in detail. It is so broken up, on the one hand, and amassed into such enormous heaps on the other, and this in every direction, that it has been apparently impossible for

\textsuperscript{14}Sheldon Rothblatt, \textit{Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education: An Essay in History and Culture} (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 168.
any human mind to grasp it in its entirety. The stream of thought is thus, as it were, choked, as the result of specialism.\textsuperscript{15}

The drive to specialise also impacted on the public sphere: new specialist journals arose to cater to the increasingly technical and rigorous demands of the learned community, whilst generalist periodicals like the \textit{Saturday Review}, the \textit{Academy}, and \textit{The Reader} no longer transmitted the views of leading researchers to a wide, non-specialist audience. The \textit{English Historical Review}, for example, was founded in 1885 to provide a forum for professional research historians, as distinct from the amateurs writing for the general public.\textsuperscript{16} Many members of the London Sociological Society saw sociology as a remedy for this atomisation of knowledge. As Bryce put it in his Introductory Address, “[a] single society surveying the whole field of human phenomena ought to be able to bring all these diverse and formally unconnected, yet really interlacing branches, into systematic cooperation.”\textsuperscript{17} As the antidote to this epistemic shattering, sociology was to consolidate the researches of specialised disciplines by orienting them with regard to society as a whole.

Sara Haslam has shown that Ford’s attitude towards fragmentation was two-fold, affirming the dominant modernist idea of “multiple perspectives that can destroy one’s sense of one’s world and one’s sense of oneself”, but also intimating, in his “positive fictions”, a “regenerative possibility” unlocked by “multiplicity”. I will take up Haslam’s insight that Ford conceived this regeneration as “a potentially painful or fearful process” in my discussion of urban pathos below, but for the moment I want to emphasise the parallel between the historically specific kind of cultural fragmentation described by Hobhouse, and Ford’s consciousness of overwhelming social complexity.\textsuperscript{18}

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\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Sociological Papers}, p. 222.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Sociological Papers}, vol. 1, xv.
\end{flushright}
regarded fragmentation and specialisation as definitive of modernity: “the whole psychology of the immediate present”, he wrote in The Spirit of the People, “is a thing of such minutiae; our attention is charmed by such an infinity of small things, that close thinking – which teleological logic demands – is for the moment almost impossible, save to the specialist.” (SP 100) Ford testifies here to the experience described by Bender: life itself was becoming too complex for the generalist to grasp. In Ford’s opinion the mass circulation newspaper, with its daily barrage of disconnected snippets, was also responsible for the fragmented modern sensibility.

Connected thinking has become nearly impossible, because it is nearly impossible to find any general idea that will connect into one train of thought: “Home Rule for Egypt,” “A Batch of Stabbing Cases,” and “Infant Motorists.” … In the ‘70’s-‘80’s the Londoner was still said to get his General Ideas from the leader writers of his favourite paper. Nowadays even the leader is dying out. (SL 134)

What Ford ironically calls “trite general reflections” have become taboo, conversations confined to the exchange of news items. Ford’s own discourse was, in fact, a corrective to this trend, supplying “trite” hypotheses and obiter dicta in abundance. (SL 132) The trilogy is itself an attempt to stimulate connected thinking about the “infinity of small things”: Ford aims to “strike the imagination of the reader, and induce him to continue an awakened train of thought” – to reinstate, in other words, the habit of generalisation. (SP xv)

SCIENTIFIC IMPRESSIONISM

As Carola Kaplan observes, the tag “sociologist” has traditionally had a pejorative connotation in literary criticism, used to characterise Edwardian novelists as “monologic”
and "boorish"; sociologists are to modernists as Edwardians are to Georgians.\textsuperscript{19} Although he doesn't impose this stigma, Wallace Martin follows this trend of categorisation, distinguishing neatly between impressionists and sociologists as two distinct species of Edwardian author, "those who looked on the novel as an art form demanding technical perfection", and those with a "sociological emphasis".\textsuperscript{20} The proceedings of the London Sociological Society show, however, that the boundaries of "sociology" itself were indeterminate. No fewer than sixty-one definitions of sociology were proposed in the first three volumes of the London Sociological Society's annual collection of papers; for Edwardian authors, the relations between this protean science and literature would have seemed ambiguous.\textsuperscript{21} H.G. Wells's February 1906 address to the Society on "The So-called Science of Sociology" (26 February 1906) is a case in point: Wells - the archetypal boorish Edwardian sociologist - actively contested the definition of "sociology" itself, bringing the supplement of literariness to bear on its perceived shortcomings. In view of his later vilification at the hands of modernist critics, Wells's paper is interesting for its attack on objectivity and defence of the irreducibility of personal experience. Sociology, Wells said,

\begin{quote}
  is ... no less than the attempt to bring that vast complex unique Being, its subject, into clear true relations with the individual intelligence. Now, since individual intelligences are individual, and each is a little differently placed in regard to the subject under consideration, since the personal angle of vision is much wider towards humanity than towards the circumambient horizon of matter, it should be manifest that no sociology of universal compulsion, of anything approaching the general validity of
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{21} Collini, \textit{Liberalism and Sociology}, p. 199.
the physical sciences, is ever to be hoped for – at least upon the metaphysical assumptions of this paper.\textsuperscript{22}

Far from evincing the materialism denounced by Virginia Woolf in “Modern Fiction”, this insistence on plurality prefigures, in its idea of perspectival diversity, Henry James’s Preface to \textit{The Portrait of a Lady}.\textsuperscript{23} Bringing “Being” into “clear true relations with the individual intelligence” accords with James’s cherished “differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter”, whilst the emphasis on “the personal angle of vision” anticipates James’s House of Fiction, in which there are many windows. (AN 45-6) Unsurprisingly, then, the discourse Wells recommended for tackling such plurality was “neither an art simply, nor science in the narrow meaning of the word at all, but knowledge rendered imaginatively, and with an element of personality; that is to say, in the highest sense of the term, literature.” Literary sociology was to have two branches: history, and Wells’s own specialty: “the creation of Utopias”.\textsuperscript{24} What did the sociologists think of Wells’s proposal? In the discussion, most responses criticised his radical attack on science (five of seven speakers), although one speaker energetically defended him, and another accepted the value of utopian writing to sociology. Other responses typified the factional disputes within the Society: one faithful Positivist sprang to Comte’s defence, and Benjamin Kidd got in a dig at Francis Galton’s eugenics – “a stud book of families of civic worth” – whilst reiterating the premise of his own widely-read \textit{Social Evolution} (1894): “the science is of society and not of the individual.”\textsuperscript{25} Wells’s paper was, on the whole, politely if sceptically received: the Society did not hasten to form a literary wing, but the attitude of seriously considering the views of eccentric others, albeit prior to prevailing on others to consider one’s own eccentric view, is typical of its meetings. As Benjamin Kidd recalled, the Society played host to an ominous array of “warring schools of opinion, often holding ideas and ideals mutually antagonistic, and

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Sociological Papers}, vol. 3, pp. 365, 367.
even mutually destructive”.\(^{26}\) Nonetheless, Wells’s vigorous promulgation of a
distinctively literary sociology, as opposed to a “materialist” sociological literature,
suggests that the relationship between these two disciplines was volatile, and amenable to
take-over attempts.

Wells’s paper, and its reception, provide a useful point of comparison for Ford’s
impressionist engagement with sociological themes. The inability of social thinkers to
agree on a basic paradigm for research, starkly dramatised in the response to Wells’s
paper, was itself one of the great motifs of Ford’s social imagination: as he wrote in
Ancient Lights, “the life of to-day is more and more becoming a life of little things. We
are losing more and more the sense of a whole, the feeling of a grand design, of the co-
ordination of all Nature in one great architectonic scheme.” (AL 62) Ford’s response to
modernity incorporates his awareness, not only of the incoherence of society, but also of
the plurality of social theories, a factor that threatened to sink the sociological project
before it had fairly begun. (In his editorial for the first number of the Sociological
Review, L.T. Hobhouse felt compelled to answer criticisms of this apparent failing,
reinterpreting it as “a sign ... of the raw vigour and exuberance of youth.”\(^{27}\) In The
Heart of the Country, Ford satirises this tendency toward cacophony in social theory, in a
chapter entitled “Utopias”. Lampooning William Morris’s News From Nowhere, Ford
relates a dream not of utopia, but of utopians: a tournament of intransigent hobby-horses.
A Liberal politician, a Lincolnshire farmer, “a Northerner”, “an American Londoner”, a
Labour member (something of a novelty in 1906), a “political economist”, “an ironical
Conservative”, “an Advanced Thinker”, “a Director”, “a Mathematician”, “a Political
Historian”, “a Norfolk farmer” and “a steam-plough proprietor”, all take turns
interjecting their incompatible plans for agricultural reform, punctuated by the dreamer’s
limp refrain: “Something ought to be done for the land.” (HC 194-201) Just before the
sleeper awakens, however, the mood shifts, as Ford’s acute sense of irresolvable
difference transforms jeu d’esprit into cri de coeur:

\(^{26}\) The Sociological Society, pamphlet (London: 1904), quoted in Sandra M. Den Otter, British
Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996),
p. 135.

\(^{27}\) Editorial, Sociological Review (1908), reprinted in Abrams, The Origins of British Sociology:
And immediately the whole assembly began to cry out in a babel of
tongues; a vast multitude of white faces, each with intent eyes, and
opened, shouting mouths; a weird and tremendous crowd, like that in the
gigantic imaginings of a great medieval painter of a last Judgment;
thousands and thousands and millions and millions of voices, in all the
tongues of the world, in all imaginable accents, with all the possible tones
of assurance, began to cry out panaceas, all the first steps towards the
solution of this problem. And each man of all the millions (the thing was
apparent to the dream consciousness of my friend) – each man had a
panacea that differed from that of his neighbour.

A cold chill, a weariness of nightmare, oppressed the dreamer ... (HC
201)

The hallucinatory intensity of this passage transfigures a playful device into a deeply-felt
sense of social crisis, the “assembly” modulating vertiginously into “thousands” and then
“millions” of voices, each implacably singular.

Wells and Ford both begin from an assumption of epistemological relativism, the
irreducibly different “relations” to the “vast complex unique Being” of society. Wells
believed that individual utopias were expressions of an unfolding collective will, and
hence ultimately harmonious: they were “the manifestations and reflections in this mind
and that, of a very complex, imperfect, elusive idea, the Social Idea.”

28 Ford’s image of deliberation, on the other hand, is centrifugal, trailing off into an agoraphobic nightmare.

For Wells’s confident, somewhat mystical progressivism, Ford substitutes a more
novelistic perception: uncontrollable heteroglossia. The intersection of impressionism and
utopianism produces a kind of self-reflexivity, Ford figuring utopians themselves as an
unruly demos in need of regulation. It is this challenge of democracy, Ford implies, that is
neglected in utopian theories; as he writes in The Soul of London, “the words of ... the
man of the future ... are always abstractions. Looking forward, looking into the mists of
the future, whose men are unborn, he sees no figures.” (SL 154) Ford can’t

help seeing figures, even when he thinks about utopia. If Wells’s speech to the London
Sociological Society indicates the potential for crossover between literature and science,
Ford’s satire of utopian dissent shows him essaying this crossover. This ability to think
through plurality is an intervention in scientific discourse, a rhetorical demonstration of
how impressionist literature could cut across the scientific paradigm.

In his classic account of the separation of culture and society, Raymond Williams
argues that the nineteenth century saw a new “emphasis on the artist as a special kind of
person”, with the result that “a general social activity was forced into the status of a
department or province”. Art became subject to the division of labour in a way that it had
not been for the Romantics.

What were seen at the end of the nineteenth century as disparate interests,
between which a man must choose and in the act of choice declare himself
poet or sociologist, were, normally, at the beginning of the century, seen as
interlocking interests: a conclusion about personal feeling became a
conclusion about society, and an observation of natural beauty carried a
necessary moral reference to the whole and unified life of man.²⁹

Several critics have seen literary impressionism, in particular, as a reaction against
science, an assertion of qualitative experience against Weberian rationalisation.³⁰
Sociology, however, and particularly the holistic sociology of the London Sociological
Society, offers a point of contact between literature and science. Wolf Lepenies has
argued this case, mapping a nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary tradition in which
sociology was seen not as an alien episteme but as a rival system of representation.³¹ As

²⁹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), pp. 53,
63, 48.
³⁰ Such as Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*
characterized the nineteenth century, some branches of literature claimed a status equal to many
scientific disciplines so far as the advancement of knowledge was concerned.”
Lepenies notes, Flaubert’s *impassibilité* was essentially a scientific principle transposed to literature. Flaubert opined that “[w]hat is beautiful in the natural sciences is that they do not want to prove anything”, and relished “treating the human soul with the impartiality that one puts into the physical sciences.”

In *England and the English*, Ford revives this sociological aspect of Flaubert’s *prise de position*, fashioning himself as both artist and scientist, refusing the “act of choice” between different specialisations. The trilogy is intended as a “work of art”, but Ford expressly dissociates this definition from any *l’art pour l’art* doctrine of “apartness from the praxis of life”, as Peter Bürger has it. He regards “a work of art as of as great usefulness to the republic as a work of reference.” Its power of “awaken[ing]” thought distinguishes it from “a serious, statistical, Blue, or unimaginative work”, but even so, “[t]he artist should be an exact scientist. (This is not a paradox.)” (SP xiv-xv) This non-paradox, assigning a social function to art, recurs often in Ford’s criticism. The function of the arts, he believed, “is truly educational – nay, it is truly scientific.” (CA 27) He propounded the idea consistently in his weekly *causerie* for *The Tribune*, writing in 1907 that “I have spoken rather freely in these papers of the novelist as an exact – and more particularly as an aloof – scientist.” Ford offers Conrad as an exemplary “exact scientist – the real servant of the Republic.”

Continuing to flirt with paradox in his prefatory remarks to *England and the English*, Ford writes in the “Author’s Advertisement” to *The Spirit of the People* that his very lack of system is a rigorous methodology: “The author’s original plan – and he has adhered to it rigidly, sternly, and in spite of many temptations – was to write about only such things as interested him.” (SP xiv) A series of footnotes draw attention to his deliberately impressionistic method, emphasising “that these pages embody only my personal views, founded upon facts that have come under my personal acquaintance”; Ford’s pointed rejection of the research ideal is framed as a

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methodology in its own right. (SP 60, 67, 82) Capricious as Ford’s assertion of methodological rigour now sounds, one critic, at least, took his theoretical apparatus seriously. *The New Age*, which chose *The Spirit of the People* as “Book of the Week” in January 1908, ratified Ford’s anti-methodology, recognising its validity as a technique of psychological fieldwork: “His power of seeing the psychological content of apparently trivial occurrences and chance remarks uttered by casual people is quite remarkable.” Mundane events “are to him so many valuable indications of the spirit of the nation which he has so closely studied. No one can question that this method, wisely used, is the right one.”

The *New Age* reviewer validates Ford’s claims to methodological legitimacy, to be providing an alternative kind of social knowledge, rather than aestheticist ruminations.

In keeping with this hybrid voice, *England and the English* engages with many of the same topics that animated the discussions of the London Sociological Society, subjecting them, however, to the peculiarities of impressionist technique, and in particular the rule that “[t]he Impressionist must always exaggerate”. Ford explained the rationale behind this dictum in his first *English Review* editorial, a year after the trilogy’s publication: “the province of the imaginative writer is by exaggeration due to his particular character – by characteristic exaggeration in fact – precisely to awaken thought.” This method guides Ford’s intervention in social debate, and particularly his handling of social evolution, national Darwinism and the Edwardian cult of Efficiency.

Ford’s aversion to this vogue for scientific organization in matters of state is most apparent in the dystopic vision of a social reformer in *The Soul of London*, whose

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impersonality is so close, so stern, and so unflinching that he would abolish all names of persons, substituting numbers. He would have all men and women who perform any public functions, all candidates for State examinations, go dressed in cloaks that should destroy all distinction of figure and limbs … (SL 161)

The movement towards "public efficiency" drains "much of our capacity for interest in our fellow men". (SL 158) Although Ford maintains a pose of scrupulous impartiality in this section, allowing his exaggeration of Fabian-esque social reform to speak for itself, his engagement with evolutionary themes in The Spirit of the People evinces a playfully subversive intention. The New Age reviewer took note of this gamine agenda, complaining that Ford was too blasé about evolution and efficiency: "[a]ll through his book he insists on one essential characteristic of the English nation – its dislike for reasoned rules for action, its distrust of coherent programmes, and its consequent tendency to take things as they come." Ford is upbraided for his complacency about the "development of the race": "Does Mr. Hueffer think that all these unselfish deeds, these passionate aspirations, are inspired by the hope of continuing things much as they are, or perpetuating the policy of 'muddling through'?" ⁴⁰ Paul Peppis has ingeniously deconstructed the latent nationalism in Ford's argument, arguing that The Spirit of the People is an "exsanguinated" vehicle of crypto-nationalism, but his hermeneutic of suspicion does not do justice to Ford's technique of exaggeration, nor to his sense of humour. ⁴¹ As the New Age review indicates, those concerned about England's struggle for survival did not read his vindication of British common sense as a patriotic sentiment: indeed, as Geoffrey Searle points out, exponents of National Efficiency were appalled that "the British seemed content to rely upon 'rule of thumb' methods and 'muddling

⁴¹ Paul Peppis, "Thinking Race in the Avant Guerre: Typological Negotiations in Ford and Stein," Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities 10, no. 2 (1997). Peppis thinks that "[b]y fashioning the persona of the cosmopolitan imperialist and deracializing imperialism in The Spirit of the People, Ford laid the groundwork for the internationalistic cultural and imperialistic political doctrine that he would articulate in The English Review." (381) The very deviousness of this argument, I suggest, would have undermined its rhetorical effectiveness.
through""). The Spirit of the People engages with anxieties about social evolution and England’s struggle for existence only to subvert them, suggesting that “muddling through” and the “rule of thumb” are themselves desirable racial traits. (SP 83, 26)

The burlesque in Ford’s evolutionary argument is also apparent in his treatment of heat death. This popular late Victorian version of the fin du globe, inspired by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, held that the tendency of energy to go from a more to a less organised state portended apocalypse by cooling, a scenario depicted by Wells in The Time Machine. Ford’s treatment of the idea is somewhat less solemn:

If, in fact, an Ice Age did supervene, we might be pretty certain that the Esquimaux would have a great immediate advantage. England would be horribly discomposed; all sorts of reputations would be hopelessly marred. But somehow, one man, coming probably from the very bottom of our particular basket, would arise among us; would teach us how to set a glass roof all over England – how to turn the land into a vast hothouse. Incidentally, too, he would probably give us the chance of roofing in, say, half Sweden or the whole of Africa, so that either as investors or as a nation, we should profit very materially. Wherever, in short, the sun did set, its last rays would shine upon a roof of glass, that upon the map could be comfortably coloured with red amidst the white of those polar nights, engulfing the other nations. We might have begun pretty badly; we should be certain to end more than moderately well. (SP 64-5)

Exaggeration here, I would suggest, takes the form of parody. The bathos of this passage – the methodical deduction that Eskimos will flourish as a result of entropy; the meiosis of England being “discomposed” and “reputations” being “marred” by solar apocalypse; the portrayal of glasshouses, emblem of suburban mundanity (witness Mr. Slack of A

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42 Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, p. 72.
43 Building on J.B.J. Fourier’s research into heat conduction, Sadi Carnot arrived at the Second Law in 1824, and it was subsequently codified in various ways by, for example, Rudolf Clausius in 1850 and William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) in 1852. See The Temperature of History (New York: Benjamin Franklin, 1978), chapter three.
England and the English

*Personal Remembrance*, as a science fiction technology; the casual absurdity of snatching “half” of Sweden, and the mock nationalism of a glasshouse Empire – marks it as satire, a subversive appropriation of the shriller strains of social debate. The complacent conclusion of this argument, like Ford’s solemn justification of muddling through, would have incensed national Darwinists such as Karl Pearson, Britain’s first Professor of Eugenics, or Benjamin Kidd, author of *Social Evolution* – both present at the London Sociological Society’s first meetings – who believed England’s struggle for survival depended on the systematic management of social evolution.44

As Stefan Collini notes, “voice” is an essential category of historical inquiry, correlating individual tonality with the “shared linguistic and cultural resources” of the day.45 Although it is hard to be certain about the nuances of Edwardian discourse, I would suggest that Ford’s voice is a vital component of his intervention in these public issues. His impressionist technique of *exaggeration* defamiliarises such Edwardian commonplaces as the quest for Efficiency and the deterioration of the race, precisely *impressing* them with an irreducibly individual voice. Crucially, this technique presupposes a matrix of public themes with which it intersects, the “fabric or texture of arguments, assumptions, values, ideas, associations”, as Collini puts it, against which voice is heard as an alterity effect.46 *England and the English* brings this specifically literary technique to bear on social questions – on the Social Question – in an attempt, as Ford says in *The Soul of London*, to induce “an awakened train of thought” in the reader; the distinction of literature is its ability to draw generalists into social debate.

STEADILY AND WHOLE

For many of the London Sociological Society’s participants, its purpose could be summed up in Matthew Arnold’s dictum of seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. Hobson, one of the founding members, quotes Arnold’s formula at the start of *The Social

46 Collini, *Public Moralists*, p. 3.
Problem, and goes on, in a chapter headed “The Need of a Sociology”, to define the goal of the nascent science as a “close and accurate intellectual replica of the entire intricacy of the social processes”.47 The need for a totalising view of society was an Edwardian preoccupation, one which E.M. Forster, for example, scrutinised in Howards End (1910). The self-reflecting clerk Leonard Bast’s cramped, priggish reading of Ruskin satirises Arnold’s idealisation of culture, which founders on economic reality: “To see life steadily and see it whole was not for the likes of him”, we are told archly.48 The rhapsodic nationalist topography that opens chapter nineteen seems to afford a sublime totalisation of England, but it is ironised by Frieda Mosebach’s prosaic response: “after a prolonged gaze, she said that the hills were more swelling here than in Pomerania, which was true, but did not seem to Mrs Munt apposite.”49 Indeed, we are bluntly informed in the preceding chapter that “[i]t is impossible to see modern life steadily and see it whole”, but, since the lovers Henry Wilcox and Margaret Schlegel cover both perspectives between them (steady and whole, respectively), their marriage might be interpreted as a sort of panopticon. The “prose” and the “passion” add up to a holistic perception of society.50 Like Forster, Ford was dubious about whether the “infinite number of little things” with which modern life was cluttered could be resolved into a “one great architectonic scheme”: “We may contemplate life steadily enough to-day: it is impossible to see it whole”, he wrote in 1911. (AL 62, CA 28)

Hobson’s adoption of Arnold’s slogan is emblematic of the Arnoldian aspirations of many early twentieth-century sociologists, who wanted nothing less than to see society whole. The affinity with Arnold went deeper than holism, however: it would seem that many members of the Society conceived of sociology as a scientific equivalent to Arnold’s Culture, a body of knowledge providing a sound rational basis for altruism, the pursuit of the common good. Anthony Giddens has explained the attraction of this kind of optimism for sociologists: sociology, he argues, plays a “pivotal role ... in the reflexivity of modernity” because it is “the most generalised type of reflection upon

49 Forster, Howards End, p. 171.
50 Forster, Howards End, p. 171.
modern social life ... *Modernity is itself deeply and intrinsically sociological.* As the knowledge of sociologists becomes public domain it alters the object of study, individuals adjusting their own perceptions and behaviour in light of new information. This fact, Giddens argues, can produce a sort of sociological hubris, the belief that “knowledge could be filtered continuously into the reasons for social action, producing step-by-step increases in the ‘rationality’ of behaviour in relation to specific needs.”

Many of the London Sociological Society’s members succumbed to this Enlightenment fantasy, believing that sociological knowledge could feed straight back into life praxis – could “percolate into the general mind”, as Hobson put it. The banker and amateur sociologist Victor Branford hoped ultimately “to impart to every sane adult of the population, what we would here call the sociological habit of mind.” This would involve

the power and habit of picturing any particular social phenomenon (say, a loaf of bread, or a band of musicians, a policeman, or a horse-race), not merely as an object of personal use or enjoyment, ... but also as ... an element in that unfolding series of actions and reactions which we are learning to call evolution ... Every one is doubtless capable of acquiring in varying degrees of thoroughness a certain power of sociological interpretation, a certain capacity of observing the tendencies of fact and events, and judging of their significance by reference to sociological ideals.

In other words, sociology itself would instil a kind of altruism in the public, educating them to consider the good of the whole. The “sociological habit of mind” was a kind of cognitive altruism, dependent on an accurate representation of the social organism, rather

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52 Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, p. 44.
than on cultivation of the moral sentiments.\textsuperscript{55} Hobson described this cognitive altruism more explicitly:

[S]ociology, by the distinctively intellectual operation of enabling individuals to realize society as an elaborate organic interaction of social forms and forces, and so to understand the worth of social conduct, will alter the scale of human values and desires.

Sociological knowledge would enable individuals to “subordinate passing caprices and desires to … the larger social purpose”.\textsuperscript{56} Branford and Hobson supposed that sociology could furnish a theory of everyday life, assigning each bewildering facet its place in the whole, and revealing the individual’s function within the social organism. In his editorial for the first issue of the Sociological Review in 1908, L.T. Hobhouse reduced this universalist imperative to an aphorism: “To the sociologist ‘nothing that is human is foreign.’”\textsuperscript{57} No datum is irrelevant to the sociological habit of mind. The sociologist, in other words, is forbidden to specialise.

\textit{England and the English} is informed at every turn by this sociological dictum; indeed, Ford cited the same aphorism, with a little more pomp, the following year: “after all, the province of the proper man is to say: ‘Nihil humanum a me alienum puto.’”\textsuperscript{58} As he put it in the preface to \textit{The Soul of London}, “[t]his author – this ideal author – must be passionately alive to all aspects of life”; he must not be a specialist. (SL xv) Ford’s anecdotal method of social observation constantly affirms this rule, seemingly willing to admit every order of experience to its field of inquiry. If Ford is animated by the sociological goal of totality, however, he is also painfully aware of its unattainability: “one falls”, he writes, “no doubt very far short of one’s ideal” (SL xv). \textit{The Soul of London} explicitly addresses the need “to see London steadily and see it whole”, but is

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\textsuperscript{55} On the late Victorian “culture of altruism”, see Collini, \textit{Public Moralists}, pp. 60-90.

\textsuperscript{56} Hobson, \textit{The Social Problem}, pp. 263-4.


less sanguine than Branford and Hobson regarding the schizoid mentality this would imply. Such an observer

must have an impressionability and an impersonality, a single-mindedness to see, and a power of arranging his illustrations cold-bloodedly, an unemotional mind and a great sympathy, a life-long engrossment in his ‘subject,’ and an immense knowledge, for purposes of comparison, of other cities. He must have an avidity and a sobriety of intellect, an untirable physique and a delicately tempered mind. These things are antitheses. (SL 21)

These paradoxes prefigure the portrait of the impressionist artist he would give in 1914, as sedulously self-effacing but incorrigibly personal.59 Ford’s vaguely hysterical oscillation between “impressionability” and “impersonality”, sense data and abstraction, casts doubt on the possibility of the “sociological habit of mind” described by Branford: seeing steadily and whole seems to call for two separate selves (as it does literally in Howards End). This irreconcilability of concrete experience with the idea of the whole is perhaps the primary finding of The Soul of London, which begins from the premise that “London is illimitable”; as Giovanni Cianci notes, Ford discovers an “inescapable connection between living in a metropolis and the loss of totality, objectivity, permanence.”60 (SL 16) Rather than “an impression, a remembered bird’s-eye-view of London as a whole”, such as was possible in the eighteenth century, the modern Londoner’s perspective is like that of “the eye of a bird that is close to the ground”, animated by a kind of perceptual appetite: just as the bird seeks “minute fragments of seed, minute insects, tiny parasites, we also look for things that to us are the constituents of our mental or visual pabula.” (SL 18) Beginning with a description of London subjectivity rather than London itself, Ford arrives at a multiplicity of Londons, each shaped by different socio-economic starting points. Towards the end of the book, having

come no closer to limiting the "illimitable" city, he brackets out the problem of totality by personifying the two poles of particularity and abstraction in two mentalities, the Individualist who "sees his dead and his living as human beings", and the Theorist "who sees mankind only in the bulk" (SL 154, 152). These tendencies are irreconcilable – "the old Individualist and the man whose eyes look forward may very well confuse each other unanswerably" – and Ford takes refuge from the deadlock in documenting "the present of our times", the supply of "unceasing mortals to be interested in." (SL 175)

The division of labour – the basis of professional society – itself interfered with the project of totalisation. As Émile Durkheim noted in 1892, the specialist worker "need not embrace vast portions of the social horizon; it is sufficient that he perceive enough of it to understand that his actions have an aim beyond themselves."\textsuperscript{61} Ford’s chapter on "Work in London" is much concerned with the phenomenon of specialisation, and specifically with what Max Weber called the *stahltartes Gehäuse*, the "iron cage" in which subjects of capitalism are enmeshed: "that mighty cosmos of the modern economic order (which is bound to the technical and economic conditions of mechanical and machine production)."\textsuperscript{62} Ford cites the classic example of watch-making to illustrate the fact that "all work in London is almost of necessity routine work: the tendency to specialise in small articles, in small parts of a whole, insures that." This is true not only of workshops, but also of offices, where "a partner mentions the drift of a letter to a clerk, he dictates it to a shorthand-typewriter, she writes and addresses it, a boy posts it." (SL 87) Drawing on chance encounters with a railway signalman and the cashier of a bus company, Ford offers a vivid portrait of rationalisation, the division of labour under which "work itself becomes an endless monotony; there is no call at all made upon the special craftsman’s intellect that is in all the human race." (SL 87) His account echoes Marx’s description of industrial manufacture, in which “the individual himself is divided up, and transformed into the automatic motor of a detail operation".\textsuperscript{63}

The examples Ford gives of denatured labour continue the theme of fragmentation, the irreconcilability of part and whole. In a parodic image of totality that

\textsuperscript{61} Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 372.
\textsuperscript{62} Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2002), p. 120.
precisely echoes Weber, Ford describes how the signalman “spends dreadfully long hours, high up in a sort of cage of wood and glass, above the innumerable lines of shimmering rails just outside the dim cave of a London terminus. He works himself dog-tired, pulling levers that are constantly bright with the friction of his hands”. (SL 85) This ironic sketch of a technician dominated by technology is juxtaposed with an account of the signalman’s hobby, the construction of architectural models. “His ambition is to make a model of every cathedral in the country”. (SL 86) Ford astutely links the rise of specialised leisure activities to the rationalisation of labour, but there is also an implicit connection between the division of labour and the sense of alienation from the whole. Like Ford’s other example – a cashier who aspires to “cover, on his bicycle, every road of the United Kingdom” – the signalman’s hobby is a displaced image of totality, a surrogate for social coherence. (SL 86) Reduced to an “automatic motor” during work hours, the signalman constructs a replica of a knowable, completable England in his spare time. Ford’s intuition that the division of labour itself produces the characteristic modern sense of fragmentation brings *The Soul of London* into line with the tradition of humanist Marxist critique exemplified by Georg Lukács: as Lukács writes in *History and Class Consciousness*, “[t]he specialisation of skills leads to the destruction of every image of the whole.”

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**MR. APOLLO**

Ford brought the resources of the supernatural romance to bear on the problem of seeing London whole in *Mr. Apollo*, his 1908 fantasy of divine visitation. The novel will serve here to illustrate the continuity of Ford’s concerns, exemplifying his engagement with the sociological problem of wholeness in a work of fiction: published a year after *England and the English*, it deploys the insights of Ford’s social criticism in a fictional format, testing out strategies of representation for the “illimitable” city and questioning the possibility of seeing it whole. The city of *Mr. Apollo* is the teeming, impersonal metropolis of *The Soul of London*, its bewildering complexity embodied in an endlessly

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circulating population. "The street ... was so crowded with motor omnibuses that any aspect of it at all was impossible. ... the crowd, gentle, jostling, silent, prevented the possibility of any glances at the shop-fronts on the near side." (35) In The Soul of London Ford identifies "enormously increased size" and "change in our habits of locomotion" as signs of the times, and these factors epitomise unknowable London in Mr. Apollo. (SL 15) Mr. Todd, a conniving muscular Christian who appoints himself cicerone on Apollo's London visit, attempts to chasten the deity's will-to-know by enumerating an "array of ideas of quantity - of infinite and incomputable quantities": "He was intent on showing how never-ending this crowd was". (38) As well as being a cornucopia of commodities, London is, he proclaims, a city in transit: "the motor buses, the horse buses, the horse cabs, and the motor cabs carried people above ground; below ground a convenient tube carried them still more swiftly". (38) Todd is trying to intimidate Apollo with this sketch of a seething modern metropolis, hectoring the naivety of his quest for knowledge.

To Todd, Apollo's wish to understand the leviathan signifies an "impracticable point of view." (38) Ford's device of divine visitation engages with the thriving late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interest in understanding the urban poor, fuelled by Charles Booth's and Seebohm Rowntree's statistical studies and institutions like the Charity Organization Society. The London Sociological Society, of course, also emerged out of this pervasive late nineteenth-century concern with the "social problem": as Stefan Collini puts it, "[t]he sense of social crisis so widely commented upon in the 1880s gave added urgency to the search for such a science." In short, Apollo is a heavenly social researcher, a superhuman urban observer who combines Ford's incompatible traits of "impressionability" and "impersonality", transcending the opposition between concrete perception and synthetic knowledge. As he explains, "a god, though by his nature he is omniscient, yet he must have in him the capacity for experience. All knowledge is contained in him, yet the vicissitudes of fate and of mortality are, for him, as for you, inexhaustible." (118) Apollo's advantage over mortal


66 Collini, Liberalism and Sociology, p. 188.
observers is temporal: released from bondage to time, his serial impressions form a timeless whole. “Time has no existence for me” (31), he declares, gliding placidly from one encounter to the next, ruled, as he says, by “caprice.” (188) “I am here to experience certain things; these I can experience when and how I will.” (189) *Mr. Apollo* encodes the basic problem of *The Soul of London* as a mystery of faith, the impossible union of omniscience and the stream of impressions.

The supernatural romance theme of Apollo’s visit intersects with a layer of gritty naturalism in the portrayal of Alfred and Frances Milne, socialist intellectuals eking out a penurious existence on a teacher’s salary and odd bits of jobbing journalism. The exigent budget and squalid digs which delimit the Milnes’ lives are reminiscent of Leonard and Jackie Bast in *Howard’s End*; they are Ford’s attempt to recover a life of quiet desperation conducted on the edge of the abyss. This is literally the case for the Milnes, whose decrepit block of flats is situated opposite “the gaping vault” of a working-class tenement, represented as a dank citadel of cockney depravity. (206) In *Return to Yesterday* (1931) Ford recalls the anarchist Peter Kropotkin telling him to write about “simple and ordinary people”, an injunction he found compelling but hard to execute. “My subsequent difficulties have been technical. I always want to write about ordinary people. But it seems to be almost impossible to decide who are ordinary people – and then to meet them. All men’s lives and characteristics are so similar.” (RY 87) Although Alfred Milne, an ex-public schoolboy, is not statistically ordinary, his life nonetheless stands for the “innumerable”, his destiny shaped by prosaic and impersonal forces. The trope Ford uses to specify Milne’s ordinariness is *attrition*: unlike Apollo, Alfred Milne is emphatically time-bound, defined by gradual decay.

[B]y degrees, by little and little, in face of the mere infinite number of things that there were in the world, he had receded from the position of a militant, a harshly full-blooded atheist to that of a weary and gentle agnostic. He was not startled; he was not regretful; he accepted the change

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67 Mark Morrisson overestimates Milne’s proletarian credentials when he says he “teaches in and was educated by the Board School system”; in fact he went to Winchester. (96) Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), p. 28.
as he accepted the diminution of his youthful ideals. It was a part of the
unseen process that slowly and insensibly moulded his microscopic
destiny. (81)

The mechanism of this diminution is the city itself. Milne’s idealism is worn away by
sheer numerical vastness, his passion for teaching eroded by “the unnumbered bands of
noise-makers that so perpetually dulled the edges of his life”. (76) Alfred Milne’s attritive
destiny illustrates the anonymity of the modern city, “that oblivion”, as Ford writes in
The Soul of London, “that ‘being no more seen,’ that is, in matters human, the note of
London”. (SL 11) Ford offers a foil to this incremental naturalism in the Ruritanian
romance novels read by the young writer Arthur Bracondale, “in which motor-cars,
exiled princes, revolutions in German Grand Duchies and Bosnian Palace conspiracies
played the chief part” (263). Unlike these neo-feudal fantasies, Alfred Milne’s story
details a “microscopic destiny”, shaped by the sustained pressure of an “unseen process”
rather than climactic events.

Apollo embodies Ford’s credo of “Nihil humanum a me alienum puto”, showing
an impartial interest in every aspect of modern London. To Alfred Milne’s horror, this
indifferentism extends even to degraded popular culture: Apollo’s blithe tolerance of
Lord Aldington’s Daily Outlook – a cipher for Lord Northcliffe’s Daily Mail – compels
Milne to renounce his friendship. In The Soul of London Ford advocates just such a
liberal attitude to the modern city, informed by a consciousness of its latent antiquity:
“[w]e see terra-cotta ornamental excrescences, meaning nothing to us ... But to our
great grandchildren these excrescences will have meanings and associations”. (SL 171)
Admonishing the artist to suppress his desire to “sentimentalise over the picturesque”,
Ford insists that urban uglification – and its advertisements – must be taken in one’s
stride: “His heart may be – it ought to be – torn at the sight of great hoardings, raised for
the house-breakers, round narrow courts, old streets, famous houses ... But he ought to
be equally inspired with satisfaction because work is being done”. (SL xiv) Apollo’s
resemblance to this detached and universally interested artist is nowhere more apparent
than in his rapt contemplation of blinking electric logos on the London sky-line:
A fresh breeze came from the river; the letters of fire against the darkness, on the further shore, winked, blazed, and went out, in silent indefatigability, like portents uttering celestial warnings or appeals. Mr. Apollo sat down upon a bench that had at one end of it a woman huddled up beneath a mat of brown rags; he gazed at the sky-signs with interest and attention. (289)

Endowing garish modern consumerism with antique gravitas, Apollo exemplifies Ford’s ideal artist, refusing the conventional hierarchy of tradition and vulgarity, according equal dignity to every impression of modernity.

Apollo is not an uncritical portrayal of the ideal social observer, however. Just as The Soul of London displays a certain unease about the sociological project of seeing steadily and whole, Mr. Apollo probes the limitations of an ideally impersonal perspective: the corollary of Apollo’s universal interest is a psychopathic lack of compassion. This trait is most marked in Apollo’s implacable punishment of the odious Mr. Todd, whom he transforms into a bay tree without regard for the sensibility of his beleaguered wife. This comic subplot darkens into melodrama and Gothic horror in the second half of the novel, when Ford offers a lurid insight into Mrs. Todd’s distress: “What do you and what does he understand of the heart of a woman? ... How we live with these men that break our hearts while they live, and break our hearts when they die!” (269) Mr. Todd exchanges one vegetable state for another at this point, restored by Apollo to human form, but reduced to twitching catatonia. His sudden return is narrated as a ghastly apparition: catching sight of him, his daughter’s “eyes grew large with horror: she pointed a pallid hand, the arm extended and rigid, towards the window.” (269-70) This tonal shift into the uncanny makes explicit the monstrousness of Apollo’s impersonality. As Arthur Bracondale realises, godlike omniscience is alien to human sympathy: “it astonishes me that you haven’t enough knowledge of human nature to see it. You know so much.” (274) Apollo may have the desirable trait of universal curiosity, but his inability to sympathise with individuals makes him a monster. His meandering course through London leaves an escalating series of atrocities in its wake, beginning with the death of a policeman who looks too closely at his face, and culminating with the
summary mass murder of a whole working-class community, killed when Apollo razes
their slum housing to the ground. “And indeed, faint and from far below, there came the
shrilling of screams and of many voices.” (307) These moments of casual violence and
horror vividly express Ford’s doubts about the project of totality. Apollo’s divine
capacity to take an interest in everything seems to entail a certain anaesthesia, an inability
to feel pity.

Both the naturalistic and the romance strains of *Mr. Apollo* are concerned with
London’s “illimitable” nature. The figure of Alfred Milne expresses Ford’s sense of the
alienating impersonality of the modern city, comprising innumerable such “microscopic
destin[ies]” shaped by intractable economic forces. As he writes in *The Soul of London*,
the Londoner soon learns that “there are so very many others of as little import in the
scale of things as the catapult seller, the green fields, – and as himself.” (SL 6) The sheer
ordinariness of Milne’s predicament, and Ford’s interest in urban life as a process of
attrition rather than heroic action, foregrounds the oppressiveness of London’s vastness
for early twentieth-century observers. Apollo fulfils a utopian wish to master this
complexity without reducing it, taking an interest in each individual. His monstrous
indifference to human feelings, however, suggests that such a project may presuppose an
amputation of compassion. This pessimistic strain in Ford’s thinking about totality marks
an important difference from the discourse of the London Sociological Society; whereas
Hobhouse confidently proclaimed the goal of interest in all things human, Ford’s sense of
human finitude makes his account more tentative. Cataloguing the whole city would
require superhuman callousness as well as superhuman stamina; for those who, like
Milne, possess a social conscience, London’s vastness is crushing.

INTEREST AND PATHOS

In his classic 1903 account of “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, George Simmel
warned that treating a city like a village could be hazardous to one’s mental health.

If the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city should
be met by the same number of inner reactions as in the small town, in
which one knows almost every person he meets and to each of whom he has a positive relationship, one would be completely atomized internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition.  

Modern citizens perforce adopt a “negative type of social conduct”.

Durkheim also commented on this salient feature of modern cities, reasoning that “[c]ollective curiosity is keener as personal relations between individuals are more continuous and more frequent. Moreover, it is clear that they are proportionately rarer and shorter as each individual is in contact with a greater number of persons.” In the city, “the great source of attention, that of interest, is more or less completely wanting.”

Durkheim’s discussion of this negative conduct in terms of curiosity is especially pertinent to *The Soul of London*, which laments this lack of interest and attention even as it reiterates Simmel’s health warning:

An awakened sense of observation is in London bewildering and nerve-shattering, because there are so many things to see and because these things flicker by so quickly ... And these great crowds chill out of us the spirit of altruism itself, or make of that spirit a curse to us. Living in a small community we know each member of it. We can hope to help, or be interested in, each man and woman ... But that, in London, is hopeless. The most we can do is to like or dislike bodies of men. (SL 150)

Prefiguring the concerns of *Mr. Apollo*, Ford regrets the passing of the personal *polis*, contrasting the ideal of the Athenian “*agora*” — “the best of social units” — with the “mass of Corporations” that the city has become. (SL 149) (Apollo brings this antique interest in individuals to his modern sabbatical, horrifying Mr. Todd with his desire to know the “aspirations” of each London inhabitant.) (MA 36) Following the affect theorist Silvan Tomkis, I want to consider Ford’s keyword of *interest* as itself an affect, an

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70 Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 298.
innate response to novelty that motivates human behaviour: the tendency to seek out excitement, Tomkins argues, is a primary human motive. Tomkins proposes “interest-excitement” as a fundamental condition of being in the world, a sort of phenomenological glue that allows a series of impressions to be integrated into a cognitive whole. This affect of interest is crucial to Ford’s idea of community. London inhibits the ability to perceive particularity, suppressing interpersonal interest – “[i]t blunts, by its vastness, their peculiarities, and our interest it dulls” – but for those alive to “the present of our times” it affords “the solace of unceasing mortals to be interested in.” (SL 148, 175) Interest was also the touchstone of Ford’s method of composition: as we have seen, his research was structured affectively, confined to “only such things as interested him.” (SP xiv) Similarly, his aesthetic objective is to awaken “a Londoner here or there to an interest in the human aspects of his London”; a work of art must, “before all things, be interesting.” (SL xv-xvi)

Merely being interested in others seems at best a rather folksy take on social renewal, at worst a retreat into humanist nostalgia. I want to suggest, however, that Ford’s attention to this platitude of urban existence constituted a critique of sociological thinking, a kind of self-reflexive sociology. As Tomkins notes, Western science has tended to ignore the role of affect in scientific discovery, isolating cognitive achievements from their affective context, whereas learning, in his view, is underpinned by affect: “[t]here is a real question whether anyone may fully grasp the nature of any object when that object has not been perceived, wished for, missed, and thought about in love and in hate, in excitement and in apathy, in distress and in joy.”

71 Tomkins identifies nine “primary” affects – interest, enjoyment, surprise, fear, anger, distress, and, as we have seen, shame, contempt, and disgust. Without entering into his system in unnecessary detail, Tomkins’s theory differs from either a cognitive- or a drive-oriented explanation of affects in according relative autonomy to the “affect system”: “Affect is a loosely matched mechanism evolved to play a number of parts in continually changing assemblies of mechanisms.” Affects can variously determine conscious thought, or be determined by it. This fits well with Ford’s notion of interest in other people as a basic motivation because it allows for affects that are neither motivated by primary drives nor directed to obtain cognitive ends. “Affect is an end in itself, with or without instrumental behaviour.” E. Virginia Demos, ed., Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of S. Tomkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 51.


impressionistic sociology redresses this erasure of affect, reinstating, among other things, the place of embodied experience in social observation. Ford situates Hobhouse’s dictum of “Nothing that is human is foreign” in the most inimical context available: the modern city, where any expansion of interest, according to Simmel, exposes one to psychic harm. Even if the “awakened sense of observation” can be kept up, Ford writes, this alertness is a “curse”. Ford’s preoccupation with forms of apathy and habituation, on the one hand, and with interest as the basis of community, on the other, subjects the potentially unbounded scope of sociological inquiry to a searching practical interrogation. How can one get to know the city – let alone society itself – if urban survival requires apathy, aloofness and forgetting?

Habituation blocks the perception of London as a whole. Like Walter Benjamin, who argued that “technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training”, Ford sees the city as a matrix of technical competence, inscribed unconsciously on the urban body.74

Daily details will have merged, as it were, into his bodily functions, and will have ceased to distract his attention. [The Londoner] will have got over the habit of relying, in these things, upon personal contacts. He will have acquired an alertness of eye that will save him from asking his way. On his ‘Underground’ he will glance at a board rather than inquire of a porter; on ‘bus-routes he will catch instinctively, on the advancing and shapeless mass of colour and trade announcements, the small names of taverns, of Crosses, of what were once outlying hamlets; he will have in his mind a rough sketch map of that plot of London that by right of living in he will have made his own. (SL 8)

Not only the crowds, but also the technological complexity of the city – its modern “habits of locomotion” – reduce the capacity for sustained interest. In keeping with the physiological bias of impressionism, Ford’s phenomenology of urban life is alert to the embodied experience of the city, describing how its rhythms are assimilated to the

citizen's "bodily functions". This analysis points out a fundamental obstacle to seeing London whole: the need for its citizens to learn automatic programs, a process which stymies Ford's ideal of an "awakened sense of observation".

The Soul of London is a self-reflexive record of social inquiry, registering the problem of sustaining interest in the city, as well as the pathos that awakened interest can produce. Impressionism, that is, refuses to separate visual impressions from emotional ones, situating the attempt to see London whole in its affective context. As we have seen, this blurring of the boundary between mind and body seems endemic to formulations of impressionism as far back as the empirical philosophy of David Hume. Hume's psychology notoriously conflated feeling and thinking: the Treatise distinguished impressions from ideas by "degrees of force and liveliness" rather than kind, a distinction which has, as Stephen Everson observes, "proved recalcitrant to analysis and elucidation - and has as a result seemed to many to be both false and carelessly executed."75 Like Tomkins, Hume acknowledges the role of feelings in intellectual endeavour, famously subordinating "reason" to "passion", and noting of his own work that "I feel I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy". Reasoning itself is "nothing but a species of sensation", and "the imagination and affections have close union together": "no object", Hume argued, "is presented to the senses, nor image form'd in the fancy, but what is accompany'd with some emotion or movement of spirits proportion'd to it".76

Ford's London impressions are of this impure kind, seen and felt simultaneously. "London is before all things an incomparable background", its images taking on "a sudden consonance with his mood, of overwhelming and hardly comprehensible joy, of overwhelming and hardly comprehensible pain". (SL 27) The remembered "cloud of little experiences, of little personal impressions" is organised emotionally, imbued by "moments of stress and anguish" with "significances so tremendous and meanings so poignant". (SL 175) The book itself is designed to reintroduce affect to the public sphere, to transmit "pleasure, or that counterpart of pleasure which is pain" along with its images. (SL xv-xvi) The most powerful stimulus of urban pathos, however, is the sense of

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fragmentation, the inability to see London whole. Haslam has inferred the pertinent Fordian doctrine here: “[i]n order to really know one’s fictional – and actual – surroundings, one must be made to suffer by them”. In a penetrating reappraisal of The Good Soldier, she notes that Ford deploys a device of “stubborn non-closure” to lodge the novel irremovably in the reader’s consciousness: because the characters are denied tragic resolution by the opacity of their story, “guarantee[ing] incompleteness”, the “matter of the book holds onto its animated existence. ... Ford has found the perfect way to make his novels live, and be fragmentingly true”.77 I would suggest that Ford’s impressionism produces a similar effect when its object is the fragmented city, translating the suffering, or at least the pathos, of “stubborn non-closure” from an epistemological to a spatial register.

Once again, “habits of locomotion” figure prominently in this distinctively urban experience: the glimpse of a steam crane from the roof of an electric tram inspires sadness by its very incoherence. “Then the outlines grew tremulous, it all vanished with a touch of that pathos like a hunger that attaches to all things of which we see the beginnings or the middle courses without knowing the ends.” (SL 40) Similarly, a train journey is a rich source of unfinished narratives:

I looked down upon black and tiny yards that were like the cells in an electric battery. In one, three children were waving their hands and turning up white faces to the train; in the next, white clothes were drying. A little further on a woman ran suddenly out of a door; she had a white apron and her sleeves were tucked up. A man followed her hastily, he had red hair, and in his hand a long stick. We moved on, and I have not the least idea whether he was going to thrash her, or whether together they were going to beat a carpet. ... Incidents even so definite as these are more or less the exception, but the constant succession of much smaller happenings that one sees, and that one never sees completed, gives to looking out of train

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77 Haslam, Fragmenting Modernism: Ford Madox Ford, the Novel and the Great War, pp. 42, 61, 60.
windows a touch of pathos and dissatisfaction. It is akin to the sentiment ingrained in humanity of liking a story to have an end. (SL 61)

“It arises”, Ford adds, “out of the innate altruism that there is in us all, or out of the universal desire ‘to know.’” (SL 62) Nick Freeman notes that this scene marks a “change in sensibility from the comforting certainties of many other London writers”, prompting open-ended reflection rather than determinate conclusions. It is the “touch of pathos”, however, that most strikingly differentiates Ford from the sociologists. The impressionist visual specificity of this passage – the tucked up sleeves, the red hair – encodes the overwhelming contingent detail of city life. Roland Barthes would call this technique the “reality effect”: undetermined narrative flotsam, irresolvable into the symmetry of plot. Ford uses this resource of impressionist fiction to assert not only the primacy of qualitative experience – as Jameson has argued of Conrad’s impressionism – but also the primacy of pathos, the affective level of social perception. Ford’s narrative altruism – “liking a story to have an end” – is trained on individuals: unlike the cognitive altruism of the sociologists, it is an awakened interest in people, and hence an affect. Much of the impressionist pathos of The Soul of London derives from the thwarting of this affect of interest, the alienating power of the London crowd to “chill out of us the spirit of altruism itself”. Mr. Apollo’s detached curiosity seems to be an attempt to think through this problem: to sustain interest in the London crowd, one would have to be emotionally numb.

The complexity embodied in the modern city was an essential condition of professional society: as society grows more complex, its departments become matters for expert knowledge, rather than general understanding. Ford’s England and the English, like the London Sociological Society, eschews the prevailing trend towards specialisation in various ways. First, it polemically collapses the social roles of artist and scientific observer that, Williams argues, had become two separate specialisations by the turn of

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the century. Ford’s technique of *exaggeration*, a muted form of satire that irritated the *New Age* reviewer of *The Spirit of the People*, is presented as a self-conscious technique designed to transcend expert coteries, and stimulate public thought and discussion: impressionism is a form of expertise oriented toward the public sphere. The *New Age* review would have pleased Ford, we might suppose, because provoking such controversy was one of his stated rhetorical purposes. This engagement with public issues – the orientation of impressionism to a public sphere – obliges us to re-evaluate literary impressionism in relation to the non-literary discourses with which it engaged. The turbulence and incoherence apparent at the London Sociological Society’s meetings provide a valuable context for Ford’s exact science of literature, indicating the indefinite nature of both categories, at least as they pertained to social knowledge.

Ford’s impressionist social criticism, as an attempt to grasp totality without recourse to expertise, bears the burden of professional society. Jonathan Rose has suggested that “[t]he undivided Edwardians achieved inner wholeness by affirming unity everywhere; but in so doing, they sacrificed philosophical integrity.”\(^8\) Ford’s profound sense of the pain involved in totalising society, or, alternatively, the image in *Mr. Apollo* of the psychopathic disposition such a project would entail, gives the lie to this interpretation. Ford’s impressionist account of urban experience, which implies, in its sensitivity to affect, an embodied account of social observation, is fully conscious of the psychic costs that attend the attempt to imagine the whole, in a way that the London Sociological Society was not. In 1908, a year after the publication of *England and the English*, Ford found himself in a position to implement the anti-specialist ideals behind his social criticism on a larger scale, as editor of the *English Review*. In considering this seminal modernist journal in my final chapter, it will be necessary to place Ford’s impressionism more explicitly in relation to the fragmented public sphere, and to develop further his response to the encroachment of specialisation on public culture.

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CHAPTER 6

Ford’s *English Review*: literature, specialisation, and the public sphere

Ford’s first four editorials for the *English Review*, a series collectively entitled “The Functions of the Arts in the Republic”, draw on the ideology of professionalism to formulate a defence of art. As we have seen, the professional ideal enshrined service to society as the justification of property, emphasising the duty of each individual to promote the good of the collective: in R.H. Tawney’s idealised definition, a profession is “a body of men who carry on their work in accordance with rules designed to enforce certain standards for the better protection of its members and for the better service of the public.”¹ This ideal of service provides the frame of reference for Ford’s introductory editorials, which assess literature, drama, music and the “plastic arts” for their social utility. Ford’s analysis of the artist’s “utilitarian function in the Republic” sounds, indeed, very like the paraphrase of the professional ethos which he offers in *The Spirit of the People*: “The professional man or the artist, on the other hand, according to [French legal opinion], devotes his chief endeavours not to the making of money, but to the advancement of his science or art, a thing beneficial to the Republic, outside the accidents of its marketability.”² (SP 128)

But although Ford adopts professional ideology to conceptualise the social function of art, there is a theme in his editorials of antagonism to the precondition of professional society: specialisation. The review’s intervention in the public sphere was shaped by a plea for generalism and the reintegration of public culture: whereas “the specialist ... addresses himself to an aristocracy, since he addresses himself to the

instructed”, Ford pitched his editorials to the “uninstructed reader”, and questioned the “general suspicion of all generalised thought abroad in the land to-day”. Just as England and the English had fashioned a voice between literature and science – an affective sociology – so the English Review constructed a catholic forum, combining established writers and new talents, privileging literature but incorporating significant political commentary, and addressing a non-specialist readership.

An instructive parallel to Ford’s ambivalence about professionalism is provided by the contemporary professionalization of literary criticism, which was complicated by pleas for humanist accessibility from within the academy itself. As Carol Atherton has shown, early professors of literature such as Walter Raleigh (Oxford), W.P. Ker (University College, London) and A.C. Bradley (Liverpool, Glasgow, and, as Professor of Poetry, Oxford) elevated “personal over professional authority” and “attached little importance to the methods of scholarship that were being developed in other disciplines of knowledge.” In 1897 Raleigh compared scholarship to arrivisme, complaining that the scholar, “[h]aving heaped up knowledge as a successful tradesman heaps up money, ... is apt to believe that his wealth makes him free of the company of letters, and a fellow-craftsman of the poets.” Ker relegated historical research to a secondary role in his inaugural lecture at University College in 1889:

The historical theorizings about environments and all the rest might disappear and leave still the essential valuable part of modern criticism. Not to confound things different; to reckon every author as one individual, with his own particular story to tell, his own individual manner, his own value – that is the essence of it. Not to judge abstractedly, but to see concretely, is the end and aim of it.

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4 Carol Atherton, Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1880-2002 (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 80-1.


As we have seen, this was the very outlook of individual diversity prescribed by Wells to the London Sociological Society, and endorsed by Ford in *England and the English*. When Ford published a selection of his *English Review* editorials as *The Critical Attitude* in 1911, he dedicated the volume to W.P. Ker, whom he may have met through Violet Hunt. Ker’s rejection of scientific methods in literary criticism, belittlement of cumbersome “historical theorizing” and emphasis on “see[ing] concretely” above copious erudition, must have seemed an appropriate touchstone for Ford’s own anti-specialist criticism.

From the review’s inception, there was a tension between Ford’s stated aim of reaching the uninstructed reader and the *English Review*’s commitment to elite literary culture. Joseph Conrad, for one, was clear in his mind that it would be nothing if not uncommercial, anxiously instructing Ford to shun the American publisher S.S. McClure, for fear of “debasing … those ideals, which, on your own declaration, were to guide your editorship of the Review.” (CL 4: 221) F.R. Leavis looked back on the review as a beachhead of minority culture, and Malcolm Bradbury argues that it targeted a coterie audience. An advertisement for the review in *The New Age* seems to confirm this interpretation, noting snottily that “in the present state of public taste the Review cannot be expected, to make any wide popular appeal”. However, this sentiment may have been tailored to *The New Age*’s self-consciously progressive audience, and Ford’s orientation to the “uninstructed reader” suggests that he hoped for a wide readership, even though the initial print run of 5,000 quickly came to seem optimistic. Unlike, say, T.S. Eliot at the *Criterion*, Ford’s editorial tone is more pedagogic than dogmatic: his survey of contemporary fiction, for example, sets out to explain “the difference between the writer of the commercial book and the writer of a book which shall be a work of art” – an objective *Criterion* subscribers would have found

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8 *The New Age*, 1 April 1909, p. 33.
9 Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, vol. 1, p. 252. Saunders records that a letter from E. Olive Thomas to H.G. Wells put the circulation of the first two numbers at 2,000. (551)
patronising. Ford’s tone is more consistent with an address to a wide readership, an attempt, as Mark Morrisson argues, “to bring modernist aesthetics to bear upon Edwardian public culture” rather than “cater to a small elite”. The proviso of the New Age advertisement – “in the present state of public taste” – connects, I would suggest, with a utopian vein in Ford’s thinking about the mass market that would surface again in his editorial for December 1909, “The Passing of the Great Figure”. The spread of cheap classics, he speculated, “is creating a million-fold of new readers, it is creating readers that never before existed. And these readers ... will go on to demand in a thousand places the works inspired by the older and finer spirit.” In this light, the Review can be seen as a utopian project, the kind of literary journal the common reader would read if the common reader read literary journals.

Morrisson argues that Ford aimed to refurbish the fragmented Edwardian public sphere. Like Lawrence Rainey, Morrisson borrows this term from Jürgen Habermas to signify a forum of rational critical discourse in which matters of common import are deliberated publicly. This environment, Habermas argues, was catalysed by the unitary middle-class reading public of the eighteenth century, but degenerated under the pressures of industrial capitalism. For Habermas the contemporary public sphere is an enfeebled epigone, compromised by the ubiquity of the culture industry: society goes from a “culture-debating” to a “culture-consuming” public. Whatever the validity of this pessimistic narrative, one important connotation of Habermas’s public sphere for Ford’s notion of literature’s “function” is its genesis in the eighteenth-century public for fiction. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Habermas argues, “[t]he relations between author, work, and public changed. They became intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals who were psychologically interested in what was

10 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: English Literature of To-day," p. 481.
12 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure," p. 110.
14 For a concise account of this concept, see Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," in Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader, ed. Steven Seidman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).
‘human,’ in self-knowledge, and in empathy.”¹⁶ This idea of literature as a forum for reflection on “humanity” – an interest that all readers held in common – and this model of active reading, as an act of community rather than the consumption of a commodity, resembles, I would suggest, Ford’s hope that the English Review would “awaken thought”, and his belief that “[t]he province of Art ... is the bringing of humanity into contact with humanity”.¹⁷

Contradicting Levenson, who reads Ford’s aesthetics as a retreat into subjectivism, Morrisson interprets the English Review as “a deeply optimistic exercise”, “an attempt to shore up what Ford saw as the fragmentation of a culture” by “form[ing] a meaningful link in the public mind between the ‘purely’ literary and the political and cultural article”.¹⁸ This places the English Review in line with another important vehicle of early modernism, A.R. Orage’s New Age (1907-1922), which critics such as Wallace Martin and, more recently, Ann Ardis and Carol Atherton, have seen as a holistic enterprise, integrating political and aesthetic writing into a single outlook. As Ardis shows, Orage combated the compartmentalisation of literature and politics, challenging any assumption that “the economic struggle can be maintained without affecting the canons that govern the writing of books, the painting of pictures, the preaching of sermons, and even the fabric and texture of religion”.¹⁹ Wallace Martin describes The New Age as an attempt to “mediate between specialized fields of knowledge and public understanding”,²⁰ and Orage himself described The New Age as “some neutral ground where intelligences may meet on equal terms”;²¹ Ford, similarly, proposed the English Review as an “attempt to form some such meeting-place” for the “English man of

¹⁶ Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, p. 50.
²¹ Quoted in Ardis, Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922, p. 145.
Ford’s English Review provides a parallel to Ford’s concerns about fragmentation and specialisation.

Ford’s vision of the English Review as a catholic forum rather than the vehicle of a movement: is another correspondence with Orage’s program at The New Age. Bradbury notes the review’s risky “split personality”, bringing distinguished Edwardian authors (such as Henry James, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad and W.H. Hudson) into contact with the younger generation of budding modernists (Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis and E.M. Forster).\textsuperscript{23} Wells and James, mythic antagonists of the Realism-Modernism debate, appeared side by side in the first number. As Saunders puts it, the “act of mediation … was the mark of the English Review, with its extraordinary synthesis of established talent and the unknown young.”\textsuperscript{24}

This, then, is one level of Ford’s adverse response to specialisation: the attempt to resolve distant sectors of the cultural scene and also, as Morrissom suggests, to combine significant new literature with political commentary. Morrissom argues that “Ford’s goal for the English Review was to cleanse the dominant public sphere of … commercialism’s undermining of a critical press and the increasing public power of competing private interests”, restoring “social and cultural cohesion”.\textsuperscript{25} I also see loss of cohesion as the general background for Ford’s project, but I situate this anxiety about the public sphere in relation to the culture of expertise. The following section takes Ford’s English Review editorials as a departure point, but I will also consider the antipathy to professional history expressed in an early essay, “Creative History and the Historic Sense”; my intention is to situate the editorials in relation to Ford’s consistent opposition to specialisation, and defence of a universally accessible public culture.

\textsuperscript{24} Saunders, Ford Madox Ford, vol. 1, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{25} Morrissom, The Public Face of Modernism, p. 21.
HISTORICAL NOVELS

The novelist, Ford wrote in 1934, occupies a "really proud position as historian of his own time". (IN 199) In his maiden editorial for the *English Review*, Ford took the opportunity of praising Henry James’s New York Edition as an exemplary assertion of this historical function, harnessing, in the process, James’s prestige to the review's *prise de position*. “The appearance of this great body of imaginative effort – definitely settling the form of a life-work of an author so single-minded in the effort to express” is worthy of public recognition, he writes. “For the record of the events assimilated by the human mind to-day moulds the event of to-morrow, and the nearer the record come to registering the truth … the more near it comes to being a historic expression, the more near it comes to being a historic event itself.”26 Ford uses James here to exemplify the review’s attitude to literature, to define the function of the arts in the republic: James’s fiction, in its capacity as contemporary history, itself becomes an agency in the destiny of the nation. As it happened, when Ford collected and expanded his first four *English Review* editorials as the second chapter of *The Critical Attitude* (1911), he erased this topical allusion, replacing James’s name with fiction in the abstract: “*this* great body of imaginative effort" becomes “*any* great body”. (My emphasis.) (CA 31)

This bibliographic minutia illustrates how Ford’s critical writings were enmeshed in the literary field, subject to its calendar of shifting vectors: the momentous event of James’s collected edition presented itself both as an enterprise worthy of patronage, and a suitable reference point for defining his own editorial project (James’s “The Jolly Corner” appeared in the same issue). More importantly, however, recovering the reference to James enriches the significance of what Michael Levenson has termed Ford’s “civic realism”, his idea that literature is socially useful as contemporary history.27 James himself had arrogated this function to the novelist in “The Art of Fiction”, writing that

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To represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men, is the task of either writer [historian or novelist], and the only difference that I can see is, in proportion as he succeeds, to the honour of the novelist, consisting as it does in his having more difficulty in collecting his evidence, which is so far from being purely literary. 28

Conrad endorsed James’s promotion of the novel to the status of history in his 1905 appreciation, also locating the primary difference in the matter of sources:

[His] claim cannot be contested ... Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting – on second-hand impression. (NLL 17)

As it happens, the means of “collecting his evidence” and the relationship between historians and “documents”, particularly hand-written ones, had been recently transformed by the late-nineteenth-century professionalization of history, which “involved a greater attention to the sources of historical evidence” and the “institutionalisation of archival and source material”. 29 Conrad, perhaps, was thinking of this new methodology when he chided “the pride of documentary history” in A Personal Record. (PR 15) By differentiating novelists and historians on the basis of “evidence”, James and Conrad engaged with the controversy over professional history, pushing the novel into the public space vacated by the new academic researchers. Modern historiography had withdrawn from the public sphere by poring over “second-hand impression[s]”; literary impressionism, by implication, had not.

Ford’s excitement about the New York Edition as a “historical expression”, then, gained additional force from the recent transformation of professional historiography. Ford addressed this transformation explicitly in his editorial for October 1909. Whereas the literary “rendering of life ... interests us because it excites our curiosity”, the “historical work of late years” has dealt in “assemblages of facts presented in an utter baldness of manner”.30 Ford views the modern academy with horror as a self-perpetuating machine for Gradgrindian research, a “system calculated to turn out, not educated men who will write great books, but specialists who will go on discovering documents”, and who will in turn form committees to entrust more “historic books to the hands of these specialists.”31 This degeneration from “educational” to “instructional” history has come about because the writing of such works has fallen into the hands of the schoolmaster – into the hands of the specialist ... The historic book of to-day exactly shadows the attitude of the modern University towards history. There is no particular attempt to awaken an historic sense, but enormous efforts to secure a meticulous knowledge of a small period are encouraged.32

By contrast, awakening the historic sense, or at least “awaken[ing] thought”, was the raison d’être of Ford’s review: Ford had specified this to be the artist’s “utilitarian function in the Republic” in his inaugural editorial – the one in which he saluted James’s collected edition – and repeats the idea in this same October editorial: “the business of the artist is to awaken thought in the unthinking.”33 In Ford’s view, this “attitude of the modern University towards history” has a pernicious effect on public culture: professional historians aggravate the fragmentation of the public sphere, which only artists have the charisma to unify. “[T]he artist should consider himself writing for the

uninstructed man *bonae voluntatis*, the man of good will, but “[t]o this wideness of appeal, to this largeness of sympathy, the specialist can never hope to attain”. ³⁴ In addition to his role of contemporary historian, then, the artist has a further implicit function in Ford’s editorials, as a unifying voice in the public sphere.

The *logic of practice* implicit in Ford’s attitude towards professional history and his idea of the “historic sense” was shaped by his own trajectory in the literary field. Saunders observes that on the basis of Ford’s published work in 1898 – fairy stories, poetry, art criticism, a major biography and a novel – “it would not have been possible to guess what kind of writer he would become”, although his unpublished stories show him turning towards fiction.³⁵ By 1902, Ford had still not specialised: his collaboration with Conrad had cemented his identity as a novelist, but he continued to divide his energies with other projects, principally archival research for a biography of Henry VIII. The life was never written, however: in *Return to Yesterday* Ford recounts how he arrived with his synopsis at the publisher’s office only moments after another biographer, A.F. Pollard, had been commissioned for the same project. But for this fatality, Ford muses, “I daresay I should have become finally a country-gentleman-historian.” (RY 131) Ford’s playful self-reference in the pseudonymously published *The Simple Life Limited* would seem to confirm his divided ambitions: “Mr Ford Madox Hueffer”, he observes blandly, is “an author esteemed by the Lifers as an authority upon the habits of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.” (SLL 55) Alluding to himself as an historical authority rather than a novelist, Ford self-mockingly fulfils a wish to be respected as a scholar; his historical erudition figured prominently in his professional sense of self.

As Saunders notes, Ford’s study of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1902) already manifests his interest in a poetics of history, and *Romance* had sprung from a historical *donnée* encountered in the British Museum.³⁶ But it was Pollard’s action that resulted indirectly in Ford’s most highly acclaimed historical novels, *The Fifth Queen* trilogy (1906–8), and also prompted his most systematic early reflection on the relationship between history and fiction: a response to a review of Pollard’s rival biography, written in 1903 or 1904. The essay “Creative History and the Historic Sense” plainly states

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Ford’s objection to the “powerful & industrious school of ‘scientific’ historians, a comparatively new growth in England”, lamenting their pedantry.\textsuperscript{37} The communication of historical research should be “in technique a work of fiction”; indeed, “in their really higher manifestations History & Fiction are one ... Fiction indeed, so long as it is not written with a purpose, is Contemporary History & History is the same thing as the Historic Novel, as long as it is inspired with the Historic Sense”.\textsuperscript{38} This assimilation of history and fiction was diametrically opposed to the agenda of academic historians, epitomised by Mandell Creighton, sometime editor of the \textit{English Historical Review}, in 1882: “I am afraid that I regard history as a branch of science, not of novel writing.”\textsuperscript{39} Ford also aired his views in conversation: R.A. Scott-James, an early favourable reviewer of Ford’s work and literary editor of the \textit{Daily News}, recalled that

He assured me (with perhaps characteristic exaggeration) that he had read all the historical material that was available till his mind was saturated with it, and then put it aside to let his imagination play on the subject; that such a method had results far more true to history and to life than the method of a plodding chronicler who set about his task as if he were writing a blue-book.\textsuperscript{40}

Ford’s essay and his table-talk present the claim of James’s “The Art of Fiction” in a more systematic form, prefiguring Conrad’s essay on James and Ford’s own first editorial for the \textit{English Review}: fiction is a valid form of historical knowledge, the history of the present. The \textit{logic of practice} making this thesis so urgent in Ford’s case, however, must have involved the need to redeem his own historical research in an irregular form, as historical novels. Ford’s essay is, at some level, an apologia for the position he found himself in after his biography was aborted.

\textsuperscript{38} Ford, “Creative History and the Historic Sense,” p. 13.
\textsuperscript{39} Quoted in Heyck, \textit{The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{40} R.A. Scot-James, “Ford Madox Ford When He Was Hueffer,” \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} 57 (1958): p. 238.
Engaging polemically with professional historians in “Creative History and the Historic Sense”, Ford self-consciously uses the methods of fiction to argue his case. Refuting Goldwin Smith’s description of Henry VIII as a “tiger”, he offers a vivid, sympathetic reconstruction of Henry’s psychology:

to have been buried deep in the very belly of the events, to have trembled for one’s throne, for one’s dynasty, one’s land, one’s personal honour & very certainly for one’s soul, to have been certain of only one thing ... that there was no man one could trust: all that must have meant a strain constant, increasing & maddening.\textsuperscript{41}

“The fact is”, he concluded, “that any account of Henry & his times must be a pathologic one.”\textsuperscript{42} Ford presumably means psychopathology, but as the mounting plangency of his diagnosis of Henry’s psychic strain suggests, “pathologic” also signifies a science of the emotions. Ford made full use of his Tudor pathology in \textit{The Fifth Queen} (1906-8). His keen sense of Henry as a “tragic figure” is embodied in the character of Katharine Howard, who also has flashes of compassionate intuition concerning the King: “it seemed to her suddenly that he was a very pitiful man – a man who could do nothing; and one who, as Throckmorton had said, was nothing but a doubt.”\textsuperscript{43} (FQ 190) (Ford suggested in his essay that Henry’s character was defined by scepticism and paranoia.) Because of its milieu of political intrigue, psychological hypotheses form a major part of the trilogy’s action. Thomas Cromwell’s sure grasp of the King’s nature – “‘His Highness is always hot o’nights ... It is in his nature so to be. But by morning the German princes shall make him afraid again’” (FQ 34) – is a crucial weapon of his “kingcraft”, and the spy Lascelles earns Cromwell’s respect by an astute analysis of the King’s mentality. (FQ 275-6) Ford perceived in 1903/4 that this power to pathologise the past was a way of distinguishing the historical novel from other forms of history, deploying the technique in his argument with Smith. \textit{The Fifth Queen}, a redemption of cultural capital (research), is plotted so as to optimise this resource, implementing the principles of “Creative History” Ford had

\textsuperscript{41} Ford, “Creative History and the Historic Sense,” p. 9.
\textsuperscript{42} Ford, “Creative History and the Historic Sense,” pp. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{43} Ford, “Creative History and the Historic Sense,” p. 9.
developed in response to Pollard’s biography. As well as its thick cultural detail, it displays Ford’s peculiarly literary use of his research in its central and self-conscious concern with psychological hypothesis. And as with England and the English, Ford offers sensitivity to affect—“pathology”—as a supplement to scientific research.

Ford’s December 1909 editorial on “The Passing of the Great Figure” is also animated by the reaction against specialism. The very disappearance of “great figures”—universally recognisable personalities—is related to the diversification of the public: “amongst those who are distinctively specialists”, Ford discovers, there exist only local celebrities. “Thus, a scientist would give you Sir William Crookes; a person interested in international matters might suggest His Majesty the King.”44 (Only Joseph Chamberlain, whom Ford associates with jingoism, is known to everyone.) Ford’s research method in this article is a somewhat patronising analysis of a music hall act—“it is in places of popular entertainment, alone, that the pulse of the unthinking can be felt”—whose impersonations of public figures are used to gauge the degree of their fame.45 As this method suggests, the lost “great figure[s]” of the title are as much celebrities as they are moral authorities, and the burden of Ford’s analysis is the fragmentation of the (supposedly) unified Victorian public, as well as the demise of “priestcraft and revealed religion”.46 Victorian sages had possessed “a certain extraneous faculty—the faculty of appeal”, which enabled them to “make a great deal of noise apart from the actual work they got through”; to appeal, unlike Sir William Crookes, beyond the ambit of their specialised function.47 This appeal is no longer possible, owing, in part, to a public prejudice against generalists: “the general thinker—the man whose speculations cover wide fields—is regarded with suspicion by the world ... we will listen to none but specialists.” Specialism militates against great figures. At this point, however, Ford comes upon an ambivalence in his attitude to specialisation: “From one point of view this is a good thing. It means to say that if the public has not yet learned to detect the charlatan it has at least progressed sufficiently far to suspect facile workmanship.”48

46 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure," p. 104.
47 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure," p. 103.
country where, as Ford complained in 1911, “a person talking about the technique of a book is laughed to scorn”, this is a promising development. (AL 293) Ford ends by positing a “finer specialist”, who has remained independent of syndicates and limited companies, and hoping that “there may rise up a great many of finer specialists, each one of whom will be a Great Figure.” Ford’s regret at the fragmented public sphere turns to qualified approval of the specialist when he considers his own precious value of “workmanship”.49

MAKE IT INTERESTING

This ambivalence about specialisation – respect for expertise but anxiety about esotericism – is mirrored in Ezra Pound’s first major prose piece in an English magazine, “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris”, a series of articles and translations appearing in The New Age from 30 November 1911 to 22 February 1912. Pound’s essay offers another perspective on the resistance to specialisation among early modernists, whilst his subsequent divergence from Ford’s idea of a vital public sphere usefully points up the specificity of Ford’s position within modernist culture. Ford had published Pound’s “Sestina: Altaforte” in the English Review in June 1909 – Pound’s first verse publication in England – and he and Pound became companions-in-arms in literary London, Pound dominating the tennis parties hosted by Ford and Violet Hunt at courts across the road from the English Review office at South Lodge.50 Levenson has shown how Ford’s and Pound’s aesthetics advanced in lockstep in the avant guerre, before diverging sharply in February 1914 with the publication of Pound’s “The New Sculpture” in The Egoist. This essay signalled a shift in his thinking “from a social justification for art to a view of art as a willed assault on society”, and marked his abandonment of civic realism.51 Ford’s influence is apparent in “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris”, which addresses the same defects of professional historiography he had identified in his English Review editorials and in the essay on “Creative History”. Pound claims that “scholarship has erred in presenting

49 Ford, “The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure,” p. 110.
all detail as if of equal import”, echoing Ford’s remark that “no collection of facts and no tabulation of figures can give us any sense of proportion”.52 “The drudgery and minutiae of method”, Pound wrote, “concern only the scholar. But when it comes to presenting matter to the public, to the intelligent, over-busy public, bonae voluntatis, there are certain forms of civility, consideration and efficiency to be considered.”53 Pound uses Ford’s favourite Latin tag, bonae voluntatis, to echo the opinion Ford expressed in “Creative History” that the “Scientific Historian is a private worker”, but “the moment he emerges from these retreats it is his duty to be a creative artist”, to “above all let it be interesting”.54 As its title suggests, “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris” outlines a project of reintegration, a way of making the research of scattered specialists available to the “intelligent, over-busy public”. Pound counterposes an alternative technique – a “‘New Method in Scholarship’” – to the professional historian’s, in order to present the fruits of his own research in Romance languages with greater “efficiency”: “[t]he artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it.”55

As A. Walton Litz and Lawrence Rainey observe, “Osiris” is written in the “vocabulary of efficiency”, sounding a “general note of professionalism”.56 What is important to note here about Pound’s essay is the attempt to reconcile this professional tone with a principle of publicity. The artist is no less expert than the professional historian, but he has the additional power of making his expertise accessible to the public. Durkheim had defended the division of labour as the basis of “organic” solidarity, arguing that specialized workers were more acutely conscious of their involvement in a web of interdependent functions.57 Pound deploys a version of this argument to explain how experts could communicate beyond the boundaries of their discipline: “every man who does his own job really well has a latent respect for every man who does his own job

53 Pound, “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris: A Rather Dull Introduction,” p. 44.
really well; this is our lasting bond”. Mutual respect for expertise allows for understanding between different kinds of specialist: “he gets his audience the moment he says something so intimate that it proves him the expert.”58 Pound suggests a way of resolving Ford’s esteem for specialist “workmanship” with his ideal of a unified public sphere (at least within the professional class). The latent elitism in this position becomes overt, however, in 1914, when Pound’s kindly concern for “presenting matter to the public, to the intelligent, over-busy public” melts away. By the time of “The Audience”, a column published in Poetry in October, he is using the trope of the expert in a more Wellsian fashion to belabour the democratic ideal: “I ask the efficient man in any department of life. Can we have no great inventors without a great audience for inventors? Had Curie a great audience? Had Ehrlich for his bacilli?”59 If, as Levenson says, “The New Sculpture” signals Pound’s break with Ford’s civic realism, then his “Essay in Constructive Criticism” – a satire of Ford that appeared along with “The New Sculpture” in The Egoist for 16 February 1914 – is part of the same rupture, a more personal and affectionate expression of Pound’s differences with his mentor. Given Pound’s bitter revilement of “the mass, the half-educated simpering general, the semi-noisseur, the some-times collector” in “The New Sculpture”, it is no surprise that “Constructive Criticism” lampoons Ford’s ideals of democratic art – or rather, golf: as Saunders explains, Pound “impersonates Ford trying to write a sporting page.”60 “[G]olfers get jolly narrow-minded and get into clubs and pay no attention to the great mass of the people”, opines the Fordian speaker: “my point is that golfers ought to quit playing golf that is only appreciated by golfers.”61 In 1911, when he was attacking the esoteric labours of academic historians and propounding audience-oriented expertise,

60 Saunders, Ford Madox Ford, vol. 1, p. 344.
Pound may not have found this opinion so funny, but by 1914 he had given up on art for the people.

Pound's theoretical breach with Ford points up a fault-line separating Ford from received ideas about modernist technique. Most readers will see Pound's fetishisation of technique as a distinctively modernist gesture, although we are now more inclined to read it as one of self-fashioning. As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane wrote in the lead essay to their influential anthology *Modernism 1890 – 1930*, "[o]ne of the word's associations is with the coming of a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life."\(^{62}\) The formalist critic Mark Schorer, whose "Technique as Discovery" is an important document in the post-war interpretation of Modernism-as-Technique, inducted Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915) into the pantheon of technicians in 1949, reading it as "a major lesson of all classic art: from the very delimitation of form arises the exfoliation of theme."\(^{63}\) It is no less customary to link this frenzy of technical experimentation to an upsurge in hard-to-read texts. "Difficulty is perhaps the most obvious characteristic of modernism", observes Cedric Watts, and it was Conrad's "modernistic innovations [which] made his work difficult".\(^{64}\) The locus classicus of this modernist myth is Eliot's diktat in 1921 that poetry must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.\(^{65}\)

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According to David Trotter, Eliot “wanted to make the novel possible again by instilling into it a stricter form ... This tendency in modernist theory and practice might be thought of, by analogy with Nietzsche’s will-to-power and will-to-life, as a will-to-literature.”

Ford’s definition of technique, however, broke with this tendency, seeking to reconcile formal experimentation with his goal of reaching the “uninstructed reader”: technique, as he infelicitously put it, was nothing other than “the will-to-please-elevated-into-a-method.”

Eliot’s famous diagnosis of modernity foregrounds the same condition of diversity and complexity that animates Ford’s *English Review* editorials, the oppressive sense, as he writes in “The Passing of the Great Figure”, of “innumerable shades of opinion, each shade finding its expression and contributing to the obscuring of the issues.” The doctrine of difficulty is a characteristically professional reaction to this condition: as life becomes less intelligible to the ordinary observer, poetry retreats into an esoteric realm, deploying an expert system of representation which, as Rainey has demonstrated with regard to the publication of *The Waste-Land*, must be taken by the layperson, and sometimes even the magazine editor, on trust. Ford responded differently to modern complexity. Just as his response to the city – the emblem of opaque modernity – was resolutely personal, grounded in affect and resistant to totalizing abstractions, so Ford’s prescription for modern poetry is not a masterful discourse of difficulty, but an amplification of personality. Ford develops this argument in “Modern Poetry”, an essay published in *Thrush* which pursues the same themes as the contemporaneous state-of-the-art *English Review* editorials of late 1909, and was collected with them in *The Critical Attitude*. “[T]he trouble today with the poet”, he writes,

as with all the rest of the world, is that we know too much. We know so much, we know so many little things that we are beginning to realise how

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68 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure," p. 105.
much there is in the world to know, and how little of all that there is, is the much that we know. Thus there is an end of generalisations. (CA 178)

This idea that modern knowledge is beyond the grasp of any individual also informs Ford’s critique of professional history, as we have seen. There, Ford’s preference was for historians who sought “a pattern in the carpet” in spite of the overwhelming mass of data, thus introducing “temperament” into historical discourse: “they have at least the merit of bringing us into contact with their authors – with men who were human beings.”

In “Modern Poetry”, similarly, Ford’s strategy for negotiating modern complexity is not difficulty but sincerity. If the poet “does very much less generalising from the works of contemporary Scientists, Divines and Social Reformers”, he at least “has become more sincere: he writes, that is to say, along the lines of his own personality and of his own personal experience”. (CA 176) The comparison of Ford and Eliot throws the anti-specialism in Ford’s response to modernity into relief: where Eliot prescribed a hermetic discourse in keeping with the culture of expertise, Ford directly opposed the expert solution to modernity, proclaiming instead the redemptive value of personality. As he wrote in “English Literature of To-day”, the editorial in which he decries professional history, the expression of personality is the distinction of literature: the artist’s catchery is: “‘Come into contact with my thought, with my visions, with the sweet sounds that I cause to arise – with my personality.’ He deals, that is to say, not in facts, and his value is in his temperament.”

Ford’s prescription of sincerity also sets him apart from Conrad’s equation of honesty and technique: in the face of the mass market, Ford seems to have retained a humanist belief in the transmission of personal conviction.

The expert shibboleth of technique, then, figures in Ford’s program of personal literature altogether differently from the way in which it does in Eliot’s, and in the influential narrative of esoteric modernism. Ford’s idea of technique as “the will-to-please-elevated-into-a-method” combines, I would suggest, the scientific formalism of Flaubert with the quickening turn of the century interest in social psychology. Durkheim’s idea of “social facts”, expounded in his Rules of Sociological Method (1895),

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studies of mass psychology such as Gustave Le Bon’s *La psychologie des foules* (1895; English translation 1897), J.A. Hobson’s *The Psychology of Jingoism* (1901) and Graham Wallas’s *Human Nature in Politics* (1908), and treatises on advertising like William Stead, Jr.’s *The Art of Advertising* (1899) and Ernest Calkins and Ralph Holden’s *The Art of Modern Advertising* (1905), all express a desire to codify and control the behaviour of mass society. As Michael Tratner has shown, high modernists such as Yeats, Joyce, Pound and Woolf were themselves entranced by this dream of reaching the crowd mind, experimenting with form in an effort to crack the algorithm of its collective alpha waves. Authors and publishers were also caught up in this attempt to understand and control *le public intouchable*, and this was no less true of self-conscious technicians than sensationists: as we have seen, Conrad told Garnett in 1911 that “the control of the public’s (audience, readers) attention is in a sense the beginning and end of artistic method”. (CL 4: 422) The unsystematic, quizzically belletrist register of much of Ford’s criticism conceals an underlying affinity with these scientific projects; as he wrote in *The Tribune* in 1908, “technique is the science of appeal.” There are other references to this idea in his journalism: in his *English Review* editorial for February 1910, for example, he explicitly compares scientific governance and literary technique:

> just as the British Statesman very seldom studies such things as history or the psychology of crowds, so practically never – except in very limited circles or during limited periods – does the English artist make any technical studies beyond what are absolutely necessary for the elementary practice of his art.

Scientific understanding of crowd psychology and the scientific study of literary technique are, Ford implies, somehow akin. Similarly, his review of *Some Imagist Poems* (1915) compares *vers libre* to the science of influencing crowds: “Rhythmic prose,

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regular verse forms, and ‘free-verse’ itself ... all these things are departments of rhetoric which is a device for stirring group passion.”

We have encountered Ford’s own touchstone for influencing the public before: interest. The goal of technical research, Ford repeatedly claimed, was to maximise the interestingness of the literary work of art. His criticism recurs often to the idea of interestingness, defining it as the highest goal of technique, the last word in artistic achievement: “in the end the province of technical skill is simply to interest”, he wrote in his editorial for November 1909, and in his monograph on Henry James he reminded his readers that “I have said somewhere else that the supreme quality of art is to be interesting.”

(HJ 19) In Ancient Lights (1911) he credited W.E. Henley with teaching “his followers that the first business of art is to interest, and the second to interest, and the third again – to interest”, and in A Personal Remembrance (1924) he ascribes this “axiom” to him and Conrad: “The first business of Style is to make work interesting: the second business of Style is to make work interesting ...” (AL 239, JC 206)

In his 1921 memoir Thus To Revisit, Ford linked his value of interest to another recurrent theme of his critical writing: the exemplary achievement of Flaubert.

The rising of the moon came, exactly a hundred years ago, when there appeared in this planet Gustave Flaubert and his circle ... Post-Flaubertian “technique” is just the purest common-sense. It has nothing to do with Revolution, with license or even with Freedom. It is Discipline. It enjoins a strict study of language so that the writer may not be a bore; it enjoins a strict study – an appraisement! – of past works that have interested humanity so that the Writer may be as interesting as possible to as many readers as possible.

77 Ford, Thus to Revisit, pp. 9-10.
This statement, coming a year before the *annus mirabilis* of hermetic modernism, combines High Modernist values of discipline, tradition and technique with the heteronomous aim of readerly hospitality and even popularity. As Nicholas Daly observes, “[m]odernist ‘difficulty,’ [has been] seen by defenders of modernism as its apotropaic charm against the culture industry’s commodifying power”.78 Ford’s idea of technique is evidently not amenable to such interpretations. “Great literature”, he wrote in *Ancient Lights*, albeit not without an edge of desperation, “always is and always has been popular”: if objectively Ford avoided the road to popularity, such was not his self-interpretation. (AL 249) His idea that “the province of technical skill is simply to interest” adapts the trope of the professional, self-conscious technician to the purpose of attracting readers in a mass market, a program that we usually associate with the New Journalism and popular fiction. Ford’s definition of technique overlaps, for example, with Hall Caine’s vision of the “millions of people at their breakfast tables … saying, ‘Interest me! Entertain me! Startle me!’”.79 For anyone involved in the mass media, predicting and controlling the affect of interest was of vital concern. Ford adopts this theme of the culture industry, but endows it with a high humanistic value: the “desire to be interested”, he wrote in *Ancient Lights*, “is indeed the noblest and finest of all desires, since it means that [the man in the street] desires to enter into the fortunes, the hopes, the very hearts of his fellow-men, and it is in this way and in no other that literature can render a man better”. (AL 250-1)

The *English Review* was to cultivate this desire of entering the “hearts of his fellow-men”: its “principal aim”, Ford announced in the first number, was “by means of the literature which it prints and the literature to which it calls attention … to aid in the comprehension of one kind of mind by another”.80 By the short stories and serials he selected and made available to the public, and by reviewing, Ford wanted to direct and concentrate the power of literature to bring “humanity into contact with humanity”.81

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This idea is a basic premise of Ford’s ethics: as the oracular Greek orthodox priest of _A Call_ proclaims, “Bring one unto the other, that mutual comprehension may result. That is the way of Christian fellowship; that is the way to bring about the peace of God on earth.” (C 222) In his role of editor, Ford envisioned literature as a potential mass vehicle for this end. Ford’s attack on specialisation in his _English Review_ editorials, and his eulogy to James’s New York Edition as an alternative form of history, express a profoundly optimistic desire for a unified public sphere like the one Habermas locates in the literary culture of the eighteenth century, comprising a wide (admittedly, middle-class) readership interested in their common humanity, in each other, and in matters of universal import. Fiction was above all _interesting_ history, appealing to a wider public.

**LIBERAL SENTIMENTS**

Ford’s objection to professional history was based on its detachment from the public sphere: unlike artists, historians did not know how to interest a wide audience. This idea of a devitalised public sphere was also a theme in the review’s political content, and the remainder of this chapter will be concerned with the politics of the review in relation to a perceived crisis of democratic culture. The same concerns about an apathetic and disengaged public that stoked Ford’s animus against professional history can also be seen to shape his political sensibility. Lionel Trilling’s insights that “there is no such thing as a liberal idea, that there are only liberal sentiments”, and that the “connection between literature and politics” derives from this fact, will serve as touchstones for my discussion.\(^2\) Ford, if he was not an orthodox Liberal, sympathised nonetheless with the Liberal politics of sentiments – or ideals – as a means of revitalising the public sphere, and a consideration of the New Liberal writers who contributed political matter to the review will serve here to anchor Ford’s political thought in contemporary Liberal ideology. This account of the review’s politics will take us some way from my concern with professional society, but will rejoin the main thread of my argument when I come to consider the relationship between this politics of sentiment and the growing power of expert administrators in Edwardian society, another minor theme of Ford’s editorials.

Ford began the *English Review* with a declaration of "'No party bias'". He hewed to this line in his political editorials, taking up maverick positions on public issues and eschewing party orthodoxy: as Saunders notes, "in Ford's political contributions ... it is the unorthodox open-mindedness, the coexistence of usually opposed views that is striking." Altogether between December 1908 and February 1910 – the last issue over which he had editorial control – Ford wrote six editorials on political themes, foreign and domestic, in addition to the nine cultural pieces that were collected in *The Critical Attitude*. Although Ford later disparaged the review's non-literary content as "the lugubrious pomposity which stuffed, like highly desiccated wadding, the brain of the unfortunate English reader of reviews", this ratio suggests that he regarded political commentary as a significant part of his remit; as he told Edward Garnett at the time, "I quite realize the importance of the political articles and I fancy that my political articles will astonish even you." As studies of the *Review* have noted, Ford placed poetry and fiction at the front, and coverage of current affairs at the back in a section headed "The Month", a departure from the conventional monthly magazine format. It was, as Homberger notes, "a brave assertion of the centrality of imaginative literature". Morrisson suggests, however, that Ford intended the two departments of the review to speak to one another, bringing "modernist aesthetics to bear upon Edwardian public culture", and Ford's thoughtful political editorials support this reading.

Opinion is divided about the net political bias of the *English Review*. Homberger places it somewhere between William Morris's medievalist socialism and Wells's Fabianism. Peppis deconstructs its disguised Liberal Imperialism, and Morrisson, whilst endorsing Peppis's assessment, claims "it had avoided the overt partisan connections

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desired by the new owner, Sir Alfred Mond”.  

MacShane finds evidence of Liberal bias earlier than this, however, claiming that when Ford’s brother-in-law, David Soskice, got involved in mid-1909, the review became a vehicle of “propaganda for the Liberal party.”

Ford’s political contributors certainly tended to come from the Left: in the harrumpfing opinion of the Academy it was “[t]o all intents and purposes ... a fat Socialist monthly.”

The single most cohesive bloc of political writers in the review’s political section, however, were not exactly socialists, as the Academy grumbled, nor were they precisely propagandists for the Liberal party, as MacShane suggests. They were, rather, New Liberals, a loosely affiliated group of Liberal collectivist thinkers who opposed the nineteenth-century Liberal dogma of laissez-faire individualism, believed passionately in the idea of an organic society, and campaigned for the expansion of the role of the state and a just redistribution of wealth.

The English Review writers H.W. Nevinson and H.N. Brailsford (journalists and activists), J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse (journalists and social theorists) and G.P. Gooch (a Liberal MP) were all identified with the New Liberal ethos, affiliated either through papers such as J.W. Massingham’s Nation, or informal institutions like the Rainbow Circle discussion group. The Review was by no means a platform for New Liberalism – only Hobson expounded New Liberal political theory at any length – but recovering these five writers as a unit, associated through the Liberal papers The Nation

92 Nevinson contributed two articles (December 1908, November 1909), Brailsford three (May, July and December 1909), Hobhouse one (January 1910) and Gooch one (November 1909). Hobson was Ford’s single most prolific contributor of political content, penning six articles between July 1909 and January 1910.
and *The Tribune* (where Brailsford and Hobhouse also worked) and the Rainbow Circle, does reveal a higher degree of cohesion within the review’s political content than has been recognised. The only comparable bloc is Chesterton and Belloc, who contributed three articles between them.

This is not to suggest that Ford actively solicited New Liberal contributions; he had lost full control over the review’s political content by mid-1909, and perhaps as early as May. There is, however, an interesting correspondence between Ford’s political sensibility and the *liberalism* in New Liberal ideology, not at the level of policy, but rather in a shared attitude to the public sphere itself, and what might be called the tone of public debate. This correspondence illustrates the extent to which Ford’s cultural program was politically valent, aimed at renewing the public sphere. Although vigorously collectivist in outlook, New Liberalism crucially differed from the efficiency politics of the Fabians in its commitment to humanist ideals: in 1911 Hobhouse would denounce the technocratic program of “Official Socialism” (Fabianism) as an “aristocracy of character and intellect”, whereas the Liberal collectivist state “must be founded on liberty, and must make not for the suppression but for the development of personality.” The reduction of politics to efficient administration was anathema to the Liberal traditions of principle, reform and oratory: as Hobhouse wrote in his first leader for the Liberal daily *The Tribune*, “[t]he work of Liberalism is never done because its essence is the permanent protest of Right against Force, of the common good against class interest, of an ideal element in political life against a merely mechanical efficiency.” Similarly, in a 1947 commemorative lecture, Brailsford recalled Hobson’s belief that “[i]n a changing

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94 See Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, vol. 1, p. 252. The source for the New Liberal articles was probably Ford’s brother-in-law David Soskice, who controlled or influenced the political content from May 1909, when he and a committee of left-leaning thinkers entered into negotiations to buy the review. Ford wrote to Soskice in June reminding him that he had obligingly published “a number of friends of your own of a purely partisan nature”. By August, Soskice’s controlling company had been formed, and Soskice wrote to Ford informing him that he had “9 or 10 pages” from Hobson in hand. (Ford to Soskice, 8 June 1909, Box 91, 4605; Soskice to Ford, 13 August 1909, Box 92, 4605. Both letters are held at the Rare and Manuscript Collection, Cornell University.)


world the ideals that move us are also facts among the visible and measurable realities.”

Although New Liberals broke with the Gladstonian mantra of Peace, Retrenchment and Reform, idealism remained core to the Liberal project.

This Liberal commitment to idealism corresponds to the theme discernible in Ford’s political thought of the poetic or sentimental dimension of public life. Ford’s Edwardian novels The Inheritors (1901), The Fifth Queen trilogy (1906-8), and Mr. Fleight (1913), for example, all express a pessimistic regret that idealism has ceased to be a factor in the public sphere. As Robert Green notes, “The Inheritors’ theme is the loss of traditional values ... in political and cultural life.” The novel’s invasion plot is not military but psychological, aimed at the sensibility of the public. Churchill, the Prime Minister, is a cultural totem, his value symbolic: the invaders aim to “bring down everything that Churchill stands for. You know what that is — the sort of probity, all the old order of things. ... I understood vaguely what she meant; that if Churchill fell ... there would be an end of belief in probity ...” (1 189) In short, the crypto-Fabian Fourth Dimensionists are out to expel idealism from the political arena. In The Fifth Queen, Katharine Howard is a political idealist pitted against the Machiavellian milieu of the Tudor court; as Cicely Elliot, a lady-in-waiting to Mary Tudor, tells her, “You are not made for this world ... This is no place for virtues learned from learned books. This is an ill world where only evil men flourish.” (FQ 280) Crucially for Ford’s political outlook, Katharine’s high principles originate in her knowledge of classical culture, and she attempts to bring literature to bear on the field of power. Hoping to persuade Anne of Cleves, the incumbent queen, to resign her throne gracefully, “she had prepared speeches — speeches against the Queen’s being disdainful, enraged, or dissolved in tears. She had read in books all night from Aulus Gellius to Cicero to get wisdom.” (FQ 367) Not disinterested erudition, however, but a pragmatic handbook is the key to political power. “This is ‘il Principe’ of Macchiavelli”, says Thomas Cromwell, consummate politician. “I am a simple man, yet hath it made me.” (FQ 386)

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In *Mr. Fleight* (1913), a bitterly cynical political satire, the idealistic statesman is embodied in Edward Lorraine Parment, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a fervent democratic orator garnished with shades of David Lloyd George. The novel recounts the systematic attempt of Mr. Fleight, a Jewish parvenu, to buy his way into parliament, masterminded by the cynical aristocrat Mr. Blood and his flunkies in the literary world. In a nice irony, Mr. Blood’s brother Reginald, an engineer, turns out to be an astute political pundit and electoral agent, approaching electioneering as he would a construction job: “I’m an engineer, and I see things pretty well as a matter of strains – one strain opposing the other, and so on.” (MF 124) Election odds are quantifiable in terms of forces; sentiment plays no part in the grotesquely corrupt political system of *Mr. Fleight*. Nonetheless, Parment actively nurtures a belief in “the great fine truths. ... The greatest good of the greatest number, for instance”: “I find it best to follow the gleam; to cultivate it, even, you know.” (MF 274-5, 57) Parment’s somewhat foggy political idealism is an object of satire, but he remains an ambiguous, strangely compelling figure. The careerist politician Reginald Debenham has an intuition of veiled power behind Parment’s shambling demeanour, as if he were “a friendly elephant – the idea of the formidable and dangerous energy that is always at the disposal of such a beast.” (MF 56) The novel’s authoritative and articulate voice, however, belongs to Reginald’s brother Mr. Blood, a mordantly cynical aristocrat: “The nation’s sick to death of eloquence”, he informs Parment brutally, “and wants to get back to its spillikins and post-card collecting and coon-can. Even bridge has become too exhausting for the tired national brain.” (MF 275) Blood’s spastic contempt for the electorate drives him almost to gibberish; the only really vital sentiment in *Mr. Fleight* is disgust.

Ford believed that the Boer War marked a change in “the whole tone of England”, “principles having died out of politics, even as the spirit of artistry has died out amongst the practitioners of the arts.” (AL 154-5) *The Inheritors* and *The Fifth Queen* register a nostalgic pessimism about this decay of political principles, which by the time of *Mr. Fleight* has become hysterical laughter. Ford’s position as editor of the *English Review* is more measured: “For Liberalism to be effective”, he wrote in July 1909,
there must be behind it a certain glow of humanitarian faith, a certain visionary quality, an absolute incapacity to temporise. So that when we remember the late Mr. Gladstone’s splendid and rhetorical handling of the Balkan question we feel bitterly ashamed of Sir Edward Grey’s.99

The Liberal Foreign Minister Edward Grey, in other words, neglects the role of “the great fine truths” in a vital political culture. As Patrick Joyce has shown, oratory was central to the evolution of a distinctively Liberal public discourse during the nineteenth century, catalysed by the expansion of the franchise in 1832, 1867 and 1884. Rhetoric was itself constitutive of Liberal policy: Gladstone’s oratory “involved feeling the faith, but also feeling reason as itself a form of faith: ... the tenets of Gladstonian Liberalism involved the rationality of free and informed public discussion, and this was expressed in the serious and didactic nature of Liberal rhetoric”.100 Liberal rhetoric also projected a myth of public unity, transcending class differences: “the great, popular Liberal leaders, pre-eminently Bright and Gladstone, can be said to have invented their own political subject, ‘the people’.”101 Ford’s nostalgia, then, is for a Liberal political tone rather than a policy, for the “rhetorical handling” that enabled the image of a single public. The loss of this tone is part of the fragmented condition that he describes, in December 1909, as “The Passing of the Great Figure.” Ford doubts whether “a Ruskin or a Gladstone would today find any kind of widespread dominion”: a modern day Gladstone expounding a gallant foreign policy “might find that the public mind was utterly unable to make the effort to interest itself at all in the matter of Macedonia.”102 As with Ford’s critique of academic history, the nemesis of public culture is a lack of interest. Ford’s political register also incorporates affect, noting the shame of Grey’s pragmatism, and beginning his election month editorial with a wounded moan: “Could anything be more depressing

102 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure," p. 105.
than the present state of public affairs?\textsuperscript{103} This political pain is due to the material issues dominating the election. Prefiguring Edward Lorraine Parment’s reverence for “great, true things” in \textit{Mr. Fleight}, he laments that “in the contending programmes of both parties, there is to be found no trace whatever of attention to the higher things of life.”\textsuperscript{104} Although Ford’s politics were not orthodox Liberal, he and the New Liberals shared a desire to refurbish the public sphere with idealism — “the higher things of life” — creating an atmosphere conducive to public spirit rather than jingoism and apathy. Trilling’s insight that literature and liberalism were allied in their reliance on sentiment resonates with Ford’s political sensibility, his nostalgia for a “certain glow of humanitarian faith” and “a certain visionary quality”.

If Ford did not go looking for his New Liberal contributors, their own willingness to write for his review may still tell us something about how its potential to revitalise public culture was perceived. J.A. Hobson provided some indication of their attitude when he referred to the review explicitly in “The Task of Realism”, an essay that appeared in the October 1909 number, and set down what he took to be its aims. The “experiment in collective self-consciousness”, he felt, was likely to be furthered by “such a Review”, which devotes itself to the “rendering of realism in many fields of thought and art”.\textsuperscript{105} Hobson is reflecting here on the interdependence of cultural and political progress, and the danger of “ever-narrower specialisation”: his argument is that nineteenth-century literature and politics had been integrated in a general philosophy of reform: “Poetic prophets, co-operative socialists, utilitarian theorists and philosophic radicals … all aimed consciously and avowedly at a general transformation of life.”\textsuperscript{106} Hobson laments, indeed, the passing of the great figure, the public intellectual whose impact extends beyond his specialist discipline: the great Victorians, Ford wrote in December, possessed “a certain extraneous faculty — the faculty of appeal”, that made them known beyond the “the actual work they did”, whereas now the “man whose


\textsuperscript{106} Hobson, "The Task of Realism," pp. 543.
speculations cover wide fields ... is regarded with suspicion".107 (William Gladstone, of course, the archetypal Liberal orator, is one of Ford’s great figures.) It was, apparently, the combination of literature and public affairs – its coverage of “many fields of thought and art” – that attracted Hobson to the English Review, and that fitted it to cultivate “collective self-consciousness”, a sense of public spirit. Ford’s project of anti-specialism, and ambition to restore literature’s “function” in the republic, had not gone unnoticed.

As Hobhouse’s opposition to “Official Socialism” suggests, the expanding state bureaucracy, and the Fabian program of expert administration, were perceived as a clear and present danger to the Liberal politics of sentiment. The late nineteenth-century expansion of the state caused a corresponding growth in the administrative apparatus, and an increase in the power of expert administrators. Ford’s opposition to specialists and their impoverishing effect on public life also extended to this dimension of professional society, which militated against the politics of ideals, and this concern, too, is evident in his English Review editorials.

GOVERNMENT BY EXPERTS

Harold Perkin argues that the expansion of the state in the Edwardian era both reflected the ideals and promoted the interests of the ascendant professional class. Measures such as the provision of school meals (1906), the Old Age Pensions Act (1908) and the National Insurance Act (1911) were largely instigated by the analyses of professional intellectuals, members of a class who had much to gain from the establishment of an expert-run welfare state.108 An expansion of government would bring them

a share in the expansion of expert services provided by or paid for by government, a higher level of remuneration guaranteed by the state and, for some of them at least, an increase in power and prestige in a system

107 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure," pp. 103, 109.
increasingly dependent for its smooth operation and success upon themselves.\textsuperscript{109}

As Christopher Tietjens’s involvement in drafting the “Labour Finance Act” in \textit{Some Do Not}... (1924) indicates, bureaucratic and other forms of expertise would be in increasing demand to engineer and administer the welfare state. (PE 78-9) H.G. Wells, an avid proselyte of scientific administration, imagined a utopian extension of this trend in \textit{A Modern Utopia} (1905), with its non-hereditary expert caste of \textit{samurai}: “[t]ypically, the \textit{samurai} are engaged in administrative work. Practically the whole of the responsible rule of the world is in their hands”.\textsuperscript{110}

In January 1909, “C.W.” – quite possibly Ford himself – questioned the ramifications of a \textit{samurai} government for the public sphere, linking this modern phenomenon to the decline of Liberal rhetoric that Ford bemoaned in July.\textsuperscript{111} “It is not so much that oratory has died”, he argues, “as that the reign of to-day belongs to the permanent official.” This removal of politics from the public sphere is compounded by the Cabinet system – “the true oligarchy” – so that public-speaking is no longer a requisite skill for government: “either they are irremovable experts, or we are under the sway of a removable jury.”\textsuperscript{112} C.W.’s concern about “irremovable experts” corresponds, of course, to Hobhouse’s Liberal objection to the Fabian “aristocracy of character and intellect which will fill the civil services and do the practical work of administration”, whilst the departure of “oratory” from public life seems to portend a similar situation to that brought about by the rise of professional history: the new historians, Ford lamented,

\textsuperscript{111} The first number announced that “[t]he Editorial is written by various members of the Editorial staff, whose initials are appended to their various contributions”; Ford’s editorials and reviews were usually signed “E.R.” or “F.” C.W. speaks in Ford’s Olympian tone, uses the editorial “we”, and adopts the vocabulary of Ford’s editorials on “The Functions of the Arts”, proclaiming that “[i]f we stood for any party it would be for one non-existent that we might well call the Republican.” “[T]he word \textit{Republica}” is “surely the most sacred of all words.” C.W., “The Prospects of Parliament at Home and Abroad: I. Home,” \textit{English Review} 1 (1909): p. 335.
exercise “not temperament at all but industry”. The “ideal” of each party, C.W. continues, “might be expressed in the same words”:

A trained, an enlightened, governing class: a proletariat with the assurance of health, of work, of contentment and of the proper conditions of life and its enjoyments ... In the Perfect Republic there will be none but those who produce living in harmony with those who administer.

Such a bland “ideal” stood little chance of reviving public interest in political life. Ford was opposed to this oligarchy of experts; when *A Modern Utopia* was published, he expressed his dissent to Wells in no uncertain terms: “To the stake with Samurai!” His editorial on “The Passing of the Great Figure” reiterated C.W’s concerns about managerial government eleven months later, underlining their persistency. As Levenson notes, Ford’s essay charts “a fundamental transformation in English culture”: in place of Victorian sages “stood the new technical specialists”. But whereas Levenson’s discussion of Ford focuses mainly on the modernist crisis of moral authority, these issues are also implicated in the rise of specialisation and its effect on public culture. The sense of complexity and fragmentation often noted in Ford’s cultural outlook amounted to a concern about the public sphere, which was becoming the preserve of government experts. As Ford wrote,

All questions have become so exceedingly complicated, there is so little opening for moral fervour that the tendency of the great public is more and more to leave all public matters in the hands of a comparatively few specialists.

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117 Ford, "The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure," p. 102.
Confounded by the administrative arcana of “[p]ractical politics”, the “average man” abandons, not only “thinking”, but “even feeling about any public matter at all.”\textsuperscript{118} Here Ford’s Liberal anxiety about the loss of idealism is combined with a concern about government-by-experts, which resulted in political anaesthesia; as with his nostalgia for Liberal rhetoric – the shame and depression he feels at its absence – Ford is alert to the affective dimension of public life. This civic apathy, he argues, leads to jingoism: “[h]is vote ... will be influenced by some mysterious catchword ... or by some private scandal or facial characteristic of the upholder of one or other cause.”\textsuperscript{119} Ford links the culture of expertise to the fear of irrational mass democracy, which had recently been analysed by Gustave Le Bon, Graham Wallas and J.A. Hobson. As it happened, the latter of these crowd psychology pundits also had an article in the December number of the \textit{English Review,} in which he, too, expressed reservations about Britain’s expanding bureaucracy. The apparatus of “permanent officials”, Hobson worried, was inclined to interfere with the processes of democratic government, tending to “impose itself upon new legislative proposals, and to substitute, as far as possible, the official will for the representative will”. \textsuperscript{120} In addition to this anxiety for democracy, Hobson also shared Ford’s belief that the logical follow-on of alienation from the political process would be jingoism. “An electorate will remain little better than a ‘mob’ so long as it is treated like a mob, deprived of all opportunity of sober reflection and judgment upon intelligible issues, and goaded at intervals to orgies of electoral excitement”. As a check on technocratic despotism, he advised plebiscitary democracy, “a direct appeal to the people”.\textsuperscript{121} Once again, Ford’s thinking is aligned with Liberal qualms about the decay of the public sphere.

Ford’s antipathy to professional history, his nostalgia for the heroic age of Liberal rhetoric, and his misgivings about expert administration, all centre on the decline of the public sphere. Just as the professional historian lacks “wideness of appeal”\textsuperscript{122}, so modern

\textsuperscript{118} Ford, “The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure,” p. 102.
\textsuperscript{119} Ford, “The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure,” p. 102.
\textsuperscript{121} Hobson, “After the Destruction of the Veto,” p. 120.
public figures have lost the “faculty of appeal”\textsuperscript{123}, whilst the tendency of the public is to “listen to none but specialists.”\textsuperscript{124} Undoubtedly, there are other themes that might be followed in Ford’s editorials: the loss of epistemological certainty noted by Levenson, for example, or the idea of the “critical attitude” itself. Projecting a selection of these essays on the grid of professional society, however, reveals a distinct preoccupation with the effects of specialisation on public culture, as well as drawing out a continuity with the review’s New Liberal contributors. The context of specialism also sheds light on how Ford imagined the distinctiveness of literature, the function of art in the republic. The uncontainable excitement Ford expressed about Henry James’s New York Edition in his first editorial, not only a “historic expression” but a “historic event” in its own right, is focused on the unique power of impressionist literature to “awaken thought” and to appeal by “exaggeration”, whereas the professional historian, Ford would write in October, “arouses no thought at all”.\textsuperscript{125} The provision of technically proficient literature – of which no more salient example existed in 1908 than James’s autocritical collected works – differed from other professions in its orientation to the public sphere.

\textsuperscript{123} Ford, “The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure,” pp. 103, 109.
\textsuperscript{124} Ford, “The Critical Attitude: The Passing of the Great Figure,” pp. 109-10.
Conclusion

In *Aren’t You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973), the latter-day modernist B.S. Johnson expresses a distaste for fabulation in terms that Ford Madox Ford would have found sympathetic. “Life does not tell stories”, Johnson declares: “Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification.”¹ Like Ford, Johnson believed that life did not narrate, although his aversion to the comforting impostures of fiction went well beyond the canons of impressionism: “OH, FUCK ALL THIS LYING”, he rages in *Albert Angelo* (1964).² Johnson wanted the novel to be truthful, to the extent that he turned against the form itself. In a recent biography, the novelist Jonathan Coe extols, if not Johnson’s militant honesty, then at least the kind of technical rigour that his fractious experimenting implied. Coe admires Johnson “above all, I suppose, for the simple reason that he took himself, and his art – or craft, vocation, call it what you will – so seriously”; it is “dilettantes” who pose the greatest threat to the art of fiction. Sounding a little like the narrator of James’s “The Death of a Lion”, who is wryly appalled by the New Journalistic practice of author-interviews, and a little like Percy Lubbock, who wanted novels to rely on their own “recognisances”, Coe complains that “we live in a age of radio and television interviews”, with the result that works of fiction are no longer read as “self-contained statements”. “[W]e have lost”, in fact, “all semblance of that kind of faith in literature, or in the trustworthiness of authors.”³

Trust, and its relation to the tropes of professionalism, seem to be perennial concerns in the evaluation of modernist authors. This spurt of spleen (for which Coe instantly apologises) echoes J.M. Kennedy’s binary of self-promoters, on the one hand, and serious artists, on the other. It is partly the fact that Mr. Conrad doesn’t advertise, after all, that obliges readers to trust him. Coe implies that it is Johnson’s conscientious

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dedication to his craft that makes him worthy of the reader's trust, reiterating a rhetoric that we have seen used by both Conrad and James: craft, vocation, call it what you will, is the guarantee of trustworthiness: "Technique", as Conrad put it, "is more than honesty." Johnson's perceived professionalism, sanctioned by expert-peers like Coe, mediates between his novels and the marketplace. This trust in expertise creates an alternative to the "radio and television interviews" of the culture industry, presenting a commodity as a trusted service. The critical edifice that James erected in his Prefaces, however, and Conrad's self-presentation as a meta-professional, adapting his "sea-training" to the composition of fiction, suggest that in practice the performance of authorship overflows the "self-contained statements" of modernist masterpieces. This is particularly so in literary impressionism, with its implicit rhetoric of human capital, the storing up of experience, but it seems likely that no textual appeal to trust in technique can be made without implicating the author's life. Indeed, it is precisely the "age of radio and television interviews" that has made available a potent mode of negative self-presentation: the avoidance of publicity. This strategy is epitomised, perhaps, in the "weapons" reserved by Stephen Dedalus at the end of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-5): silence, exile (from the illustrated magazines?) and cunning. It is no accident, of course, that these modernist resources became available at the same time as the machinery of mass publicity: the existence of literary celebrities like H.G. Wells and Marie Corelli provided a pole against which disinterested artists could be defined.

This thesis has argued for a model of authorial performance situated within an interactional *modus vivendi*, an articulated formation of agents and structures wherein "self-contained statements" are created as masterpieces. As Ford intimated in *A Personal Remembrance*, the valuation of early modernist literature was a collaborative process, dependent on a cast of "backers behind the scenes", and on such matters of etiquette as eschewing publicity. The accrual of symbolic capital within this structure was seldom accomplished by cynical calculation alone, however. An author disposed to seek his or her interest in disinterestedness is likely to have an unreflective feel for the game of letters, to be inscribed with a certain habitus rather than possessed of a rational plan. To accurately assess the symbolic capital of the *English Review*’s list of contributors, to be

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Conclusion

enraptured by a line of prose, to be incensed by Hall Caine, to despise publicity, all imply an embodied, socialised scheme of perception, which may not be consciously oriented to utilitarian ends (even in those cases where literary prestige is ultimately redeemed as financial reward). As Bourdieu puts it, “[t]he space of position-takings that analysis reconstitutes does not present itself as such to the writer’s consciousness; that would oblige us to interpret his choices as conscious strategies of distinction.”

Impressionism is most often discussed as a suite of techniques, in which authorial effacement and Flaubertian impassibilité figure prominently. For James and Conrad, however, the “direct impression of life” implied not only the use of reflectors or the meticulous mimesis of sensory perception, but also the work done prior to writing, the accumulation of impressions. The autobiographical bent of James’s Prefaces — their device of retracing the donnée, the “story of one’s story itself” — foregrounds this aspect of the writer’s profession, drawing on the protestant-capitalist motives of the “compulsion to save” and the idea of the calling to figure authorship as an imperiously demanding occupation. The imperative of living all you can, of being one of those on whom nothing is lost, becomes a kind of training, a capitalisation of experience so that wasteful “life” may yield “the most princely of incomes”.

Conrad’s professionalism also entailed a performance of gender; as Besant and Carlyle discovered, a necessary task of the construction of authorship as a profession was the assertion of masculinity. The Nigger of the “Narcissus” established Conrad as a writer of the sea, equipped with first-hand knowledge of his subject matter, but also constructed him as a heroic writer in the tradition of Carlyle, whose “Hero as Man of Letters” was an early bid for the professionalization of writing. Notwithstanding the importance of women to Conrad’s life and work, this prise de position deployed signal tropes of Victorian and Edwardian masculinity to construct its author as a professional. The classic narrative of masculinist modernism can be seen in this light to meet up with the broader culture of professionalism. Conrad’s perceived indifference to the proverbial “reading young woman” doubly determined him as a professional author, both a manly “worker in prose” and an artist unconcerned for commercial success.

Conclusion

The characteristic modernist theme of complexity was in many ways an epiphenomenon of professional society. Late capitalism had evolved beyond the grasp of the generalist, and both the explanation and the administration of society increasingly became matter for expert determination; T.S. Eliot’s high modernist dictum of difficulty can itself be seen as a moment in this process, the deployment of an esoteric discourse to digest modern complexity. Ford’s literary impressionism is shaped by this complexity, and particularly by the rise of specialism with which it was inseparably bound up. The irreducible bafflement he often expresses about modernity’s many “little things” is an attempt to articulate a response to modern complexity without recourse to inaccessible expertise. This aspect of literary impressionism comes more sharply into view when we consider Ford’s more overt interventions in public culture, and situate these gestures in relation to contemporary non-literary discourses. England and the English is animated by many of the same concerns as the London Sociological Society, but brings Ford’s impressionist principles of exaggeration and embodied, affective observation to bear on these themes. Viewed in relation to the fragmented public sphere, Fordian exaggeration, a kind of veiled polemic, can be construed as a way of reclaiming the habit of generalisation, opening complex social issues to public debate by transforming them into controversies. The proceedings of the Sociological Society also suggest that the boundary separating social science from literature at the turn of the century was exceedingly ill-defined. Ford’s refusal to immure literature and science in specialised, mutually exclusive compartments – his definition of the artist as an “exact scientist” – corresponds to an indetermination within sociology itself.

We are increasingly coming to question the simple opposition between modernism and the public sphere. Thanks particularly to the work of Mark Morrisson, the English Review now looks more like an optimistic bridge between literature and public culture than a breastwork of high art. Ford’s response to professional society offers new bearings on this process of revision, highlighting his conception of literature as an eminently interesting mode of discourse, by contrast with the impenetrable gründlichkeit, or thoroughness, of the professional research historian. Ford’s belief that nihil humanum a me alienum puto – nothing that is human is foreign to me – and his ideal of interesting people in one another, seem to correspond quite closely to Habermas’s eighteenth-
century public sphere, which began with an engaged reading public concerned to discuss the “humanity” that they held in common. Understood as a reaction against specialism, literary impressionism appears as a form of audience-oriented expertise, subtending a utopian vision of the mass market as a cohesive public.

Both early modernism and professional society burgeoned around the turn of the twentieth century, and key gestures of modernist praxis are illuminated by recovering this coevality, as scholars such as Thomas Strychacz and David Trotter have shown. Professionalism offered a mediating structure between modernist writers and the market for commodities, one determined by trust rather than desire, whilst specialisation spurred Ford’s formulation of impressionism as a means of renewing the fragmented public sphere. Understanding literary impressionism, whether in its capacity as a mode of authorial self-fashioning, or as an intervention in public culture, necessarily implicates extra-literary considerations and the historical moment of impressionist writing. This process of recovering “richer, thicker narratives” of modernism, in Michael Levenson’s phrase, is not conducive to sweeping conclusions: like Ford, we have become chary of “great architectonic scheme[s]” of criticism, and more attentive to the “little things” that such schemata obscure.\(^6\) (AL 62) Ford, Conrad and James have much to offer on the subject of inconclusiveness, much that might be relevant at this point; suffice it to say, however, that if the carpet has become more richly textured, its figure has grown more intricate, its edges more uncertain, and what might once have been a conclusion, now feels more like the completion of a phase in the division of labour.

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