

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

How to Become an Author: The Art and Business of Literary Advice Handbooks

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of  
Philosophy in English

by

John Sutton Caughey

2016

© Copyright by

John Sutton Caughey

2016

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

How to Become an Author: The Art and Business of Literary Advice Handbooks

by

John Sutton Caughey

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Jonathan Hamilton Grossman, Co-Chair

Professor Mark J. McGurl, Co-Chair

This dissertation reads the archive of literary advice texts that erupted into the world of letters beginning in the mid-1880s alongside the work of Henry James, Jack London, Arnold Bennett, and Virginia Woolf. At that moment, fiction, to adapt a phrase of Edward Gibbon, was elevated into an art and degraded into a trade. The agitated coupling of art and commerce made authorship seem available and attractive on an unprecedented scale. All manner of instructional texts, from how-to manuals to plot charts, and from author interviews to fictions about fiction making, sated this sudden explosion of interest. United by a post-Romantic faith that novelists, though born to varying degrees of talent, could be made, this enterprise mobilized emerging knowledge practices and media technologies in its effort to develop a practical science of fiction, one I dub “fictioneering.”

My central field of study is not so much the “how-to” documents themselves as the practices they produced, the processes they allowed, and the techniques they fostered. In attending to fictioneering, I expose how the doctrine of the autonomous literary object arose as part of the formation of the discipline of English literature from a sort of sleight of hand. In the case of the novel, technique, which was first articulated as a writer’s tool, subtly morphed into an inherent feature of the text, dormant until uncovered by the skilled reader. “How to Become an Author” tells the story of an unexpected rivalry between fictioneering and the new-born science of literary criticism, a rivalry that profoundly shaped the signature techniques of both.

The dissertation of John Sutton Caughey is approved.

Stuart M. Burrows

Michael A. North

Mark I. Seltzer

Mark J. McGurl, Committee Co-Chair

Jonathan Hamilton Grossman, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

*To Jessica, Emily, and Malcolm*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The Art of Fictioneering .....	1
Part I:.....	19
Part II: Chapter One	
Learning Fiction by Subscription .....	97
Part II: Chapter Two	
The Making of the Self-Making Author .....	153
Part II: Chapter Three	
Changing the Character of Modern Fiction .....	202
Bibliography .....	263

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of this dissertation I have considered several bookshelves worth of advice on the art of writing. Doing so has made me particularly aware of the great fortune I have had in receiving the best. Jonathan Grossman's advice deserves to be enshrined in a handbook, but never could be because the enthusiasm behind it would burst the binding. Mark McGurl managed to allay the doubts his own magnificent work instilled. Mark Seltzer guided me to unexpected insights while almost fooling me into thinking I had arrived at them on my own. Michael North has perfected the art of asking the single question that brings everything into question and kindly raised enough of them to keep me busy these last years and many more. Stuart Burrows made prescient suggestions that became ever more relevant as the project evolved. Chris Mott provided the bridge between thinking and doing.

Many others at UCLA had a part in the making of this dissertation. Christian Reed, Cristina Griffin, Jake Lang, Leigh-Michil George, Tim Fosbury, and Jay Jin all contributed in essential ways to the actual work of writing, and many other graduate students helped in less tangible, if no less essential, ways. "How to Become an Author" benefitted enormously from the careful attentions of the Nineteenth-Century Group, the Americanist Research Colloquium, and the M/ELT group. My students helped me to take the measure the project's concrete stakes. Deeper debts are owed to my family for their support through the years. Many thanks to my father, my mother, my brother, my sisters, to Patricia Martin, and to the Suttons for everything they have done. Emily patiently made room for this dissertation while Malcolm, whose infancy coincided with the infancy of the project, has shared his entire life with it. Both provided the clearest possible lessons about inspiration. All the advice in the world would have meant nothing if it weren't for Jessica, who provided all the essential things that I needed to become anything.



## VITA

### **Education**

M.A., English, University of California, Los Angeles, 2010

M.A., English, University of Nevada, Reno, May 2007

B.A., *Magna Cum Laude*, Philosophy, Bates College, May 1996

### **Publication**

“A Zombie Novel With Brains: Bringing Genre to Life in the Literature Classroom,” *Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 7, nos. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2015): 1-22.

### **Selected Conference Papers**

“Telling Stories, Selling Stories: The Art and Business of Authorship in Literary Handbooks,” English Department Winter Athenaeum, February 2013.

“The Author’s Study: Reading the Room of One’s Own,” Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association Conference, Scripps College, CA, November 2011.

“Learning Fiction by Subscription,” Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Annual Conference, Scottsdale, AZ, October 2011.

“Training for Authorship: How-To Handbooks and the Art of Fiction,” Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Annual Conference, Honolulu, HI, November 2010.

“‘Let’s Write a Movie’: Constructing the Photoplay Author,” Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Annual Conference, Albuquerque, NM, October 2010.

### **Selected Awards and Fellowships**

UCLA Department of English Dissertation Research Fellowship, 2014–2015

Collegium of University Teaching Fellows Award, UCLA, 2014

Dean’s Fellowship, UCLA, 2010-2011

Graduate Research Mentorship, UCLA, 2009-10

Pauley Fellowship, UCLA, 2007-8

## Introduction

### The Art of Fictioneering

On April 25, 1884, the novelist Walter Besant stood before the Royal Institution to deliver “The Art of Fiction,” an oddly genial polemic aimed at making his profession “the Sister and the equal of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture, Music, and Poetry.”<sup>1</sup> As matters presently stood, he suggested, the general public would regard any such claim as “ludicrous and even painful” (*AF*, p.5). Yet, for Besant, fiction was the most potent of all arts in spite of the low regard, capable of the widest reach and the deepest influence. On his view, the mis-measure of fiction proceeded from a confusion about how it was written. This misunderstanding of the craft was so widespread, he argued, that it prevailed even “among the majority of those who try their chance in the field of fiction.” Such a mistaken view held that whatever art went into novels derived from in-born traits, bolstered by intuition or perhaps, at best, “unconscious imitation.” To write a novel one merely had to “sit down and write one” (*AF*, p. 15). Besant, by contrast, argued that fiction was an art only insofar as its laws, methods, and rules “may be laid down and taught with as much precision as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion” (*AF*, p. 6). The art of fiction, in short, drew its legitimacy from a body of formal techniques and principles that could be both learned and taught, and any campaign aimed at raising the prestige of the venture must start from them.

More than sixty-five years later, the scholar Mark Schorer would feel compelled to make what seems a remarkably similar claim in his “Fiction and the Analogical Matrix.” Literary criticism of the novel must begin, Schorer announces, with “the simplest assertion: fiction is a

---

<sup>1</sup> Besant, *The Art of Fiction* (London, 1902), pp. 5-6; hereafter abbreviated *AF*.

literary art.”<sup>2</sup> Writing at the moment when a second wave of New Criticism finally turned in earnest to fiction, Schorer defensively justifies his belated claim by admitting that a “beginning as simple as this must overcome corrupted reading habits of long standing.”<sup>3</sup> This corruption, as Schorer makes clear in “Technique as Discovery,” an essay he published just a year prior to “Analogical Matrix,” manifests in the tendency to read as though the novel’s “content has some value in itself, as though technique were not a primary but a supplementary element capable perhaps of not unattractive embellishments on the surface of its subject, but hardly of its essence.”<sup>4</sup> As with Besant, Schorer suggests that the remedy is a close attention to technique:

Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the *achieved* content, the form, the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique.<sup>5</sup>

Despite holding divergent notions of what constitutes aesthetic excellence, Besant and Schorer appear to be in full agreement in their wish to see (some) fiction as the artistic equal of the other fine arts and in their presumption that technique is the means of achieving such elevation. The apparent coincidence of their respective views, however, is deeply misleading, for they are in fact worlds apart, relying on very different concept of “Art.” Surprisingly, the gulf that separates Besant from Schorer is much greater than the one that separates Schorer’s midcentury formalism from present day critical practices.

---

<sup>2</sup> Schorer, “Fiction and the ‘Analogical Matrix,’” in *The World We Imagine* (New York, 1968), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Schorer, “Technique as Discovery,” in *The World We Imagine* (New York, 1968), pp. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

Read as simply prefiguring, in a fumbling and primitive sort of way, both the deeply influential formalist poetics of the New Criticism and the equally significant rise of the creative writing program, Besant's lecture appears distinctly pedestrian, offering an entirely artless defense of fiction's artistry. Certainly this dismissal has been the most common judgment. Leon Edel, for instance, dubbed him "an efficient ... hack" and an "amiable fool," a judgment Nicholas Dames more recently rehearsed in calling Besant "genially bumbling" and "methodologically incoherent." As for the lecture itself, Rob Davidson claimed that it "caused more ripples than waves." Even the sympathetic Frederick Boege, whose two-part, 1956 essay "Sir Walter Besant: Novelist" remains the definitive assessment of his oeuvre, dismissed "The Art of Fiction" by suggesting that it was "more suitable for telling ... how to finish a piece of furniture than how to write good fiction."<sup>6</sup> Besant, it would seem, squanders whatever esteem he might have claimed by way of historical priority through sheer dullness.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, despite the scorn of literary historians, his attempt sought to locate fiction's artistry in the methods and the techniques that writers employed to craft their works is urgently worth returning to. Its animating argument runs counter to the aesthetic that informs the view of literary

---

<sup>6</sup> Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Middle Years, 1882-1895* (Philadelphia, 1962), p. 124; Nicholas Dames, "The Disease of Temporality; or, Forgetful Reading in James and Lubbock," *The Henry James Review* 25.3 (2004): 247; Rob Davidson *The Master and the Dean* (Columbia, 2005) p. 51; Frederick Boege, "Sir Walter Besant: Novelist," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 10.4 (March 1956): 36.

<sup>7</sup> The academic turned novelist David Lodge offers one of the few dissenting opinions when he suggests that "if anyone deserves the title 'Father of Creative Writing Courses' it is" Besant. There is a sense in which this is true, though not in any straightforward way. As I argue below, Besant's lecture instigates a movement with marked differences from creative writing in its now institutionalized form though the two share much (Lodge, "Creative Writing: Can it/ Should it be Taught?," *The Practice of Writing* [London, 1996], p. 170).

art that Schorer's criticism typifies, one that locates artistry in the object itself and dismissed the intricate and often agonized details of its composition. Even more crucially, this aesthetic still largely governs the way that literary criticism treats its objects of study, even as evaluative judgments have almost entirely dropped away and the object studied is not always an art object. Boege's remark above, in the distance it places between the craft of furniture making and the craft of fiction, is particularly revealing because it so clearly applies this aesthetic ideology to Besant's lecture, but in so doing it misses the entire thrust of his argument. In claiming that artistry arises from the practices that go into making the work, Besant invoked an older notion of art to sponsor the all-too-modern novel. When the critics above look back at, and down on, Besant, they misread him because they attribute to him a theory of fiction attuned to the meaning of a novel rather than the making of a novel – and a novelist.

Such a misreading is readily evident in the standard scholarly account where Besant's efforts to ground the artistry of fiction on the practical knowledge of the artist foundered as soon as Henry James published his famous reply of the same title in *Longman's* just a few months later. In this accepted history, Besant's attempts to define precisely the methods of making fiction roused the slumbering lion of James's artistic conscience. Goaded on by Besant's reductive mechanics, James set out to liberate the novel from formulas and rules that could be "applied *a priori*."<sup>8</sup> Taking the opposite tack, he posited the novel as an autonomous object whose value lay in its form, something that could only be discovered after its composition was complete. An artist worked as a sort of oracle and, when it came to giving advice to aspirants, could only offer

---

<sup>8</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," *Longman's Magazine* IV (1884): 507; hereafter abbreviated "AR." For reasons that will become clear, I quote from James's original version of the essay; most citations refer to revised version first published in his 1888 *Partial Portraits*.

the vague and daunting advice to be “one of those on whom nothing is lost” (*AR*, p. 510). Within literary studies, this reply is understood both as having ended Besant’s line of inquiry and as opening, virtually *ex-nihilo*, the one that flowered into novel theory. The novel came out all right in the end, taking its rightful place alongside poetry and the other arts, but if Besant helped it get there he did so entirely by accident. In a telling allegory of being careful what one wishes for, Besant – whose florid style and robust prudery perfectly conjure the stereotype of the Victorian novelist – stranded himself on the wrong side of the chasm. While his lecture, without too much exaggeration, pinpoints the opening of the “Great Divide” in fiction, registering the very moment of separation between the high-culture art novel and the low-culture mass-market novel, it does so as a cautionary beacon.<sup>9</sup> As Mark Spilka put it, “Besant held in half-baked solution the whole swirl of received ideas about fiction,” and his public presentation of this swirl served to mark off one path with a “dead end” sign.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the path James set out on becomes steadily more visible in the way that the novelists who followed him make an inward turn, developing the psychological novel and experimenting with dense, difficult, mentally demanding prose.

---

<sup>9</sup> See Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 205, 216-9. Cross dates the battle that opened an “irrevocable schism” between the “middlebrow” “tradesmen” and the “highbrow” “artists” to the mid-1880s, citing the “Art of Fiction” debate as its central engagement. “Both sides,” Cross observes, “emerged victorious, even strengthened by their conflict.” See also John Goode, “The art of fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James,” in *Tradition and tolerance in nineteenth-century fiction: Critical essays on some English and American novels*, ed. David Howard, John Lucas, and John Goode (London, 1966) pp. 243-281. Goode suggests the bifurcation of the serious novel and the bestseller, “which became so acute after 1884,” marks “the beginning of the dividing line between the Victorian novel and the twentieth-century novel” (p. 245).

<sup>10</sup> Spilka, “Henry James and Walter Besant: ‘The Art of Fiction’ Controversy,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 6, no. 2 (Winter 1973): 102.

This narrative is an old one, with clear flaws, yet nothing if not intractable. As Dames recently observed, “That James inaugurates the serious formal study of the novel is a critical shibboleth that has shown an unparalleled ability to survive punishment.”<sup>11</sup> Noting how James continually manages to reemerge “triumphant as the inaugurator of the categories of novel theory as we know them” despite the best attempts of literary scholars to provide alternate accounts, Dames argues that

the resilience of this James-as-origin picture owes everything to the institutional boundaries he helped erect: after James, novel theory could only be an author-centered study of the epistemological conditions of fiction, entirely divorced from the competing disciplines that had previously given it life.<sup>12</sup>

Despite Dames’s suggestion that novel theory is “author centered” and despite the figure of James looming so large, the discipline organizes itself much more clearly as a text centered one, as Dames partly admits. Novels themselves become the primary object of study serving, in his words, as an “engine for the production of knowledge.” Novel theory thus becomes epistemology, and the job of the critic turns to investigating those “aspects of novels where knowledge, or a sudden cognition of a whole, is revealed.”<sup>13</sup> In his own intriguing attempt to

---

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Dames, “Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories,” *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 207.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210. As will become clear in what follows, Dames crucially overstates the role that Jamesian-centered novel theory played in displacing the physiological novel theory he aims to resuscitate. If the force of James’s remarkable presence only become manifest in the 1940s and 1950s, it’s fairly clear that novel theory wasn’t what buried Alexander Bain and the other reading theorists Dames mentions. The physiology of reading was not replaced by novel theory but by the sort of practical approach that Besant inaugurates.

dislodge this narrative, Dames unearths an earlier approach to novel theory that focused on the physiology of reading, arguing that this lost theory usefully accessed to the affective aspects of literary interactions. For all the promise that such reader-centered approach might hold, this angle leaves novel theory's object-centered relation almost entirely intact. Moreover, it ignores entirely the disjuncture I began with. Despite the neat evolutionary arc of novel theory's accepted history, the more than half-century that lies between Besant's (and James's) claim that fiction is an art and Schorer's reiteration presents a formidable lacuna.

Whatever its claims to springing directly from the mind of James, novel theory is an invention of the 1940s not the 1880s. Too easy and undignified for the philologists, too contemporary for "old" historicists, and too worldly for the classical humanists, modern fiction, whether high-brow or low, remained largely ignored by literary studies through the first fifty years of the discipline's existence.<sup>14</sup> Even after the advent of the New Criticism, scholars were

---

<sup>14</sup> Although there are a very limited number of exceptions, professors of literature generally kept fiction out of their classrooms as well. The reasons given vary with the type of novel. Popular fictions hardly needed to be encouraged. They were assumed to be what students read on their own time, and there was little hope that students benefitted thereby. "Art" novels, by contrast, were to be kept out of the classroom because they were morally unfit for "young men." Those who did attempt to teach fiction risked ridicule, both from other professors and from the world at large. The example of William Lyon Phelps's 1895 course on "Modern Novels" at Yale is instructive. An alarmed senior faculty suggested either that Phelps drop the course or that he be "dropped from the faculty (Phelps, *Autobiography with Letters* [Oxford, 1939], p. 297). The course was enough of a sensation to draw the attention of *The Daily Telegraph* and sustained mockery from *Punch*. The satirist from the latter delights in reimagining this new "modern fiction class in Yale University" – a course reported as having "no fewer than 258 members" – as a Cambridge tutorial. The predictably conservative attack on such "modern" ideas of education, especially one so decidedly popular, takes the form of a series of conferences between a tutor in modern fiction and his underperforming undergraduates, with the teacher castigating his students for neglecting their studies in favor of "light literature –



slow, as Schorer's essay makes clear, to turn to fiction. Schorer himself is responding to a contemporaneous essay by R.P. Blackmur that served as something of a call to arms. Writing in *The Kenyon Review*, one of the central New Critical organs, Blackmur announced in 1949 that the "novel needs precisely the kind of attention, the same second look ... that in the last twenty years or so we have been giving poetry."<sup>15</sup> Equally to the point, James's influence on the novel was, despite general assumptions to the contrary, much delayed. Contrary to the usual timeline, Linda Simon has shown "after James's death in 1916, criticism [of his work] waned" and remained low for the next thirty years. Even Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), often taken as the landmark popularization of James, "failed to generate renewed interest."<sup>16</sup> Lubbock's stock rose with that of his master, and *The Craft of Fiction* suddenly re-emerged after a long period of dormancy, flying through a flurry of editions, most notably a 1957 reprint featuring an introduction by Schorer. If novel theory did not then develop as a steady unfolding of James's insight, what filled the gap between the Besant and the New Critics?

The usual answer is that literary modernism did. The period's leading artists advanced along James's indicated path through both their technical experiments and their theoretical observations, leaving Besant and his ilk further and further behind. The extramural efforts of Woolf, Joyce, and many others made of the novel a theoretically rich object that the New Critics simply domesticated, securely institutionalizing the modernist novel and keeping it relatively

---

HOMER and VIRGIL, and trash of that sort." The tutor advises one student to "attend the course of anatomy lectures at the hospital" because his "acquaintance with modern realism is quite insufficient" and he examines another pupil on *Trilby*, *The Jungle Book*, and the "employment" of common plot "formulæ." ["A Novel Education." *Punch*, November 30, 1895, 255].

<sup>15</sup> R.P. Blackmur, "For a Second Look," *The Kenyon Review* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1949): 9.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Simon, *The Critical Reception of Henry James: Creating a Master* (Rochester, 2007), p. 42.

free from the commercial contamination that attended the middlebrow novel.<sup>17</sup> While critical work over the last few decades has called the notion of such radical rupture, and the too easy periodization that goes with it, into question, literary modernism remains most recognizable as a regime change in technique. Even if the ends of their experiments are now connected with social programs instead of formalist preoccupations, technical innovation remains the period's hallmark, and the innovations are taken to support the novel as engaged in the sort of epistemological work that Dames acutely remarks on. However much we might contest the old saw that the modernist novel makes a psychological turn, it remains a general truism. Against this, I argue that the techniques of the modernist novelist were continuous with Besant's vision of fiction as an art rooted in practical *techne*. This maker's view of the novel shares with modernism a conception of technique squarely at odds with that offered in most formalist criticism of fiction, where technical innovations function as so many tools in the *reader's* search for truth. The objectification of the modernist novel by midcentury critics, which played such a crucial role in criticism of the novel more broadly, systematically redefined the art of fiction as made possible by a particular practice of reading. Ironically, in elaborating the techniques of

---

<sup>17</sup> This commonplace narrative is rendered particularly legible in the informal disciplinary histories captured in textbook anthologies. Consider, for instance, Michael Hoffman and Patrick Murphy's popular anthology, *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction* (Durham, 2005). The editors claim that James "practically invented" theory of fiction, and their condensed version of "The Art of Fiction" excises Besant entirely. The most notable omission is the opening sentence of the essay, where James openly declares that he found both his "pretext" for writing and his very title in Besant's lecture, a modesty now glossed as a moment of polite but profound irony. Hoffman and Murphy's next two entries come from Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster, but the remainder of the volume consists entirely of work by professional literary critics. The transition from practicing novelist to professional critic goes unremarked.

close reading fiction and making them into an eminently teachable craft, these critics rendered the practices of writing, which compromised an equally transmissible craft, unavailable.

In an interlinked series of classic articles from the 1980s, M.H. Abrams contrasts the two versions of art that are at play here.<sup>18</sup> Regarding the first and older version that Besant invokes, Abrams observes that, “From the time of the Greeks, what we call ‘the arts’ had been classified with crafts such as carpentry and cookery, and had only occasionally and in limited aspects been linked to one another.”<sup>19</sup> Abrams dubs this view of art the “construction model,” and notes, apropos of Boege’s dismissive remark above, that the operative mode of dealing with poetry closely resembled the method of addressing how a piece of furniture is best made. On Abrams’s account, the construction model remained dominant up through most of the eighteenth century.

Critics working from this conceptual stance

posited a poem or any other work of art to be an *opus*, a thing that is made according to a *techne* or *ars*, that is, a craft, each with its requisite skills for selecting materials and shaping them into a work designed to effect certain external ends, such as achieving pleasure or

---

<sup>18</sup> I refer respectively to “From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and the Exemplary Art,” “Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics,” and “Kant and the Theology of Art.” The first two are collected in *Doing Things with Texts* (New York, 1991) while the final essay may be found in the *Notre Dame English Journal* (13 [1981]: 75-106).

<sup>19</sup> Abrams, “From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and the Exemplary Art,” p. 159. Abrams’s argument is indebted to Paul Oskar Kristeller’s seminal “The Modern System of the Arts,” (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 [1951]: 496-527; 13 (1952): 17-46. Recent revisions suggest that the Greeks and Romans did have a somewhat more unified view of the fine arts than Kristeller claims, but the point that the arts of furniture making and the literary arts were classed together remains, as does the claim that the notion of “Art” underwent a radical modification in the course of the eighteenth century. See Stephen Halliwell’s *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* (Princeton, 2009., p. 7-9.

instruction or emotional effects on an audience, as well as adapting the work to a particular social occasion or function. (“Art-as-Such,” p. 137).

Considered from this vantage point, “Aristotle’s *Poetics*, whatever its important differences, is congruent with the views of Horace, whose enormously influential *Ars Poetica* is explicitly a how-to document” (“Art-as-Such,” p. 138). Importantly, these “traditional treatises did not distinguish between their function as a guide to the poet in making a good, or successful poem, and as a guide to the reader in judging whether the poem is good” (“From Addison to Kant,” p.163).

Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, a new model of the fine arts emerged, one that Abrams christens the “art-as-such” model. Theories of art-as-such “assume that the paradigmatic situation, in defining and analyzing art, is that in which a lone perceiver confronts an isolated work, however it happened to get made, and simply attends to the features that it manifests to his exclusive attention” (“Art-as-Such,” p. 139). The two basic premises, both of which were first articulated in the eighteenth century, that underlie this conceptual stance are, in Abrams’s terms, the “contemplation model” and the “heterocosmic model.” The first concerns the perceiver of the work and reformulates the experience of art as a detached form of appreciation that is an end in itself, while second concerns the work proper and defines that work as an autonomous, complete object, a world, in short, of its own. As Abrams notes, the consolidation of the “art-as-such” perspective was gradual, only becoming the dominant mode “of critical theory and discussion of the arts after the third decade of the [twentieth] century” ( p. 161). In literary studies, of course, this coincides with the moment of New Critical hegemony, but the gradual evolution makes possible a seemingly continuous line of development that ignores rival developments in literary art that emanate out of the construction model.

The seeming incoherence of Besant's project thus has everything to do with the fact that critics treat it as if it were flawed attempt to articulate technique from the contemplation model, when it was in fact made directly counter to that model. Working from the idea that it was the theorization of the novel, begun by Henry James in his famous reply to Besant, that elevated the fiction into one of the fine arts, literary critics have long misread the "Art of Fiction" debate as an argument over how to read novels when it was rather a debate about how to write them. James's essay appears to decisively eclipse Besant's only when our perspective takes *form* to be an inherent feature of the autonomous text, one that remains dormant until uncovered by the skilled reader. Viewing the debate from the maker's side fills the gap between Besant's lecture and Schorer's essay with what is one of the most expansive, populist movements in literary history. In so doing, it also exposes a submerged rivalry that profoundly shaped how literary critics treat authorial intention, aesthetic excellence, and practical knowledge.

## I.

How does one write fiction? The question was never asked more widely nor answered more comprehensively than in the period between the Art of Fiction debate and the Second World War. A flood of handbooks addressed themselves to the topic, as did an array of specialized periodicals. The popular press gave the question ample coverage and shadow system of education – conducted in correspondence schools, extension courses, and even by way of radio broadcast – supplied the curriculum that universities remained reluctant to offer until after the war. Although the *Ars Poetica* genre stretches back at least as far as Aristotle, and although many handbooks on literary advice readily declare themselves his legitimate descendants, the "Art of Fiction" debate marks the emergence of this new form of literary do-it-yourself

fashioning. While Besant's lecture echoes the *ars poetica* of the classical tradition in ways that will be worth looking at in more detail, it is a repetition with a difference, enthusiastic in its embrace of modernity, uniting *techne* with technology. The distinctive feature of the outpouring of literary advice unleashed after 1884 rests with the aesthetic awareness it brings to craft in which the theories introduced by the eighteenth century are brought down from the heavens and put to work. The field produces information that shuttles between the practical and the theoretical but this knowledge is, above all, meant to be *used* in the world, effectively erasing the boundary between art and everyday life. This shuttling has, when acknowledged at all, usually been seen to run in only one direction, with art making all the concessions to a life lived under capitalism but, as I'll show, the traffic went both ways. The field of literary do-it-yourself fashioning functions as a distinctly modern, and relatively autonomous, expert system, but the expertise is best seen not as a set of ideological beliefs (conscious or not) to be acquired, but as a self-reflexive practical craft to be mastered. Against models of practical mastery that have dominated social thought across an array of disciplines, I argue, however, that such expertise is marked by a continuous conscious intervention. Thus, capturing the distinctiveness of this new *ars poetica* means focusing not on its ideology but in its practice and the specific knowledge practice makes available. Texts in the field demand that aspirants, if they wish to succeed, know the field and know that the field is always changing: they need to consume the freshest tips, imitate the most innovative techniques, develop their sense of observation, track the changing market, and attune themselves to the taste of the reading public. Such practical skills have, in the course of the twentieth century, come to be seen as separate from cognitive knowledge. Skill, from this standpoint, is acquired through largely unconscious pathways and determined by underlying objective structures that individual actors have little access to. I will explicitly take up

this theory of skill in later sections, but, for the moment, will rather indicate the immense field from which the counter-evidence will be drawn.

Within a few years of the “Art of Fiction” debate the field would be crowded with “literary workers” eager to discuss the practical dimensions of fiction writing, first in such general interest newspapers and periodicals as *The Spectator*, the *Nation*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Tribune*, *Lippincott’s*, and *The New Review*, and then, not long after, in specialty periodicals addressed exclusively to literary workers and aspirants. 1887 saw the launch of *The Writer* whose subtitle – “A Monthly Magazine to Interest and Help All Literary Workers” – echoes James’s interest in interest as well as his emphasis on labor and work. Launched in Boston, the venture succeeded so well that the same firm soon produced a companion journal called *The Author* in 1889. A journal that shared the title of the latter began appearing in London in 1890, followed by *The Editor* in 1896 and *The Writers’ and Artists’ Year-Book* (London) in 1897.<sup>20</sup> By the late 1880s the interest in keeping up with the state of the art demanded more comprehensive surveys in the form of comprehensive manuals. Initially, they simply collected and sorted all the outpourings of the “era of discussion,” but by mid-1890s they took the form of proper “Art of Fiction” handbooks – devoted exclusively to writing fiction and organized around a base of practice exercises – a form that would remain dominant and fairly stable up through the appearance of creative writing programs beginning around 1937, and one that remains familiar today.

---

<sup>20</sup> Many of these efforts can be directly connected with the Art of Fiction debate. The London edition of *The Author* was the “organ” for the Society of Authors, an organization founded and largely run by Besant, while *The Writer* reprinted Besant’s lecture in its August issue for 1899 followed in September by James’s reply.

By even a conservative estimate, several hundred handbooks on writing fiction were published in Britain and America between the mid-1890s and the late 1940s, with many of them running through multiple editions.<sup>21</sup> The anonymously published *How to Write a Novel* (1901), one of the very first handbooks devoted exclusively to long fictions and a useful example of the transition that the handbook form was making from sprawling compilation to integrated course, could already collect a list of more than 100 books and articles of advice on the art of fiction in a series of appendices. The field would grow exponentially over the next several decades, so much so that the literary historian Fred Lewis Pattee, writing in 1925, dubbed his own era “the age of the handbook.”<sup>22</sup>

There is no ready-to-hand term that might be conveniently applied to this constellation of technique, theory, and practice that makes up the do-it-yourself approach to literary composition.

---

<sup>21</sup> Because some handbooks were distinctly amateur productions, pamphlets really, it is difficult to calculate their total number with final precision. In a chapter that is limited to American short story handbooks, Andrew Levy compiles a catalogue of more than one hundred manuals published between 1898 and 1928. When those handbooks published in Britain, or in the Thirties, are put together with manuals that treat novel writing or fiction in general, the number easily doubles. As far as the popularity of individual titles goes, Levy cites J. Berg Esenwein’s *Writing the Short Story* (sixteen editions in fifteen years) and Walter Pitkin’s *Art and Business of Story Writing* (ten editions in twelve years) as examples of the genre’s potential sales (86). Handbooks were also distributed by correspondence schools (subscribers were sent manuals as part of their overall fees) and assigned in the college and high school classes that began appearing around 1900, significantly furthering the circulation.

<sup>22</sup> Pattee, *The Development of the American Short Story: an Historical Survey* (New York, 1923), p. 364. So exhaustive is Pattee’s survey that the very useful bibliography for his final chapter – headed “Notable Books and Articles on Short-Story History and Technique” – concludes with “1923: Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Development of the American Short Story: an Historical Survey*” (378). For Pattee, the rise of the handbook seems to have led to the end of literary history, making his own work more of an elegy than a survey.



“Creative writing” springs to mind, but doesn’t quite fit, chiefly because it refers to a specifically institutionalized discipline. In many ways, the self-reflexive, print-based practices invent the face-to-face workshop and the discipline of creative writing, but once the institutions of “school” – most especially those of the university system – take up the task of producing writers, new forms of socialization take over, as Mark McGurl has amply documented in *The Program Era*.<sup>23</sup> To speak of only the most obvious, Creative Writing, for better or worse, operates in the sheltered world of academia and often speaks little, perhaps only in the form of the once-a-semester guest lecture to the commercial side. Thus, what becomes one of the most central and enduring problems that will plague MFA programs – that they are so cloistered as to prevent the student from acquiring the necessary real world experience – precisely inverts the criticisms faced by the literary self-help articles and manuals, namely that they were too worldly. In what follows, I will employ the term “fictioneering” to fill the terminological void.

“Fictioneering”: is a usefully unlovely term and one with a various enough history to qualify as a contested word, up, as it were, for grabs. Carlyle used it to express his ambivalence towards Dickens’s chosen vocation and the late Frank Kermode put it to a very different use in describing J.M. Coetzee’s metafictional pseudo-memoirs.<sup>24</sup> One writing manual – Henry Bedford-Jones’s *The Graduate Fictioneer* (1932)- employed the word in its title, and several others toss it about with greater discretion. The strongest sanction for my use of the label comes from a 1922 – of course – *New York Times* article (April 23) titled “Fictioneering for All!” in which Emania M. Sachs facetiously advocates “universal fiction writing” – “Every man his own story writer and a typewriter in every home” – as the ideal emotional outlet and tool for practical thinking and self-

---

<sup>23</sup> Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Kermode, “Fictioneering,” *London Review of Books* 31, no. 19 (October 8, 2009): 8-9.

management. Sachs employs a few humorous fictional sketches of his own to demonstrate that taking up the pen beats “consulting neurologists, psychoanalysts and the family lawyer.” While satiric, Sachs exaggerated description concisely puts the salient habits and practices of the fictioneer into high relief: the fictioneer, “irregular contributor to *Facile Fiction Magazine*,” is “trained to think in the third person”; “Plot making has given her a terrible habit of saying ‘Why?’ or, ‘And then what?’ and in crises she’s apt to fling these pungent words at herself”; he possesses extensive “card index files” wherein are sorted the awkward situations of life under titles such as “Triangle Plots” and “Young Love stories”; she constantly reflects on the behaviors of those around her and asks, “if I were writing this story” how would I “motivate” their actions? The fictioneer “writes ten mediocre stories a year and sells two triennially,” thereby steadily realizing the Athenian philosopher’s “antiseptic phrase” – know thyself – through his work, although it is not always a pleasant realization: “No halo garlands the brow of a fictioneer. But he knows a villain when he sees one, even if it is his very own self.” At this mature stage in the development of do-it-yourself literary cultivation, the fictioneer is visible and defined enough for Sachs to know one when he sees one, and he provides here the quintessence of such individuals: fictioneers are productive, self-trained, as much engineers as artist; although somewhat machine-like, they are obsessed with craft; while they typically spend most of their time doing something else, their weakly remunerative literary labors nonetheless provide the deeper rhythm of their existence.

Looking to the profession of “engineering,” fictioneering thinks of itself a fusion of science and art that employs specialized knowledge and skills for applied, often explicitly commercial, ends. A fictioneer anxiously aspires to be “professional,” desiring legitimacy in the eyes of the broader public while nonetheless wanting exemption from the gatekeepers, fixed routines, and

bureaucratic demands of the more established professions. Manuals, handbooks, novels and stories about artists – the whole collective enterprise of fictioneering – thus had implications for who the writer aspired to be, for what she took her subject to be, for how she would give it form, and for how she would *live*, in both the social and the economic sense of that term. To become a literary artist was not only to pursue a newly professionalizing career, but to also to craft a self. At first sight, the archive of fictioneering merely records, in the most prosaic way possible, the ways in which a writer might make herself through prose: the various exercises, technical tips, and recommended model readings that anyone who aspires to write fiction needs to undertake. Yet, within these atlases of the mundane, lurks a stranger and deeper patterning of life as well as a possibility for rethinking the nature of literary knowledge.

Without question, there is much within the manuals and articles that seems grossly commercial, embarrassingly sincere, or flat-out ridiculous; the genre is undeniably the haunt of small-time grifters and enthusiastic quacks; and, finally, because of the mechanistic associations and taints of middlebrow aspiration, writers who may well have benefitted from how-to literature are generally disinclined to admit it. The present study can only admit to finding in all of these apparent deterrents additional recommendations to the subject. Compared with high epistemic, and more recently ethical, claims of the contemplation model that literary studies has worked under since the advent of the New Criticism, the practical *techne* of the fictioneer appears either minor or petty. Its apparent insignificance, however, has everything to do with the disciplinary configuration of literary studies, a configuration moreover that fictioneering, as a surprisingly lively rival to criticism, decisively shaped.

## Part I

Literary criticism's rivalry with fictioneering has rendered the latter almost invisible. This itself is not the crucial point, for it would be possible simply to add the various documents of the fictioneering archive to the field of study without too much accommodation. Certainly, literary studies has become more hospitable towards such humble aesthetics as those of the fictioneer. The reason, rather, to turn to the forgotten contest between these two opposed approaches to literature is that the ground they fought over was a procedural one as much as a conceptual one. At stake were both the definition of literary knowledge and the value of that knowledge. The knowledge procedures that emerged from this struggle remain the largely unacknowledged frame of literary studies. As criticism sought to establish its disciplinary standing, partly against its more pragmatic rival and partly against intradepartmental competitors, it cultivated - through its own body of concrete, distinctive techniques - a conceptual stance organized around the autonomous object, one aptly summarized by Abrams in his "Art-as-Such" model, but distinctively organized into a craft of *reading* (and thus importantly distinct from other forms of aesthetic contemplation). While subsequent revisions of critical approach have entirely altered the substance of the object studied such that "Art" no longer serves as the central term, the practical art of reading remains remarkably unaltered. To put it slightly differently, in insisting that the nature of this object studied determines the method of approach, I.A. Richards and the New Critics fundamentally established a conceptual orientation that admitted of endless variation so long as a secure object remained in place to be read. Indeed, there is considerably more variation than is often admitted not only between Richards and the New Critics but also among the New Critics themselves from an ideological or theoretical standpoint. What they share – and

what has driven the unwarranted move of claiming all these early critics shared a single ideology of the aesthetic – is a procedural orientation toward their objects of interpretation.

This particular arrangement of the stance literary critics take toward their objects of study remains defined largely by a shift our discipline underwent as it moved from a program of scholarly research to one of critical interpretation. During this shift the primary “object” of study migrated from language to literature, meaning that our discipline shifted from a study of the most practical process of all – linguistic interaction – to a study of products. In recent years, literary scholars have traced the interdepartmental, institutional, and intellectual rivalries that attended this shift and that remain in play. While this work has valuably brought out the historical and social forces that influenced literary critical methodology, and while it has made us more attentive to how such forces continue to shape our discipline, it remains confined within a relation of reading that cannot fully account for its own procedures. A close reading of close reading, even when undertaken from a sociological or historical point of inflection, remains locked within a horizon defined by the relation of a reader to a pre-existent object. As a consequence, while the theoretical and cultural underpinnings of the discipline have undergone significant revisions, the procedural and practical aspects remain relatively untouched even though they crucially define the relation between reader and text. The central irony is that the Richardsonian “practical critics” and the American New Critics together elaborated an array of practical skills even as they denied such skills to literary artists. Averting to an epistemic scheme that viewed the techniques of production as irrelevant, literary critics articulated an art of reading that featured the very “laws, methods, and rules” that Besant had proposed as the basis for the art of fiction. As we will see, the disciplinary injunctions against looking to a work’s technical

genesis, however, were intended as expedients, not permanent laws. Yet, without doubt, they have hardened into a virtually inviolable critical theology.

The critique of the New Critical object is not new. The autonomous text object is one of New Criticism's most salient features, and with good reason. When Cleanth Brooks, perhaps the most influential of all New Critics, was called upon to state his faith in the "My Credo" series for *The Kenyon Review*, he rendered his leading "article" thus: "*That literary criticism is a description and evaluation of its object.*"<sup>25</sup> John Crowe Ransom took his faith even further. The literary object was not just what made English a discipline, it was what made it more than a discipline. While the sciences may similarly "contemplate object as object," in literary studies one may contemplate the object "under another form entirely, the form of art. And that is when I am impelled neither to lay hands on the object immediately, nor to ticket it for tomorrow's outrage, but am in such a marvelous state of innocence that I would know it for its own sake, and conceive it as having its own existence."<sup>26</sup> One could easily multiply such statements, for, despite the fact that midcentury criticism was more heterogeneous than is often claimed, the literary text as object served as one of the field's central organizing principles.

The most trenchant repudiations of the "autonomous object" model focused their energies on exposing the ideological formations behind the first term.<sup>27</sup> My concern, however, is with the second term and, more crucially, how the particular nature of the object underwrites an array of practices and procedures. While the ideology of an aesthetic autonomy undoubtedly carried

---

<sup>25</sup> Cleanth Brooks, "The Formalist Critics," *The Kenyon Review*, 13, no. 1 (Winter, 1951): p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> John Crowe Ransom, "Forms and Citizens" in *The World's Body* (New York: Scribner's, 1938), pp. 44-45.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*. Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (London, 1996) provides the quick reference version condemning the New Critics for "disentangling" the text "from any social or historical context." (pp. 47-9).

significant social and political consequence – and was thus eminently worth debunking – it is worth remembering that the New Critics themselves regarded autonomy less as a philosophical ideal and more as a practical expedient. D.G. Myers has usefully observed that, as far as aesthetic autonomy goes, “literature was not so much defined in this way as studied in this way.” His point is that the coherence of the New Criticism was not so much an ideological one as a practical one. It triumphed over its rivals – philology, the old historicism, and belles lettristic appreciations – not because of theoretical sophistication but because of practical application. “The isolation of an object of study is a practical necessity,” Myers continues, “A methodological expedient, which falls to those who would study something instead of everything.” Myers points to the “Teacher’s Note” in the first edition of *Understanding Poetry*: “Though one may consider a poem as an instance of historical and ethical documentation, the poem in itself, if literature is to be studied as literature, remains finally the object for study.”<sup>28</sup> What may be more surprising, however, is that this methodological expedient and practical necessity proposed only a temporary isolation from the practices that fictioneering was then exploring. Within the history of literary criticism for the hundred years and more can be found a seemingly minor series of practical compromises and ad-hoc procedural decisions that nonetheless carried the greatest consequence. That the practical skill a discipline cultivates can itself shape that discipline is a point that has sometimes astonished the practitioners themselves. Consider how Hugh Kenner, in “The Pedagogue as Critic” observed of the New Criticism that “the curious thing is how a classroom strategy could come to mistake itself for a critical discipline.”<sup>29</sup> Kenner meant to dismiss the whole of New Criticism by exposing its entire theoretical foundation as simply a pedagogical trick, but the

---

<sup>28</sup> Myers, *The Elephants Teach* (Englewood Cliffs, 1996), p. 130.

<sup>29</sup> Kenner, “The Pedagogue as Critic,” in *The New Criticism and After* (Charlottesville, 1976), p. 45.

more interesting conclusion to take away is to notice both how decisively a seemingly merely practical exercise influences the entire enterprise and how ready the discipline is to dismiss them.

## I.

Curiously enough, fictioneering and literary studies in English were more or less born together. Keeping in mind the obvious simplification that any sort of dating always implies, it is still worth noting that 1884 saw not only Besant's lecture and James's reply but also the founding of the Merton professorship of English Language and Literature at Oxford, the first such chair of English at the Oxbridge universities.<sup>30</sup> The same year also witnessed the first issue of PMLA, arriving just a year after the founding of the MLA.<sup>31</sup> On both sides of the Atlantic, English departments adopted the philological and research emphases of German universities.<sup>32</sup> The emphasis on scholarly research meant, in these early days, that fictioneering and literary studies ran parallel, operating almost exclusively in separate spheres. Even in those rare instances when students studied literature in a fairly direct way, other barriers intervened. Thus,

---

<sup>30</sup> Some of Britain's other universities did begin offering degree exams in English in advance of either Oxford or Cambridge. The University of London, for instance, had established a program as early as 1859 but with a decidedly historical emphasis. Other non-Oxbridge universities began offering degree programs as well, but they generally remained the province of German-trained, or German born, philologists. The lone, tenuous foothold literary criticism gained in nineteenth-century Britain was in extension programs.

<sup>31</sup> The first issue was officially titled *The Transactions of the Modern Language Association*. Sharon Hamilton offers an intriguing reading of the journal in "The PMLA and the Backstory to Making Poetry New" *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 2, no. 1 (2011): 53-85.

<sup>32</sup> On the American side, see Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature* (New York, 1989) and the documentary collection he edited with Michael Warner on *The Origins of Literary Study in America* (New York, 1989) as well as the first chapter of D.G. Myers's *The Elephants Teach*. On the British side, see Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932* (Oxford, 1983).



while there had been a chair of poetry at Oxford since 1708, the Professors who held it delivered their lectures in Latin until well into the 19th century. While alternatives to the philological approach had been aired from the very beginning, and although the German-style “grammarians” came under some heavy fire, literary criticism – in opposition to scholarship – did not gain a firm footing until decades later.<sup>33</sup> Yet when it did it did so by way of eminently practical interventions that brought fictioneering and English studies into an ongoing intermittent collision.

The first really noticeable such collision occurred in 1913 when Arthur Quiller-Couch – better known as “Q” – gave his first lectures as professor of English literature at Cambridge. Cambridge did not then offer a degree in English literature, but the lecture course proved immensely popular, not only with undergraduates but also with the general public once they were collected under the title *On the Art of Writing*. Dense with allusion and littered with untranslated Greek, the book might best be described as a fictioneering manual for such gentlemen as would never be caught reading one. As with Besant, Quiller-Couch insists that writing is an “Art.” For both men, it is not a “fine art” fit for cultured contemplation, but a practical one demanding the exercise and acquisition of skill and craft. In his preface to the lectures – which he chose to leave intact *as* lectures (again like Besant) – Quiller-Couch insists that “the main attack” of his book “amounts to this”: “literature is not a mere Science, to be studied; but an Art, to be practised.”<sup>34</sup> He extends the point in his second lecture, titled “the

---

<sup>33</sup> The efforts of John Churl Collins particularly stand out. Collins had begun giving lectures on modern English literature in 1880 as Oxford University Extension lecturer had aggressively campaigned for the first Merton professor to be, in our current terms, a critic rather than a scholar. While Collins did not succeed – the post was given to – A.S. Napier, a German-trained philologist – his disappointment led directly to his 1891 book *The Study of English Literature*, which later bore fruit by providing the foundation for the Cambridge Tripos.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing* (New York, 1916), p. vi.

practice of literature” and delivered Wednesday, February 12, 1913. There he observes that if English literature is an Art “with a living and therefore improvable language for its medium or vehicle,” then it is “our business *to practise it*” (AW, 22, original emphasis). Such practice shapes the art of reading as well as the art of writing, working against the dictates of the contemplation model by turning aesthetic activity to practical ends: “by all means let us study the great writers of the past for their own sakes; but let us study them for our guidance.” Crucially, Quiller-Couch thought that such practice was to be valued even for criticism. Admitting perhaps that not every student was destined to become a great literary artist, he nonetheless insisted that even criticism would benefit from an insider’s practical knowledge of the art (thus echoing the ways in which earlier *ars poetica* texts, as Abrams pointed out, presumed both to instruct the artist and the critic). The fourth lecture, April 17<sup>th</sup>’s “On the Capital Difficulty of Verse,” puts his point most emphatically.

literature being an art (forgive the reiteration!) and therefore to be practised, I want us to be seeking all the time how it is done: to hunt out the principles on which the great artists wrought; to face, to rationalise, the difficulties by which they were confronted, and learn how they overcame the particular obstacle. Surely even for mere criticism, apart from practice, we shall equip ourselves better by seeking, so far as we may, how the thing is done than by standing at gaze before this or that masterpiece and murmuring ‘Isn’t that beautiful!’ (AW, 82)

Quiller-Couch’s reiterated assertion that literature is art, and that art requires practice rather than appreciation demonstrates just how deeply at odds these sentiments were with the prevailing intellectual climate of university. By way of aside, he often admits to overheard criticism, claiming at one point for instance, “I am told that these lectures are criticised as tending to make

you conceited; to encourage in you a belief that you can do things, when it were better that you merely admired” (AW, 82). He often feels the need to make clear that the lecture is offering not merely information but a far-reaching change in pedagogy, protesting at one point, “Yes, I seriously propose to you that here in Cambridge we *practice writing*” (AW, p. 22, original emphasis). This proposal, to put it in the briefest terms, was flatly rejected. However popular the *practice* of writing was becoming outside the university – these years could aptly be termed the golden age of fictioneering – the feelings within were distinctly against it, particularly at Cambridge where mathematics held sway. Among its purported flaws, Quiller-Couch’s proposal admitted of no clear form of objective evaluation and thus had to be rejected as a serious course of study.

Cambridge would not offer an official degree in modern English literature until 1917, though the developments there, delayed as they were, would quickly exert a jarring, decisive influence on literary criticism. As E.M.W. Tillyard recalled of the moment in his first-hand account, “English at Cambridge thus took a violent leap from a marked archaism to hitherto undreamt-of modernity.”<sup>35</sup> Tillyard suggests that it took the effects of the war to “make philology yield literature,” for only in the wake of that event were the German grammarians Karl Breul and E.G.W. Brauholtz – who had previously directed the course of literature and language study at the university – “powerless to oppose” such change.<sup>36</sup> The pragmatic impetus that Quiller-Couch had initiated remained clearly at the forefront when substantial change finally arrived, most notably in the early strand of interpretive criticism that I.A. Richards pioneered – he called “practical criticism” after all. Richards, however, had a radically different notion of what constituted the

---

<sup>35</sup> E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Muse Unchained* (London, 1958), p. 58.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

practical and viewed Quiller-Couch's version as representing a nebulous, anti-scientific aestheticism. Richards central innovation was to deploy what has come to be called "close reading" in a classroom milieu, thus introducing the needed rigor – and, no less important, testable exercises – for an exam subject.

The exact origins of close reading remain contested, but two claims are beyond debate: close reading began with the analysis of poetry and did so as a pedagogical corrective. Richards famously turned to his "practical criticism" in the face of the simple but "disturbing" fact that the elite students he taught at Cambridge were unable to make out even the "plain sense of poetry."<sup>37</sup> Realizing that his students needed as much instruction for John Donne, Christina Rossetti, Thomas Hardy, and Edna St. Vincent Millay as they needed for Homer or Vergil, Richards worked to devise a new system of instruction. Pedagogical approaches used for classical poets in no doubt provided some of the framework for the experiment. Scansion and metrical analysis had their place in the study of modern languages as they did in the study of the ancient languages, but whereas the study of poetry was largely incidental to the learning of the language, the study of modern poetry was the "thing itself." What the classical tradition did not provide, however, was a justification or a final purpose. Sustained by the weight of tradition, the study of Latin and Greek remained relatively unquestioned. The modern languages, by contrast, had no such weight behind them. The very skepticism with which they were held proved, in some sense, an advantage. Maligned, as we have seen, as "a poor man's classics," the study of English literature invited open challenge, particularly from the entrenched faculty. Richards welcomed the challenge. He was interested in the largest possible questions about the function of literature, and open to seemingly any approach to answering them. These concerns centrally

---

<sup>37</sup> I.A. Richards. *Practical Criticism* (New York, 1950), p. 12.

appear in both *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929) and *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). The general incomprehension of poetry thus provided a natural starting point for a revolutionary approach to the study of literature and the unsettled post-war environment of Cambridge provided an ideal laboratory: the sheer newness of the English Tripos required invention and the students, with the trauma of war still heavy on them, were more than willing to abandon tradition and strike out on new paths.<sup>38</sup> Richards scoured aesthetics, moral philosophy, linguistics, experimental psychology, neurophysiology and other fields for useful leads. His guiding philosophy in all of this might well be characterized as the search for techniques and skills that would empower the reader.

In this, Richards went against the tide of classical aesthetics by emphasizing both the practical activity of the contemplating subject and, more radically, the worldly utility of the pursuit. At the heart of his intervention was the denial of what he called “the phantom aesthetic state.” Aesthetic inquiry, according to Richards, did not depend on a separate faculty, but rather employed distinctly ordinary cognitive operations. The experience we undergo when reading poetry, as Richards put it in *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, “is made up of experiences of exactly the same kinds as those that come to us in other ways.”<sup>39</sup> The value of art, including poetry, resided in its ability to “order” these operations, thus making them somewhat less ordinary. Aesthetic inquiry was a practical intervention aimed at complicating “stock responses.”

---

<sup>38</sup> On I.A. Richards and the development of the English Tripos at Cambridge see J.P. Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work* (Baltimore, 1989); E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Muse Unchained* (London, 1958); F.R. Leavis, *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (Cambridge, 1979); David W. West “I.A. Richards's Psychological Principles of Literary and Aesthetic Response,” *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, (2000) 7:1, pp. 33-43.

<sup>39</sup> Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York, 1930), p. 78; hereafter abbreviated *PLC*.

In terms of the “art-as-such” model sketched by Abrams, Richards essentially violated all three of its fundamental premises: fine art did not constitute a separate, *sui generis* realm; the object was not attended to “for its own sake;” the work possessed no claim to be as an autonomous entity or world unto itself. Richards points out that the “art-as-such” doctrine, “insists on a severance between poetry and what, in opposition, may be called life” (*PLC*, p.78). Writing in direct opposition to A.C. Bradley’s suppositions that poetry “is a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous” and that to “possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to his laws, and ignore, for the time being, the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality,” Richards argues that any separation we make between poetry and any other experience is merely a pragmatic expedient that draws a boundary not between “unlike things” but between “different systems of the same activity” (*PLC*, p.78). In Joseph North’s succinct formulation, “Richards’s theoretical project is to break the aesthetic out of the Kantian loop of self-sufficiency and redundancy and instead to put it back into contact with the material concerns of life.”<sup>40</sup> Because these concerns materialized within the space of rapidly professionalizing university, straddling the twin aims of research and education, the theoretical foundations of Richards’s work are inseparable from their application. As North summarizes,

The effect of Richards’s work ... was to put literary criticism, considered as an active attempt to use literature as a tool of aesthetic education for the improvement of people’s lives, on something like the scientific footing required in order to qualify it as a discipline

---

<sup>40</sup> Joseph North, “What’s ‘New Critical’ about ‘Close Reading’? I. A. Richards and His New Critical Reception,” *New Literary History* 44, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 145.

within the modern research university, alongside—and even sometimes in competition with—literary scholarship, philology, literary history.<sup>41</sup>

Curiously enough, Richards's anti-aesthetic came very close to realizing the definition of art that Besant had proposed some years earlier. Criticism had an aesthetic component to it, in the way that Richards developed it, not because it dealt with a special class of objects that required a rarefied form of attention, but because it was a skilled operation defined by a transmissible body of practical knowledge. When it successfully brought the experience of poetry above the level of stock response, literary criticism might seem to endow its objects with an elevated quality, but the ghostly aura of the artwork emanated not from an inherent quality but from the quality of the interaction. Practical criticism's art, like fictioneering's, resulted from its *techne*, one that was transmissible, though not necessarily in any straightforwardly discursive form. What criticism required was its own technique, not its own "state." North argues that Richards's practical orientation makes him both unique and worth returning to as the discipline of literary studies rethinks its signature technique of close reading. As he puts it,

Richards was not alone in seeing the need for a general project of criticism as aesthetic education; nor was he alone in seeing that a real commitment to aesthetic education would mean developing a method for the training of skills, aptitudes, and sensitivities of the broadest and most general, as well as most unreliable, tenuous, intuitive, and idiosyncratic, kinds. He was, however, virtually unique in his insight that this new era, in which the study of English literature was being institutionalized, could support, and would in fact require,

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 146-7.

these aptitudes to be trained by a method that was repeatable, reliable, and precise enough to take its place among the disciplines.<sup>42</sup>

When considered in the context of fictioneering, however, the uniqueness of his approach fades considerably. The practical utility of a skill based approach, the living connection between literature and life, and an interest in exploring the varieties of non-propositional knowledge offered are all eminently familiar features of fictioneering, ones that had already been explored for decades.

So the question becomes this: how is it that in articulating his "practical criticism" Richards ignored an approach to literature that had been proclaiming itself as practical for over forty years, and that shared a profound distrust of the "art-as-such" model? Fictioneering could hardly have emphasized the practical nature of its approach any more loudly; from the very beginning, virtually every manual featured "practical" in its title. Yet, Richards does not just ignore fictioneering, but he has very little to say about fiction at all. Partly, this might be because his interlocutors in the field of aesthetics had not much concerned themselves with the novel, holding fast to the traditional fine arts instead. It's equally likely that poetry simply offered a more manageable field for experiment (and for making sure his courses, worrying "soft" in their subject, meshed with the rigorous demands Cambridge's Tripos examination system). Richard's classroom was his laboratory and short, self-contained poems returned more data. But it's worth remembering that Richards did attempt to deal with fiction and did so as both a practitioner and a theoretician. Intriguingly, Richards made at least two attempts to write a novel. Unfortunately, the manuscripts of his two "quasi novels" no longer exist, nor can we know how much his attempts might have put him in touch with the materials of fictioneering. It's excessively

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 146.



speculative to suggest that Richards's practical approach to studying literature - which is surely his most consequential innovation - derived in any direct way from the approaches of fictioneering, but strong parallels exist. On the theoretical side, the first assignment Richards faced as a lecturer at Cambridge in 1919 was to offer a course on "The Contemporary Novel" (the other course that he taught that term was his vastly more famous one on "The Principles of Literary Criticism"). Likely in preparation for the lectures, he began a book on the novel that same year. Of his attempts to develop a practical criticism of fiction, little more remains than of his novels - only the sketch of a syllabus - and it's clear that the experiment was a failure, fully abandoned by 1924.<sup>43</sup>

The reasons for the failure, however, are less distinct. Nicholas Dames has recently suggested that it was simply a matter of length. In his assessment, one fact above all - the length of the novel form - motivated both Richards's dislike for it and his inability to treat it theoretically. This most obvious or banal of facts [...] - the size of the novel, its increasing bulk, its implicit demand for more and more of our time, spread out over days and weeks - is for Richards the fundamental stumbling block.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> The reading list included Hardy, Conrad, Joyce, Bennett, Wells, George Moore, and Lawrence. Interestingly, Richards gave the course for, in his own words, "money," and such considerations no doubt shaped the course (and perhaps his aversion to it). His payment depended on how many students he was able to attract to the course. Each student who stayed on for at least six lectures was required to pay him 15 shillings. Overall, Richards found the course a bother and seemed glad to be done with it when his employment became more secure. See Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work*, p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel* (Oxford, 2007), p. 250. How much length was a problem in his fiction writing practice remains an open question. He seems to have abandoned both his "quasi" novels and his theoretical work on the novel around the same time.

It's no doubt true that novels presented a formidable obstacle for an approach whose attention was on attention. The simple fact of a novel's size would remain a problem that literary criticism, as we will see in the next section, would grapple with for the next several decades. What the difficulty of length really stands in for is the difficulty of rendering the novel as an object apart. Some of this is simply a function of the impossibility of, as it were, keeping the whole thing in one's head and seeing it entire. But the curious thing is why Richards would need to see the novel as a whole at all. In many ways the lack of unity experienced in the reading of a novel ought not to have mattered. Throughout *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, Richards seems so resolutely focused on the process of reading rather than on the object read, suggesting, for instance, "we continually talk as though things possess qualities, but what we ought to say is that they cause effects in us of one kind or another" (*PLC*, p. 16). However much this might focus on the interaction, this interaction still demands the stable ground provided by a definitive object. The novel, unlike a short poem, offered a much less stable ground for the interactions Richards wanted to study, partly because of their unwieldy size but partly because they also invited conjectures that called into question the very contemplative stance that he was aiming to set as the cornerstone of his pragmatic program of aesthetic education.

While Richards may have rejected a separate aesthetic realm that housed, or ought to house, the true works of "Art," he did inherit the design stance that underwrites aesthetic contemplation. He may have brought the ultimate end of aesthetic appreciation down from the heavens, but the focus remained on the contemplative, and the objects to be contemplated were pre-existent ones. Nowhere is this more evident than in his famous use of protocols. The protocols were sample poems stripped of identifying marks – the authors' names, the titles, the dates of publication – with updated, regularized spelling. Beginning in 1925, he handed them out to students in his

“Principles of Literary Criticism” course with the instructions to “comment freely in writing upon them.”<sup>45</sup> Subsequent critics have often misread the point of this activity. The New Critics, as we will soon see, offered a strong initial misinterpretation. Because many subsequent critics have looked back at this exercise through the lens of their tendentious misreading, it remains widely thought that Richards was promulgating a version of the autonomous object model. Only the briefest reading of *The Principles of Literary Criticism* is needed to dispel such a view, but his use of the protocols does reveal other continuities of method with the New Critics.

In the paradigmatic situation of the protocol reader, the poem, qua object, is simply already there to be interpreted. Richards’s erasure of its context does not betray a latent idealism that would place the work in a world apart, but it does seal the poem off from the work that went into making it. However much Richards may have disenchanted the art of critical reading by attempting to banish the “phantom aesthetic state,” his loosely Romantic view of composition meant that he viewed the writing of literature as a quasi-mystical venture, one even less tangible than a dream state. His earlier *The Principles of Literary Criticism* offers justification for turning away from the genesis of a literary work as a worthwhile avenue of inquiry: “the difficulty is that nearly all speculation as to what went on in the artist’s mind are unverifiable, even more unverifiable than the similar speculations as to the dreamers mind” (*PLC*, p. 30). In the end, he concludes that,

The mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation. They offer far too happy a hunting ground for uncontrollable conjecture. Much that goes to produce a poem is, of course, unconscious. Very likely the unconscious processes are more important than the conscious, but even if we knew far more than we do about how the mind works, the

---

<sup>45</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 4.

attempt to display the inner workings of the artist's mind by the evidence of his work alone must be subject to the gravest dangers. (*PLC*, p. 29)

Richards's elaboration of a consciously practical method of reading thus depends on denying that the practice of writing literature is either conscious or guided by practical knowledge. Two main reasons motivated such a denial: one pragmatic and one theoretical.

On the pragmatic side, it needs to be remembered that Richards was establishing a degree program in English that required exacting examination. What must be avoided on such an exam, above all, was conjecture. Philology had held sway in British English departments for so long largely on account of the fear that admitting a more literary approach would lead to, in Edward Freeman's famous formulation, "chatter about Shelley." Such a worry had dogged Quiller-Couch's lectures, leading to much chatter that a degree in literature was amounted "a poor man's Classics," (which at Cambridge was already "a poor man's maths"). Richards's prohibition against looking into how an artwork was made can be read as a direct rebuke of the longer serving professor's desire to seek to know above all "*how it is done*."

On the theoretical side, Richards's unwillingness to go hunting after the mental processes of a poet participated in broader anti-mentalistic research programs. Joshua Gang has recently argued that "some of close reading's most enduring techniques and assumptions have their origins in psychological behaviorism, the deterministic doctrine made famous by John Watson and B. F. Skinner."<sup>46</sup> Gang singles out Richards as the primary conduit between this "empiricist intervention in psychology" and the development of formalist poetics. Suggesting that the design of the protocol exercise had little to do with historical decontextualization and everything to do

---

<sup>46</sup> Joshua Gang, "Behaviorism and the Beginnings of Close Reading," *English Literary History* 78, no. 1 (2011): 2.

with removing “anything that might induce psychological speculation about the author,” Gang goes on to claim that close reading was founded on the attempt to limit analysis to observable external facts (rather than mental states). Gang’s account has itself been accused of applying its own reductions by making Richards into more of a devotee of behaviorism than he actually was,<sup>47</sup> but he is correct to note that the invention of close reading depended on locating a stable overt object of observation. Such a move is common to a much broader anti-intentionalist trend that continued to resonate long after most of the tenets of behaviorism were abandoned. The movement decisively favored the study of products rather than processes and tended to regard the training of most skilled behavior as if it were a sort of automatic conditioning that dispensed with the need for reference to mental states.

While there may not be a separate state when it comes to reading literature, it seems as if Richards supposed that there was when it comes to composing literature. It was a sort of phantom state, not in any supernatural sense, but in the sense that it was beyond the grasp of analysis, even less accessible even than a dream. To what degree he thought that the writing prose fiction depended on unconscious states, and how much his own experience with novel writing informed his views thereon, remains only a happy hunting ground for conjecture. What can be shown, however, is how the New Critics who followed him adopted and elaborated this particular feature of his method even as they jettisoned what his “theoretical machinery” and brought the practice of close reading back under the aegis of the philosophical aesthetics Richards had worked so hard against.

---

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Glicksohn and Chanita Goodblatt rebut the claim in rather numbing detail in their “Reclaiming I.A. Richards,” (*Poetics Today* 35, nos. 1-2 [Spring – Summer 2014]: 173-189).

## II.

In many ways, the situation of the American critic in the 1930s resembled the one that Besant found the novelist facing in 1884. Just as Besant had bemoaned that the public thought novelists proceeded by simple intuition and that anyone interested in writing a novel merely had to sit down and write one, so too did would-be professional critics lament the widespread feeling that the activity simply came naturally, a product of inborn taste. In his seminal “Criticism, INC.” (1937) John Crowe Ransom quoted the remark that “the head of English studies in a graduate school fabulously equipped” made to a would-be academic critic: “This is a place for exact scholarship, and you want to do criticism. Well, we don’t allow criticism here, because that is something anybody can do.”<sup>48</sup> The story of how English departments became places for criticism, and the ways that criticism became a form of “exact” scholarship are now well known. Proceeding from the widely observed crisis in literary studies, scholars have turned a critical eye on the social forces that shaped the development of criticism – as well as how the rise of criticism reshaped the institution that housed it. Recent histories of criticism have explored how the products of literary critical interpretation were fashioned into an institutionally credible form of knowledge. They have highlighted how the knowledge produced within English departments was constructed both to fit with the various missions of the university and how it was packaged in opposition to various rivals. Although these studies have given us a greater grasp of the institutional, political, and social forces that so shaped our professional activities, we have a surprisingly difficult time dealing with the “literary” rivalry posed by something like fictioneering because the practical dimensions of literary criticism themselves are so submerged. Unearthing such practical dimensions begins by looking back at the formative moments of

---

<sup>48</sup> Ransom, “Criticism, INC.,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 13: 4 (Fall 1937): p. 592; hereafter abbreviated “IF.”

criticism to unearth the decisive maneuvers that the New Critics made in excess of institutional mandates.

Much of "Criticism, INC." can be read as an extended response to the claim that "criticism is something anybody can do." For Ransom, such a notion simply reveals ignorance about how to conduct the proper business of criticism. Indeed, the essay forms a catalog of exclusions in which all the rival claimants to such business are successively disbarred. The easiest victims are the clear amateurs, such as the "high school classes and women's clubs," who are excluded because of their "delight" in the procedures of "synopsis and paraphrase." Book reviewers and literary journalists are discounted because their motives are mixed; "pure criticism" is simply not their business. This winnowing leaves "three sorts of trained performers who would appear to have some of the competence that the critic needs": artists, philosophers, and university teachers of literature. Yet, these "have not been trained to criticism so much as they have undertaken a job for which no specific qualifications were required" ("CI," 586). The lack of adequate gatekeepers and the absence of appropriate training mechanisms has kept criticism from emerging as the true profession that it might be. The clear remedy is to supply the missing training and develop the appropriate qualifications, and Ransom argues that the institution best suited to doing both is the university: "Criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons – which means that its proper seat is in the universities" ("CI," 587). This proper seat was, of course, already occupied. Thus Ransom's primary targets of the essay appear to be "the present incumbents of the professorial chairs" in English.

Catherine Gallagher brilliantly exposed how Ransom and the other New Critics unseated their scholarly rivals by more effectively exploiting the institutional opportunities made available by the modern university. As Gallagher observes, “the stunning success” of New Criticism “probably owed more to the deftness with which the ideas were woven into a discourse of professionalism than to the ideas themselves.”<sup>49</sup> Contrary to their long-standing reputation as conservative opponents of modernization in any form, the New Critics better gauged their institutional roles and transformed the place of literary studies within the university:

The New Criticism reinvented the discipline by unifying what had formerly seemed to be competing professional exigencies. Before the new criticism, the two legs necessary to the forward stride of any profession – specialized learning and public service – were uncoordinated in English departments. Each leg had a separate institutional footing: the philological research activities of the faculty organized the graduate school, while the undergraduate curriculum was generally devoted to what one professor called “the diffusion of culture.”<sup>50</sup>

Gallagher is quick to note that the profession had done perfectly well under the old system, but the New Critics cannily drew attention to what seemed like neglect and disorder in their own departments. They exposed, in Gallagher’s words, a “disjunction between graduate and undergraduate curricula, between specialized knowledge and general educational service.”<sup>51</sup> The New Critics found a common ground between the two by shifting the object of study from language to literature, and by making the knowledge produced from such a shift seem both

---

<sup>49</sup> Catherine Gallagher, “The History of Literary Criticism,” *Daedalus* 126, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 134-5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.



scientifically credible and socially useful. Moreover they did it so effectively that it came to seem eminently natural. As Gerald Graff noted, “We tend to forget that until recently the terms [‘scholar’ and ‘critic’] were considered antithetical: scholars did research and dealt with verifiable facts, whereas critics presided over interpretations and values, which supposedly had no objective basis and therefore did not qualify for serious academic study [...] Whereas ‘academic criticism’ had been a contradiction in terms, it suddenly became a redundancy, as criticism, once the province of nonacademic journalists and men of letters, became (with important exceptions) virtually the monopoly of university departments.”<sup>52</sup> The New Critics refashioned “notoriously arbitrary and undefined” artistic judgments into a science of sorts by locating a precise point of application for their methods.

One of Ransom’s key insights was to observe that literary studies had failed to become a proper professional discipline because it had failed to treat its true object of study appropriately. Scholars had somehow contrived to overlook the core object itself in favor of data that was both peripheral and external. “It is true,” Ransom observed, “that the historical and ethical studies will cluster round objects which for some reason are called artistic objects. But the thing itself the professors do not have to contemplate.” Without an independent object for study, and without independent procedures for studying the object, literary studies itself cannot be independent:

It is really atrocious policy for a department to abdicate its own self-respecting identity. The department of English is charged with the understanding and communication of literature, an art, yet is has usually forgotten to inquire into the peculiar constitution and structure of its product. English might as well announce that it does not regard itself as entirely

---

<sup>52</sup> Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, p.14.

autonomous, but as a branch of the department of history, with the option of declaring itself occasionally a branch of the department of ethics. (“CI,” p. 592).

In order for criticism to “receive its own charter of rights and function independently” it needed to establish a “product” sufficiently distinct from adjacent disciplines along with a distinctive way of training its “performers” (“CI,” p. 600). In the initial procedure of establishing a discrete object of study, literary studies had before it the successful models of other recently specialized disciplines – Ransom mentions an intriguingly haphazard collection that includes “economics, chemistry, sociology, theology, and architecture” – from which could be taken the basic methodological procedures of systematic inquiry. As Gallagher shows, professional autonomy demanded that the knowledge produced by a specific discipline be “untranslatable” into, or at least very different from, other forms of professional discourse. The difficulty was that literature seemed so eminently translatable: as Ransom notes, “nearly all departments of knowledge may conceivably find their own materials in literature, and take them out” (“CI,” p. 599). The critical – in both senses of the term – coup was to found professional autonomy upon the autonomy of the discipline’s object, an autonomy that was not by any means readily evident. Grasping this vitally unseen essence of the object become both the professional responsibility and the special procedure of literary criticism.

As we have already seen, philosophical aesthetics offered a general outline of a way forward in its “art-as-such model” – so ably sketched by Abrams. Yet the very generality of this model was precisely what counted against it. Philosophical aesthetics crucially lacked a specific “product.” All the fine arts were functionally equivalent. Thus, although the philosopher ought “to know about the function of the fine arts,” as Ransom mentions at the very outset of his article, “his theory is very general and his acquaintance with the particular works of art is not

persistent and intimate, especially his acquaintance with their technical effects” (*CI*, p. 586). Literary critics thus became *readers* rather than *contemplators* by specifying a very particular object and a systematic method for its study grounded on techniques. Curiously, however, technical effects were supposed to be the particular specialty of the poet, not the critic. Ransom’s articulation of the artwork’s autonomy in “Criticism, INC.,” offers an object lesson in procedural ingenuity in which the technique is transferred from an integral part of the construction model of art to being the essential locus of the contemplation model of art. To put it in a simpler idiom, the New Critics translate “form” from a verb to a noun.

This migration most explicitly occurs late in the essay, where Ransom programmatically defines critical activity by way of negation. The first and longest negation is examining at some length. “I should wish to exclude,” he proposes:

1. Personal registrations, which are declarations of the effect of the art-work on the critic as reader. The first law to be prescribed to criticism, if we may assume such authority, is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object rather than its effects upon the subject (“CI,” p. 597).

The idea that subjective effects are the proper domain of criticism “seems to reflect the view,” Ransom continues, “that art comes into being because the artist ... has designs on the public, whether high moral designs or box office ones.” Ransom finds it an “odious view” because “it denies the autonomy of the artist as the one who interests himself in the artistic object in his own right, and likewise the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake” (“CI,” p. 597-8). The attempt to ground autonomy in the artist’s stance toward the object, however, proves particularly tenuous because the very first person Ransom had excluded from the practice of criticism was the artist. While the artist may know good art when “he sees it,” his understanding

is “intuitive rather than dialectical – he cannot very well explain his theory of the thing.” Ransom permits the artist to comment on the artwork in a very limited way, but only insofar as “he sticks to its technical *effects*,” a topic he goes on to forbid from the realm of objective criticism, as we have just seen, in the very first law of criticism (“CI,” p. 586; my emphasis). In discussing their art, poets thus paradoxically deny both their own autonomy and the autonomy of their art.

Ransom grants the poet some awareness of “this sense of his labors,” though it’s a very curious kind of knowledge and one that makes poetry into “a desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre” (“CI,” p. 601). The very knowledge that poets possess – the technical knowledge of how to produce certain effects – is precisely what keeps them from having an adequate critical understanding of the true nature of their own work. The poet “knows that his practical interests will reduce this living object [the poem] to mere utility, and that his sciences will disintegrate it for their convenience into their respective abstracts” (“CI,” p. 601). Strangely then, poets are prevented from seeing their poems as autonomous objects by precisely those technical skills that they needed to compose their works in the first place.

In establishing the formal autonomy of the literary object as something independent of its construction, Ransom brings the literary object under what Daniel Dennett calls a “design stance,” although he does so in a complex way. When working from the design stance, “one ignores the (possibly messy) details of the physical constitution of an object, and, on the assumption that it has a certain design, predicts that it will behave *as it is designed to behave*.”<sup>53</sup> For relatively straightforward functional objects the design stance is tremendously useful, and so long as the function remains stable one rarely needs to reflect on the design stance itself. Dennett’s example is an alarm clock: if one knows what it is “for,” then one need not have any

---

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 16-7. Original emphasis.

understanding of how it was made to predict its behavior and manipulate it efficiently. But Ransom has claimed that the poem is an object designed to exist for itself.<sup>54</sup> The literary object is thus something both autonomous and designed. It exists independently of its cause or the processes of its construction, yet nonetheless seems designed to elicit interpretation; poetry remains, in Ransom's words "a device with a purpose" ("CI," p. 600). But by disqualifying the maker of the object from specifying the poem's "purpose," Ransom effectively black boxes the object of study. As Karin Knorr-Cetina points out, deploying the design strategy in regard to a "knowledge process," as Ransom does here, means that one is able to consider "only its output and its particular relevance to one's purposes."<sup>55</sup> The curious nature of Ransom's poetic object – a designed object with no "designs" – invites its own interpretation, and "the superior critic" then "speculates on why poetry, through its devices, is at such pains to dissociate itself from prose at all, and what it is trying to represent that cannot be represented by prose" ("CI," pp. 600-1). With such a speculative field before them, critics could then apply rigorous – and institutionally credible – methodological procedures in a systematic fashion without worrying over what the artist might say about her own work.

---

<sup>54</sup> Some measure of Ransom's ingenuity here is visible in the somewhat baffling examples he regarding the confusions between design, use, and effect: "We may define a chemical as something which can affect a certain cure, but that is not its meaning to the chemist; and we may define toys, if we are weary parents, as things which keep our children quiet, but that is not what they are to engineers" ("CI," p. 598). The first analogy evidences the New Critical borrowing of the object model from the harder sciences, but the toy example seems rather to indicate how an object's design is determined by its use and interestingly leaves out the very figure who would seem to come closest to being interested in the toy for its own sake (and who would thus come closest to the critic): namely, the child herself.

<sup>55</sup> Karin Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 7.

It is this sleight-of-hand that has long struck subsequent critics as so very suspect, and not without reason. Ransom's characteristic New Critical move of asserting a poem's formal autonomy depends on bootstrapping this very autonomy into existence. He predicts that the poem will act as an autonomous object – as a unified whole – and then performs a procedure that confirms exactly what he had predicted. Unsurprisingly, subsequent revisions have cast this move as an ideological one. On this view, an aesthetic that depends so entirely on the suspect construction its object forms the part of the New Critical methodology best explained by reference to the movement's political conservatism, its roots in a certain brand of Christianity, its anti-modern modernist mythology, and any other number of areas where it manifests as a merely personal (or regional) bias. The autonomy of the work, and the aesthetic excellence that such autonomy underwrites, thus stands as a sort of faith, the indivisible core of New Critical belief.

Gallagher, for example, who otherwise explicates so much of the New Critical methodology by looking at it through the lens of professionalization, falls back on ideological explanations when it comes to understanding its aesthetic stance, casting it as a “reaction against certain aspects of modernization”:

Against the homogenizing tendencies of the marketplace, the merely formal individualism of democratic politics, and the standardized consciousness produced by industrial workplaces and urban living, [the New Critics] counterposed a deeper, truer, and more qualitative selfhood [....] Their sentiments about modern society were translated into a critical practice by letting the “integrity” of the literary work stand in for the “integrity” of all forms of endangered specificity. In this regard, they did not depart from the standard aesthetic doctrines of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Gallagher, “The History of Criticism,” p. 134.

As this example indicates, belief in aesthetic autonomy is widely seen to function as a vestigial intellectual response, an inheritance from an earlier era that lives on while serving no useful function, nothing more than cognitive goose bumps. Similar interventions thus operate under the assumption that the New Critics' aesthetic doctrine was, at its core, a set of conservative ideological tenets. On such a view, this core creed subtended New Critical practice in excess of any practical or professional exigencies thereby making the evaluative pretensions associated with the movement appear as nothing more than a retrograde elitism and politically motivated mystification.

This judgment seems to be confirmed by a comparison with Richards. The New Criticism and the practical criticism of Richards are often lumped together as a matter of convenience, but there were real differences, particularly in the theoretical foundation for their respective projects. Accounting for their differences thus puts in relief that element of the American critics that seems most purely ideological. Richards, as I have mentioned, attempted to make a decisive break with inherited aesthetic doctrines, while the New Critics, as Gallagher indicated above, sought reestablish a direct line of continuity. Removing the elements that Richards contributed to the New Critical alloy would thus appear to isolate the essentializing, idealist residuum that so many subsequent critics have found unpalatable because it motivated the retreat from history and context. Performing this operation turns out to be relatively simple because the New Critics themselves were quite open about they took from Richards and what they left aside.

Taking a long look back from 1981, Cleanth Brooks accounted his debts in an article for the *Sewanee Review* as part of the "Critics Who Made Us" forum. Brooks had first encountered *Practical Criticism* and *The Principles of Literary Criticism* when he was studying at Oxford during the 1929-30 academic year, and thus he, along with Robert Penn Warren who then also

happened to be studying at Oxford, might be said very literally to have carried Richards's work across the Atlantic. When these not-yet New Critics brought Richards's "practical criticism" back to America, however, they only took half of it. As far as the direct influence of Richards's early work goes, Brooks readily admits that, "my appropriation of his ideas was [...] highly selective."<sup>57</sup> Brooks found Richards to be "a masterful practical critic" whose work changed "our views of reading in general and of reading poetry in particular."<sup>58</sup> In Brooks's estimation, Richards achieved his revolution by a skilled demonstration of a new mode of reading, one almost exclusively evident in the "specific case studies" based on the protocols. The theoretical foundation, as Brooks bluntly says, "was another matter." As Brooks sums up, "the practical effect of Richards's discussion of his thirteen selected poems was almost overpowering, and was to make his fortune in the world of letters" but the "psychological machinery" "got in the way for me and for many other theorists"<sup>59</sup> Quite simply, "such machinery simply seemed irrelevant as well as mystifying"<sup>60</sup> Brooks was not alone in this and rehearses the objections other New Critics – including Ransom and Wimsatt – made to the theoretical aspect of the work. The essence of their critique was that Richards, having come up with a tremendously useful practical foundation for the study of literature, proceeded to inexplicably stray away from literature into psychology. In their own eyes, the New Critics thought of themselves as refining what Richards had wrought by keeping the focus steadily on literature itself. The notion of "literature itself" would later come to be seen as New Criticism's bargain with the devil, one evidently made at the

---

<sup>57</sup> Brooks, "I.A. Richards and *Practical Criticism*," *The Sewanee Review* 89, no. 4 (1981): 589.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 592, 587.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 587.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 591.



crossroads where they turned off the path that Richards had indicated and turned back toward the aesthetics of philosophical idealism.<sup>61</sup>

Joseph North lays out the case most explicitly: once they had “co-opted” Richards’s practical criticism, the New Critics “remade and institutionalized it as a thoroughly idealist practice, based in a neo-Kantian aesthetics of disinterest and transcendent value, directed towards religious cultural conservatism.”<sup>62</sup> They dragged literary studies back “into the Kantian and idealist realm of transcendental value” for purely ideological reasons:

for thinkers brought up in the southern United States, who then came to see it as their task to reaffirm and defend a conservative cultural and religious tradition under threat from an encroaching modernity, it was much more natural to assume that one reads a text primarily in order to expound its authority, or to come to an assessment of its relation to other textual authorities.<sup>63</sup>

For North as for many others, prior ideological tradition determined New Critical practice in a way that inflected the way they defined art. Such an account leaves the New Criticism oddly torn. On the one hand they greatly expanded the innovative pedagogy Richards had initiated and cannily navigated modern knowledge systems to great effect, thus decisively outmaneuvering intramural rivals who seemed to hold the easily defended high ground. On the other, they unreflectively adopted a retrograde politics and a fundamentally conservative aesthetic that led

---

<sup>61</sup> As will shortly become clear, the “aesthetics of philosophical idealism” serve as a shorthand for the pragmatic use the New Critics made of the aesthetic tradition – which is quite selective – rather than that tradition itself. The aesthetic philosopher will likely feel, and with good reason, that the New Critics treated aesthetic idealism rather more roughly than reverentially.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph North, “What’s ‘New Critical’ about ‘Close Reading’?” p. 142.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

them into a sequence of missteps that subsequent critics would take great pains to repudiate. I argue, however, that this very useful distillation of New Criticism's aesthetic idealism yields an insight almost exactly reversed. The New Critics' use of the aesthetic idealist tradition, rather than showing them at their most ideological, shows them at their most practical.

Indeed, aesthetic idealism provided the New Critics with the very resource they needed to fashion an eminently pragmatic art of training readers. What seems like a merely ideological superaddition thus turns out to be a foundational elements in the craft of reading as a literary critic, so much so that the discipline's successive re-theorizations and even its eventual return to historicism represents not a break with this aspect of formalist criticism but an expansion and refinement of it. When New Critics took up the banner of the art-as-such doctrine, they did so not to conserve literary texts from the polluting hands of modernity but to create a wholly novel use for literary texts by explicitly turning them into a training objects for what itself can only be described as an art – though not a “fine” one. When they imported the “contemplation model” from aesthetics, they refashioned it into an activity that was anything except purely contemplative. Idealist aesthetics provided them with the eminently useful ability to treat literary artists as “oracles” who create beautiful things but don't understand their meaning. In so construing both the objects they acted on and the actions they took in relation to these objects, the New Critics configured literary knowledge as primarily a propositional statement of the work's meaning, and rendered literary artists as oracles who produced works but who had no exclusive access to their meaning.

Far from being the recrudescence of an antiquated aesthetic doctrine, however, the postulation of formal aesthetic autonomy and the use of idealist traditions to establish it actually represents a strategic innovation on the part of the New Critics that sustains the practical

application of their craft. The need to elaborate such a strategy arose in large part from the challenge posed to their model of literary education represented by fictioneering, and the recourse to aesthetic idealism was made to defuse the more extravagant appeal of this rival. It was not their beliefs that led them to render literary texts as autonomous objects, but a very concrete, practical strategy taken against to a surprisingly threatening alternative form of literary education. Their response, in effect, erected a boundary between what Gilbert Ryle famously dubbed “knowing how” and “knowing that” at the level of disciplinary procedure. Criticism laid exclusive claim to possessing the latter sort of knowledge while ruling the possibility – and even the desirability – of coming to any credible knowledge of the former.

The long-term consequences of this arrangement are profound, and crucially shape how we think of the New Criticism by limiting the possibilities both for expanding how literary studies is itself shaped by its procedures of “know how” and for re-evaluating the boundary between these two kinds of knowing. The practical strategy elaborated in the early years of criticism has not only shaped how we interpret the various objects we attend to, but how we interpret our own history as a discipline, as even this history becomes an object to be read, one that has crucially been disentangled from the forms of training that produced it.

### **III.**

The general thrust of “The Intentional Fallacy” and certain of its more resonant phrases could hardly be more well known. The foundational polemic recognizes its own import when it announces that “There is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic’s approach will not be qualified by his view of intention,” and it outlines the general stance that literary studies will follow over the next half century in the pronouncement that the “design or intention of the

author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.”<sup>64</sup> The evaluative pretensions of the remark may now seem at clear odds with the project of criticism, but the effect, and even (dare we say) the intent of the essay worked more at the level of meaning than of evaluation and did so from the start, as Wimsatt himself soon realized.<sup>65</sup> The authors begin their “discussion with a series of propositions summarized and abstracted to a degree where they seem to us axiomatic, if not truistic” and end with a memorable reading of T.S. Eliot’s “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” that “may serve to epitomize the practical implications of what we have been saying.” (“IF,” pp. 469, 486). Their closing interpretation centers on whether the line “I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each” consciously alludes to John Donne’s line “Teach me to heare Mermaides singing.” Wimsatt and Beardsley propose that there are two ways to decide: the objective way of “poetical analysis and exegesis” and the “way of biographical or genetic inquiry” (“IF,” p. 486). The former is of course close reading in its most classical form, where evidence is restricted to the poem itself. The second path, the authors suggest, is the way of temptation, the way out for those unable to bear the tension and paradox produced by authentic literature. Pushing this approach to its logical

---

<sup>64</sup> W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and M.C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (Jul-Sep 1946): 468-488; hereafter abbreviated “IF.” Wimsatt himself would revisit the fallacy a few years later to slightly revise the line some to clear up what he originally intended by “success”: “The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging either the meaning or the value of a work of literary art. (“Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited” p. 222).

<sup>65</sup> In the wake of the debates it would stir, Wimsatt revisited the fallacy to slightly revise the line some to clear up what he originally intended by “success”: “The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging either the meaning or the value of a work of literary art. (“Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited” p. 222). In many ways, as will soon become clear, the essay itself helped spur the movement away from aesthetic judgments to judgments of meaning.

extreme and “taking advantage of the fact that Eliot” was still alive at the moment they were writing, Wimsatt and Beardsley imagine writing to the poet, “in the spirit of a man settling a bet,” to ask “what he meant, and whether he had Donne in mind” (“IF,” pp. 488-9). Although they “refuse to weigh the probabilities” of whether Eliot would answer such a query in “an unguarded moment,” the authors don’t leave any doubt about the illegitimacy of such a potential reply: “Our point is that such an answer to an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem ‘Prufrock;’ it would not be a critical inquiry. Critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled in this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle” (“IF,” p. 489).

This definitive closing line, rising to a ringing commandment from the critical scripture, has always been read as targeting a distinctly romantic conception of literature, not least because the authors say as much themselves: “It is not so much an empirical as an analytic judgment,” they famously remark, “not a historical statement, but a definition, to say that the intentional fallacy is a romantic one” (“IF,” p.471). Any romanticist will quickly point out, however, that the essay doesn’t make any substantial engagement with either the works or the theories of the romantic poets themselves. Such an objection proves entirely accurate, for the middle section between the tersely economical propositions and the closing reading of “Prufrock” turns rather to the broader tradition of literary advice that proceeds from Abrams’s “construction” model. Indeed, they spend more time dealing with the decidedly unromantic formation that I have dubbed fictioneering than they do with Keats and Wordsworth. What may well seem odd about this aspect of the skirmish is just how seriously Wimsatt and Beardsley take it and how defensively they approach it.

The authors concede that advice related to the creation of literature can be “more exciting” than criticism: “Certainly the poets have had something to say that the analyst and

professor could not say” (“IF,” 747). They admit too that “books of creative writing” and related new forms of advice have “brought the art of inspiring poets, or at least of inciting something like poetry in young persons, ... further in our own day than ever before.” Having granted such concessions, however, Wimsatt and Beardsley pause again and again to draw a careful distinction, noting that this body of practical advice “would appear to belong to an art separate from criticism” (“IF,” 476). It belongs rather to “a discipline one might call the psychology of composition, valid and useful, an individual and private culture, yoga, or a system of self-development which the young poet would do well to notice, but different from the public science of evaluating poems.” In case a reader has not yet grasped the distinction, the two critics repeat that the “judgment of poems is different from the art of producing them” (“IF,” 476) before concluding, “The day may arrive when the psychology of composition is unified with the science of objective criticism, but so far they are separate” (“IF,” 476).

For a reader today, this middle section is apt to come across as an unmotivated and distracting digression while their four-times repeated distinction between the objective criticism of poems and “the psychology of composition” cannot but seem excessive. That the authors also invoke philosophical aesthetics most clearly at this very point in the essay would appear to reinforce the supposition that their return such a doctrine proceeds from conservative ideology. All in all, the entire third section of the essay reads like the account of an obscure personal quarrel, one that tellingly exposes a number of biases better kept private. Contrary to such a view, understanding this seeming digression is the key to understanding the work as a whole. Occupying the exact middle of the essay, this section neatly cleaves the essay into two parts – the theoretical opening and the practical close reading of the conclusion – but also quietly serves as the hinge between them. Indeed, the third section unites the theory and the practice of criticism

by providing the warrant for the later key assertion that “every rule for a poet is but another side of a judgment by a critic” (“IF,” p.482). Although this claim has passed virtually without comment, it stands as the essay’s crucial practical move insofar as it opens the possibility of treating technique as an inherent feature of the text and not just as a tool of the maker. And it is precisely this possibility that is realized in the reading of Eliot. The connection between critical theory and critical practice does not, however, depend on the loudly proclaimed separation between the production of poems and the composition of them but rather on the erasing that boundary. Although stated as if merely establishing an equivalence, the link between the rule of the poet and the judgment of the critic grants the latter sole access to the meaning of the poem. In short, “The Intentional Fallacy” provides a guide to refashioning the technical practices and operative vocabulary the artist – which featured a dense web of intentional actions – into a formal structure wherein intention figures primarily as discursive “meaning.” “Understanding poetry,” as the famous textbook has it, thereby becomes the central concern of literary interaction as well as the guarantor of its pedagogical worth.

The aesthetics of philosophical idealism provides the main resource for the critics in this affair – which might well be thought of as another episode in the long quarrel between poetry and philosophy – one most obviously tapped at the very beginning of the section. The initial reference is not to the idealist aesthetics of the eighteenth century but to the more ancient idealism of Plato. Plato might be the ultimate authority figure, but the New Critical footnote to him – to adapt Alfred North Whitehead’s phrase – provides not an altar at which to kneel, but a pragmatic resource to employ. Wimsatt and Beardsley turn to Plato in the first place because “Plato’s Socrates saw a truth about the poetic mind which the world no longer commonly sees – so much criticism, and that the most inspirational and most affectionately remembered, has

proceeded from the poets themselves” (474). The New Critics’ Plato is an interesting figure, one with a less unremittingly hostile view of poetry than he is often made out to hold, enough of a devotee of the art that he sees it more clearly than the poets themselves. As he functions within “The Intentional Fallacy,” Plato is an advocate for poetry, but an enemy to poets. The long epigraph Wimsatt and Beardsley use to open the third section renders legible the separation of the poet from the poem:

I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts .... I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them .... Will you believe me? ... there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration. (*IF*, p. 474)

Taken from the *Apology*, this excerpt narrates an episode of Socrates’s attempt to puzzle out the pronouncement that the Oracle of Delphi had made concerning himself, namely that “no one was wiser” than Socrates.<sup>66</sup> As the excerpt makes clear, the poets fail the test of wisdom, but the line that immediately follows – which Wimsatt and Beardsley interestingly omit – makes the connection between poet and oracle just as evident: poets “are like diviners or soothsayers who

---

<sup>66</sup> Socrates, it will be remembered, received the prophecy indirectly: “You must have known Chaerephon; he was early a friend of mine, and also a friend of yours [...] Well, Chaerephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his doings, and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether—as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt—he asked the oracle to tell him whether any one was wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered, that there was no man wiser” (Plato, *Apology*, trans B. Jowett [New York: Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1892], 113. Because my concern is with ways the New Critics put Plato to use – rather than with a more historically informed account of Plato – my citations to the Platonic corpus are taken from Jowett’s translations rather than more recent ones.



also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them.”<sup>67</sup> The equivalence thus drawn between the Delphic oracle – who also figures so clearly as the reference of the essay’s closing interdict – and the poet elevates the poetic object by endowing it with significant truth but simultaneously discounts the ability of the poet to give an adequate (critical) explanation of the object’s meaning. Thus, while Socrates is here offering a clear public rebuke to poets, his argument maintains the value of poetry by linking his search for poetic meaning to his search for the meaning of the oracle’s prophecy, a point seen in the parallels between his quest to “find out the meaning of the oracle” and his going to the poets with their poems and asking “what was the meaning of them?”<sup>68</sup> Poems, like prophecies, thus contain significant meanings eminently worth pursuing, but the maker of the poem has no direct access to them. Crucially, if the poets don’t know the meaning of their own work, then any advice they provide on the art of creating poems is also suspect. This particular line of reasoning was most famously pursued by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*, and the influence of his third critique is deeply embedded in the distinction that Wimsatt and Beardsley repeatedly make between the “science” of criticism and the “art” of poetry.

Kant essentially keeps intact Plato’s argument that poets may “say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them” but flips it from a deflating criticism to an elevating celebration that makes the artist into one “favoured by nature.”<sup>69</sup> The German philosopher argues that genius in the arts is defined by the fact that it cannot be transmitted, for, when it comes to

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 88, 114.

<sup>69</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Judgement*, Trans. James Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952),

“originality,” “no definite rule can be given.”<sup>70</sup> A creative genius “cannot teach others” his art “for the good reason that he himself does not know” how original ideas “enter and assemble themselves in his brain.”<sup>71</sup> Should the artist or his followers persist in providing “methodological instruction according to rules,” the only result, Kant argues, will be so much unoriginal “copying” and “imitation.” By contrast, under the aegis of philosophical aesthetics, the New Critics could render their methods of close reading as a science, which, for Kant, proceeds exactly by way of imitation. Original thinkers in science, whose originality is only a relative one, can make “intuitively evident and plain to follow” all the steps that they take on the path to their discoveries.<sup>72</sup> In many ways this is exactly what the essay did. Rather than laying down some sort of prohibition that the field of literary studies would miraculously observe for the decades to come, the essay offered a strategy to imitate.

We find Cleanth Brooks, for example, arguing his influential essay “The Formalist Critics” that the critic “assumes that the relevant part of the author's intention is what he got actually into his work; that is, he assumes that the author's intention as realized is the ‘intention’ that counts, not necessarily what he was conscious of trying to do, or what he now remembers he was then trying to do.”<sup>73</sup> Or consider Northrop Frye’s demand in his landmark *Anatomy of Criticism* that the central “axiom of criticism must be, not that the poet does not know what he is talking about, but that he cannot talk about what he knows.” As a consequence “what a writer says of his work “has a peculiar interest, but not a peculiar authority [...] The poet speaking as critic produces,

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>73</sup> Brooks, “The Formalist Critics,” p.75.

not criticism, but documents to be examined by critics.”<sup>74</sup> Even scholars who were opposed to the logical arguments of the intentional fallacy fell in line with its practical example. E.D. Hirsch, for example, who mounted what is likely the most prominent, sustained contemporary critique of “The Intentional Fallacy,” works within such a horizon. Putatively a defender of the author, Hirsch sought to stabilize *meaning*, thus making the ground worked by interpretation into a fixed object of pure contemplation. Whatever his disagreements with Wimsatt and Beardsley, he was united with them in supposing a barrier between the working “knowledge” of the artist and the meaning of the text and in discounting the latter almost entirely. For Hirsch, when it comes to “the process of interpretation, the author’s private experiences are irrelevant” because “the intentional object represented by a text is different from the intentional acts which realize it.”<sup>75</sup> As a practical strategy then, the separation between the production of poems and the interpretation of them, which the use of philosophical aesthetics had helped secure, proved incredibly fruitful. Yet, this same separation carried with it a burden that had plagued idealist aesthetics from the beginning. M.H. Abrams had identified “Kant’s problem” as showing “how it can be that an artist, without intending to do so – and in fact while often intending quite different ends – effects a product which meets the precise criteria which Kant had already established by reference to the contemplation model of the encounter between a percipient and a ready-made aesthetic object.”<sup>76</sup> In different terms, the problem might be cast as justifying using the design

---

<sup>74</sup> Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957), p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, 1967), p. 241. Hirsch is willing to admit extrinsic data such as historical context or biographical backgrounds as an auxiliary to process of interpretation, yet this data is “not read into the text.” Rather, “it is used to verify that which we read out of it. The extrinsic information has ultimately a purely verificative function” (Ibid., p.241).

<sup>76</sup> Abrams, “Kant and the Theology of Art,” p. 82.

stance for literary objects while acknowledging that the designer “intended quite different ends.” It is an acute problem for literary critics because they, unlike idealist philosophers, ground the specificity of their discipline on the study of technique. The novelty of the New Criticism was to make of their interpretive art a science by stabilizing the meaning of work through the concept of form and proposing a method rigorous enough that it seemed to promise verifiable results. The rigor of this method, however, crucially required the close study of technique. Close reading underwrote both the authority of the critics as well as the transmissibility of their teaching. The irony was thus that the New Critics elaborated their particular form of “methodological instruction” – with its own set of explicit rules, not the least of which banned reference to authorial intention – through the analysis of artistic techniques that were primarily articulated by the poets themselves. Formalist critics then have the task not only of showing that poets don’t have a special access to the deeper meaning of their poems (as idealism had asserted from Plato on), but that they don’t even know how their tools and techniques work. We have already seen Ransom struggle with this problem and attempt to overcome it with by black-boxing the object of study. “The Intentional Fallacy” offers a closer look at this move in the way that it more directly faces the competition posed by the artist’s own technical advice.

Wimsatt and Beardsley mount their attack by claiming that manuals on the art of literature could only supply the quasi-mystical, and decidedly unscientific, private work of “firing the imagination.” The two critics characterize the psychology of composition as little more than a set of esoteric exercises concerned with the rough magic “inciting” poetry. They suggested that the advice offered within the handbooks was a “form of inspirational promotion” undertaken in private and essentially nothing more than a latter-day romanticism (“IF,” p. 477). This association with romanticism was, however, disingenuous. Wimsatt and Beardsley propose

the romantic genealogy of literary advice handbook by suggesting it was of a piece with Wordsworth's (unattributed) "rule" that poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility." The entire tradition is then condensed into a brisk parade of romantic cliché: "drink a pint of beer, relax, go walking, think on nothing in particular, look at things, surrender yourself to yourself, search for the truth in your own soul, listen to the sound of your own inside voice, discover and express the *vraie vérité*" ("IF," p.475).

While such romantic cliché has long featured – and continues to feature – in the "lore" of creative writing pedagogy, fictioneering had been founded in clear opposition to this (straw-man) version of romantic composition. Fictioneering handbooks aimed explicitly to render the ways in which individuals could fashion themselves into novelists and short story writers through precise technical instructions and specific practical exercises. Writing was not the simple expression of personality or the spontaneous overflow of emotion. The manuals and handbooks repeatedly display overt hostility to the creed of inspiration because it represented a harmful mystification of the artistic process. To the fictioneer, waiting for the muse wrongly encouraged an aspirant to put off the real work of writing. This hostility can be seen clearly in Percy Russell's *The Literary Manual, or A Complete Guide to Authorship* (1886), one of the earliest fictioneering handbooks, when Russell cautions that "many a career has been hopelessly frustrated because the young aspirant to honours in Literature, supposed that the possession of what is known as the divine afflatus, would of itself suffice to compel that worldly success which is attained alone by" a comprehensive knowledge of "literary technology" in all its "practical mechanical details."<sup>77</sup> Far from being divided by their respective views of romanticism then, fictioneering and formalist criticism were united by a common opposition to it. Indeed, the fictioneers had made the prior

---

<sup>77</sup> Russell, *The Literary Manual* (London, 1886), p.5.

claim against it. The loudly proclaimed separation that the essay's third section so insistently made between the production of literary works and the criticism of them arises not because they are so different – not because one is a private culture and the other a public science – but because they are so much the same. Both, in fact, conceived of themselves as practical crafts. If we have failed to acknowledge how much the procedures of criticism and fictioneering have in common, it's largely because we have taken claims of the sort that Wimsatt and Beardsley made and their word.

This oversight can be partly explained by the fact that poetry represents something of a special case. In contrast to the aspirant to fiction, who needed merely to be even minimally gifted, the feeling that poets are born rather than made persisted, albeit in diminished form; they remained creatures produced by something other than their own labors and thus seemed more resistant to taking any counsel whatsoever. In his most comprehensive manual of advice on writing, Besant – who had insisted that the art of fiction was based on teachable methods – succinctly observed in his much shorter chapter on verse that, “If good advice was ever taken there would be no poets.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, even the manuals on poetry that Wimsatt and Beardsley dismissed as promoting undiluted romanticism generally left aside questions of inspiration so as to focus on the more pragmatic elements of craft. For example, J. Berg Esenwein and Mary Eleanor Roberts's *The Art of Versification* – first published in 1913 with the telling subtitle *A Practical Handbook of the Structure of Verse together with Chapters on the Origin, Nature, and Form of Poetry* – made the point explicit in its opening lines: “This little treatise does not aim to create poets — Heaven must do that; but it does seek to furnish those who have poetic inspirations with the knowledge of how to master the forms of expression. Poetry is first a gift,

---

<sup>78</sup> Walter Besant, *The Pen and the Book* (London, 1899), 73; hereafter abbreviated as *PB*.

then an art — both the gift and the art demand cultivation.”<sup>79</sup> After the requisite quotation from Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, the authors observe that “Industry is not a substitute for inspiration, but it is an admirable assistant,” before admonishing would-be poets, most especially young ones, to “take pains to follow the exercises appended to nearly every chapter.”<sup>80</sup> Drinking a beer and expressing the *vraie vérité* nowhere features among them.

If anything, the special character of poetry partly explains why there were so relatively few manuals on verse. Esenwein and Roberts’s handbook, for instance, forms part of “The Writer’s Library,” a larger line of handbooks that Esenwein conducted. While featuring but the one text on poetry, the “Library” offers five on fiction writing, along with three on photoplay writing, and one on playwriting. As a conservative estimate, it’s fair to say that the number of commercial manuals on the art of fiction published between 1900-1950 outnumber ones on the art of poetry published in the same period by a ratio of seven to one. The psychology of composition, in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s terms, was thus dominated by a very practical focus on fiction, though the two critics pass over this point in silence. I would suggest, in fact, that the well-known New Critical bias toward poetry and their prolonged delay in turning to the novel was at least partly motivated by the presence of a formidable presence of fictioneering. Poetry (and to a lesser degree drama) proved more readily amenable to the practices of close reading because much had already been done to fit them into a more comprehensive Kantian aesthetic of art. When it came to poetry, the New Critical borrowings from idealist aesthetics could be all the more seamlessly appropriated to their program, even as they developed their own discipline-specific form of analysis. Unlike those arts that had, from the eighteenth century on, already

---

<sup>79</sup> J. Berg Esenwein and Mary Eleanor Roberts, *The Art of Versification* (New York, 1920), ix.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-x.

attained the condition of the “Fine Arts,” however, the novel started as a low genre too interested in the world around it to qualify, as a proper artwork should, as an end in itself. Turning to fiction then makes even more evident how much criticism raided the practices of literary composition.

#### IV.

Because it was not a recognizable “Fine Art,” fiction had proved especially problematic from the first, with the historians and scholars finding little of substantial interest in the genre.<sup>81</sup> It posed no less of a challenge for the critics who followed them. Some measure of the difficulty is evident in how long it took for the novel to become both a legitimate object of study. Even after the triumph of formalist criticism over philology and scholarship, critics were slow to turn to fiction as a subject, despite their having before them the great modernist novels that would eventually become the subject of so much scholarship. Deeply shaped by modernism, they could hardly be said to hold the moral distrust of novels that some of their predecessors had conspicuously displayed, a point all the more evident in that the eventual canon of fiction seemed to be composed almost exclusively of “immoral” books.<sup>82</sup> The real obstacle to a criticism of

---

<sup>81</sup> Ironically, as the New Criticism began to take hold a steady if limited body of work did begin to appear in the form of more traditional scholarly output, including appreciations, influence studies, and histories of the sort epitomized by Ernest Baker’s comprehensive *History of the English Novel* (1924-1939). There was also a fairly substantial body of work dedicated to attacking the novel, the most notable perhaps being Q.D. Leavis’s *Fiction and the Reading Public*.

<sup>82</sup>For a contemporary account of the scholarly resistance to modern fiction as a fitting subject for university study see William Lyon Phelps, “Novels as a University Study,” in *Essays on Modern Novelists* (New York, 1910), pp. 245-51. See also Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, pp.124-5.



fiction was the nature of the object itself and its relation to its creator. To fit out the novel as a properly autonomous object, then, critics had to contest the character of the novel itself, especially the vivid connections between the fiction and its surrounding “real” social world, connections that the laboring novelist so problematically mediated and that the would-be critical reader was so often distracted by. The novel thus opens an even more revealing window on the oracular model of literary criticism largely because critics had to work so hard to craft the novel into an autonomous object of interpretation.

Only in the late 1940s, did the New Criticism really turn in earnest to the novel. R.P. Blackmur and Mark Schorer, as we have already seen, prominently argued for applying the methods developed in the criticism of poetry to fiction. In 1950, John Crowe Ransom – though ever ready to modestly renounce the claim to expertise in fiction – was moved to both pose and answer the question “To what extent in the understanding of poetry be applied to the understanding of fiction?”<sup>83</sup> Philip Rahv, as late as 1956, could still suggest that novel criticism remained underdeveloped in relation to poetic criticism:

My argument rests on a premise that most of us will surely accept, and that is that 20th Century criticism has as yet failed to evolve a theory and a set of practical procedures dealing with the prose-medium that are as satisfactory in their exactness, subtlety and variety as the theory and procedures worked out in the past few decades by the critics of poetry.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> John Crowe Ransom, “The Understanding of Fiction,” *Kenyon Review* 12, no. 2 (Spring, 1950): 193. Ransom’s attempt to close read fiction consisted the reading a collection of fragments from a series of “reputable fictions” and treating them like “like fictional analogues of lyrical moments (Ibid., p.193).

<sup>84</sup> Philip Rahv, “Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction,” *Kenyon Review* 18, no. 22 (Spring, 1956): 277.

On another front, Brooks and Warren had already literalized Ransom's question by following up their classic textbook *Understanding Poetry* with *Understanding Fiction*. First published in 1943, and thus preceding most of truly seminal works criticism on fiction, Brooks and Warren's pedagogical advance march was anything but confident. Witness the especial caution urged to teachers who picked up the first edition of *Understanding Fiction* (1943):

Most students read some kind of fiction of their own free will and for pleasure. Most students do not, except under academic pressure, read essays or poetry. This contrast may lull the teacher false sense of security when he gives a course on fiction. He does not half to 'make' the student read fiction, he feels, as he has to 'make' the student read poetry, any kind of poetry. He simply sets himself the easier problem persuading the student that some stories or novels which are called 'good' from the literary point of view, or which are important in the history of literature, are also interesting in themselves.<sup>85</sup>

Doubly hazardous as such teaching was, the authors clearly attempt to import the model of study they had pioneered in their book on poetry: "The liking for a piece of fiction does not depend upon the satisfaction of the threshold interest, whatever it may be, football or moral message hunting or sociological documentation, but upon the total structure, upon a set of organic relationships, upon the logic of the whole."<sup>86</sup>

All of this should indicate two things. First, critics explicitly set out to model their criticism of the novel after the criticism of poetry. Second, it turned out to be really difficult to do apply the model and the successful application was not accomplished until long after that offered by the usual accounts of novel theory's history. What is intriguing here is how, after a formalist

---

<sup>85</sup> Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, (New York, 1943), p. vii.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

poetics of fiction eventually took root, critics read the theory of the novel that they had established in the 1950s back into the history of the novel, such that the great modernist practitioners of the art of fiction seemed to be operating explicitly under its sway. Despite all the handwringing over the lack of any sort of adequate theory of fiction made in the 1940s and 1950s, it soon became a commonplace that the theory of the novel appeared in a full-fledged form as early as 1884.

The “practical procedures” that Rahv sought were eventually found in the practical procedures already articulated by fictioneering – where they lay ready to hand – but they were redefined to fit within the oracular model developed in the criticism of poetry. Critics denied novelists the conscious use of their tools, even as they seemed to center their studies on the figure of the author, thus placing a truly strange idol at the heart of the discipline. Novelistic technique, pioneered in the attempt to make fiction a legitimate art, came to seem an effect of close reading. The striking success of this flip ramifies throughout the field of literary studies. Many otherwise astute critics now regard formalist criticism as “author centered,” most often excessively so, despite the widely observed prohibition against “consulting the oracle.” In those rare instances when a fictioneering guidebook gains critical mention, it is treated as a confused work of criticism and considered from the reader’s point of view. Partly as a consequence of such a misreading, the recent movement of “creative writing studies,” which would seem to offer an ideal point of view on literary studies grounded in practical knowledge, aims instead to elevate creative writing as a discipline by foregrounding its theoretical credentials, thus somewhat strangely treating writing as simply another mode of reading.<sup>87</sup> As a concrete

---

<sup>87</sup> Paul Dawson’s central argument in *Creative Writing and the New Humanities* (New York, 2005), for instance, is that the discipline of creative writing needs to be reconceptualized as an “institutional site for literary intellectuals ...

illustration of how technique came to seem the property of critics, consider that a text like *Understanding Fiction* has come to be seen as a useful guide to writing fiction, thus setting up the consequential notion that “understanding fiction” – in the deeper sense of that phrase – is prerequisite for writing it.<sup>88</sup>

It’s true that the second edition of *Understanding Fiction* (1959) did feature an appendix for “the student writer of fiction,” but Brooks clearly considered creative writing simply a way of smuggling the art of reading into the classroom under the cover of an apparently more attractive set of exercises. The point could hardly be more evident than in the now little known address on “The Place of Creative Writing in the Study of Literature” that he gave before the American Conference of Academic Deans in 1948 – and thus between the first and second editions of his textbook on fiction. Here, he rather brazenly confesses that “I am interested in creative writing ... not because it may teach a few students to become able writers, but rather because it may

---

critically aware of how literature circulates in social power relations.” Arguing that “the best way to learn how to write is to read,” Dawson claims that “and reformation must be centred on a practice of critical reading” (203). In her *The Author is not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else: Creative Writing Reconceived* (New York, 2008), Michelene Wandor likewise aims to legitimize Creative Writing by “the historicising and theorisation” of it (p. 228).

<sup>88</sup> One other point bears mentioning regarding *Understanding Fiction* is that this textbook registers the rise of the classroom fiction anthology. In the rare fiction courses offered before the mid century, often given through extension programs and otherwise semi-official channels, instructors frequently used fictioneering manuals as their texts, if only for lack of better alternatives. As professors of literature began to turn to fiction, both as teachers and as scholars, there was a significant boom in the much more readerly anthology. Other textbook anthologies from prominent critics include Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate’s *The House of Fiction* (1950), Mark Schorer’s *The Story: A Critical Anthology* (1950) In light of his below remarks to the deans, Brooks seems to have delayed the entry of creative writing program more than he encouraged it.

teach many to read.”<sup>89</sup> While Brooks admits that “the problems of writing and the problems of reading interpenetrate” he clearly gives priority to the art of reading.<sup>90</sup> The chief virtue Brooks finds in creative writing is that it reminds the professor of literature that he is not primarily a scientist or a historian:

I do not wish him to cease to be a scientist and historian. I do want him to become critic and craftsman as well. If he teaches creative writing, he is forced to become a critic – he is forced to deal with literature as a craft. When he teaches creative writing he finds, of necessity, that he is teaching creative reading as well.<sup>91</sup>

The omitted point of course is that his theory of reading treats an author’s conscious intentions regarding what she “is trying to do” as irrelevant. Students were apparently meant to “realize” their intentions in their work, without realizing they were doing it.<sup>92</sup>

The stakes of the argument that I am advancing do not primarily lie in offering a more accurate account of novel theory’s timeline – though perhaps there is some value in that – nor am I committed to disparaging the art of reading. I am perfectly in sympathy with Brooks’s claim that it is worth reminding the “English professor ... that he professes literature, and that literature is ultimately a craft,” and I would like to share his hope that “Could he be reminded that he professes a craft – that he is supposed to teach an art – I think the repercussions might be profound.”<sup>93</sup> If anything, I am interested in making reading even more of an art. My point is that

---

<sup>89</sup> Brooks, “The Place of Creative Writing in the Study of Literature,” *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* 34 (May 1948): 231.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>92</sup> Brooks, “The Formalist Critics,” p.75.

<sup>93</sup> Brooks, “The Place of Creative Writing in the Study of Literature,” p. 227.

when Brooks privileges “critical reading” because it gives access to the meaning of a literary work, he diminishes the possibilities of the art he intends to elevate. When critics give priority to the theoretical, the conceptual, and the meaningful in such a fashion, they impoverish practical knowledge, particularly the very odd sort of practical knowledge that a literary work is capable of embodying.

Nowhere is the transformation that I here invoke more evident than in the “Art of Fiction” debate between James and Besant. Critics returned to a discussion that had centrally concerned itself with how to write fiction, as I observed in the first section, and refashioned it into “the art of *reading* fiction.” James and Besant were abstracted from the dense web of conversation and cast as adversaries, each filling a distinct role.<sup>94</sup> So perfect a foil was Besant, in fact, that if he didn’t exist, as the old line from Voltaire goes, it would have been necessary to invent him – which is precisely what happened, but not until the late 1940s.

For midcentury formalist critics (and after), Besant served much the same role as the hapless Ion does in the Socratic corpus where, in his eponymous dialogue, the overconfident rhapsode seems to clinch the accusation made in the *Apology* that “not by wisdom do poets write poetry but by a sort of genius and inspiration.” In typical fashion, Socrates reduces the overconfident rhapsode’s theory of poetry to incoherence and brings into question whether there is any element of *techne* in poetry. Ion’s inability to answer Socrates’s demand that he give a full account of the underlying principles of his art leads the philosopher to suggest that poetry is not an art at all, but more of a habit or a knack. Besant, in the same way, serves as the bumbling mouthpiece for

---

<sup>94</sup> I deal more specifically with the enlarged context of the debate in next chapter. Here I will simply observe that the discussion directly involved Robert Louis Stevenson, Andrew Lang, Paul Bourget, and Thomas Hardy.

fictioneering as a whole. He conveniently serves up a lengthy account of the “laws, method, and rules” which apprentices to fiction should make it “their first business to learn,” and even more conveniently took the trouble of summarizing them in a dense, single-sentence catalogue:

The Art of Fiction requires first of all the power of description, truth, and fidelity, observation, selection, clearness of conception and of outline, dramatic grouping, directness of purpose, a profound belief on the part of the story-teller in the reality of his story, and beauty of workmanship. (*AF*, pp. 62-3)

James, by contrast, plays the role of Socrates for the formalists, even adding just the right dose of irony. This irony emerges in his description of Besant’s proposed laws as “so beautiful and so vague” though “difficult positively to assent to.” The only recommendation, in fact, that won James’s full endorsement was Besant’s injunction that the writer “must carry his note-book always with him, into the fields, to the theatre, into the streets” (*AF*, p. 41). As for the rest, it wasn’t that Besant’s advice was bad – after all, James also found it difficult to dissent from any of it.<sup>95</sup> Rather, in a move that would perfectly resonate with the New Criticism’s use of philosophical idealism, James would claim that the way an artist works “is his secret, not necessarily a deliberate one. He cannot disclose it, as a general thing, if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others.” James’s announcement that, “the literary artist would be obliged to say to his pupil [...], ‘Ah, well, you must do it as you can!’” could then be taken as the last word on literary advice and as a full assent to the oracular view established by the New Critics (“AR,” p. 508). In the end, James’s “single criticism” of Besant – namely the elder writer had committed

---

<sup>95</sup> Henry James, “The Art of Fiction,” *Longman’s Magazine* IV (Sep. 1884): 508-9; hereafter abbreviated *F*. I quote from James’s original article rather than the revised essay published four years later in his *Partial Portraits*.

Significant differences between the versions are mentioned in my footnotes.

a “mistake in attempting to say so definitely beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be” – came to be thought of as a truly devastating blow that demolished the foundations of the practical art of fiction and simultaneously announced the arrival of novel theory (“AR,” p. 507).

The birth of novel theory story sketched here is of course both a myth and is known to be one. While it has certainly lost much of its credibility in the last thirty years, this origin story, like any good “miracle birth” story, continues to do explanatory work in spite of the fact that it is readily seen through. Yet, it has a lot of explaining to do. To start: the two novels that James published after “The Art of Fiction” failed so miserably that he confessed to William Dean Howells in an 1888 letter that “I have entered upon evil days ... I am still staggering a good deal under the mysterious and (to me) inexplicable injury wrought ... upon my situation by my last two novels, the *Bostonians* and the *Princess*, from which I expected so much and derived so little.”<sup>96</sup> The failure of these novels only portended the greater humiliation at the theatre with the *Guy Domville* in 1895. The New York Edition – from which James expected so much and of which critics have made even more – failed completely on its release. All the adulation he received from his small coterie was more than balanced by the frequent abuse he endured, most famously perhaps from H.G. Wells, though many others were ready to chime in against him.<sup>97</sup> Even his own brother found late novels like *The Golden Bowl* full of “twilight and mustiness”

---

<sup>96</sup> Qtd in Marcia Ann Jacobson, *Henry James and the Mass Market* (University, 1983), p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> In the culminating moment of his tirade against James in *Boon*, Wells famously compared James to “a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea which has got into a corner of its den” (H.G. Wells, *Boon*, [London, 1915], p. 110).



and marked by the “interminable elaboration of suggestive reference.”<sup>98</sup> James’s death in 1916 spared him from witnessing the further attacks made on his writing in the popular literary press by H.L. Menken, Van Wyck Brooks, Vernon Parrington, all of whom found him so excessively refined as to be entirely out of touch.<sup>99</sup> Until the New Critical turn to fiction in the 1940s, academic scholarship paid him little attention, but this is no surprise since it largely neglected the novel as a whole. In short, inventing novel theory did James few immediate favors because no one apparently realized that he had.

On the other hand, the practical approach that Besant had advocated, and that James’s essay had supposedly scuttled, flourished. Some details have already been given and the rest will be saved for later chapters, but the relevant point is that James’s reputation was kept alive by the very thing that he is said to have so effectively demolished. His presence within fictioneering is a vexed but lively one. He serves as cautionary example as often as does an innovator – his errors provide as much fodder as his successes. His essays, his short stories, and his novels (particularly his earlier ones) appear in appendices on further reading, though never at the top of the list. This oft-neglected afterlife proves crucial for better understanding the first real step in his critical rehabilitation.

Percy Lubbock’s 1921 *The Craft of Fiction* usually gets the credit for codifying James and making him accessible to a broad audience. More Jamesian than James, as Mark Schorer quipped, Lubbock translated James’s techniques – both those that the master had “told” in his criticism and those that he had “shown” in his fictions – into a set of formal rules, more or less

---

<sup>98</sup> William James, *The Correspondence of William James: William and Henry, 1897-1910*, Vol. 3, eds. Ignas Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Berkeley, (Charlottesville, 1992) p. 301.

<sup>99</sup> The first and third chapters of Linda Simon’s *The Critical Reception of Henry James: Creating a Master* supply a wealth of additional details on the mixed reception of James’s work prior to 1960.

establishing “point of view” as a category of analysis along the way. Before turning to this work in detail, however, it is worth reiterating that *The Craft of Fiction* came into the world prematurely – not so prematurely as the works of James, but prematurely still. Although not unsuccessful, it faced a mixed reception. Arnold Bennett, probably the most influential reviewer in England at the time and a fictioneer extraordinaire himself, telling complained that the book “suffers from the ... defect [of] ignorance, relative or complete, of the actual creative process of the artist.”<sup>100</sup> More than anything, it was unclear for whom the book was intended. Starting in the 1940s, Lubbock’s work witnessed something of a rebirth, not on the same scale as that of his master, but substantial nonetheless. *The Craft of Fiction* was republished several times, with the 1957 edition featuring a Foreword by Schorer, and selections of the work featured in a number of the standard critical anthologies for students of fiction including John Aldridge’s *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction* (1952). A *Percy Lubbock Reader* was even issued in 1957.<sup>101</sup>

Keeping in mind the delay, Lubbock’s argument is nonetheless illuminating in the way serves as a bridge between fictioneering and formalist criticism, starting with the title. To this day, the book is often advertised as a manual on the art of writing, testifying perhaps too how little of the book the marketer managed to consume. Certainly the title raises this expectation and would have in 1921 as well, with more than two decades of similarly titled manuals behind it that did in fact offer practical instruction on writing fiction. The missing subtitle – proclaiming the book to be “practical” in just this way – is perhaps the lone external clue that Lubbock intended

---

<sup>100</sup> Bennett, *The Evening Standard Years: ‘Books and Persons’ 1926-1931* (Hampden, 1974), p. 212.

<sup>101</sup> A very similar situation faced Joseph Beach’s *The Method of Henry James*, one of the earliest academic studies of James, first published in 1918. After falling out of print, and remaining so for decades, Beach reissued it in a massively expanded form in 1954. The main text remained unchanged, but a very long introduction nearly doubled its size.

something different. Long stretches of the work – including the famous lines that “the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself” – shade into the prescriptive mode of the how-to manual.<sup>102</sup> The work as a whole thus bears the deep imprint of fictioneering and with good reason. Lubbock, after all, makes the reader the co-creator of the novel: “The reader of a novel – by which I mean the critical reader – is himself a novelist; he is the maker of a book which may or may not please his taste when it is finished, but of a book for which he must take his own share of the responsibility” (*CF*, p.17). The writer’s choice of subject is beyond the ken of criticism – “we judge the novelist’s eye for a subject to be his cardinal gift, and we have nothing to say ... till his subject is announced” (*CF*, p.23) – but from that choice forward the (ideal) reader co-authors the form and structure of the narrative, a form and structure that will become *his* subject.<sup>103</sup>

Even when it comes to point of view, the critical category he is most associated with though he can hardly be said to have been the first to speak of it, Lubbock employs the concept as much in the mode of a writer as of reader. It might fairly be said that the attempt to specify the position and limitations of a critic’s “point of view” is in fact his main objective. In fact, the former constitutes the latter. From the opening chapter, Lubbock casts his investigation as an inquiry into the technical conditions that underwrite the critic’s vantage point as much as those that determine the novelist’s and his critical model postulates that the reader of a novel proceeds from a distinctly limited one (just as do the great modern novels). While critics of visual arts can work with their object of scrutiny in full view before them, “we can never speak of a book with an eye

---

<sup>102</sup> Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York, 1921), p. 62; hereafter abbreviated *CF*.

<sup>103</sup> Even this thought has antecedents in fictioneering, where the idea that “a writer does not choose her subjects, they choose her” has already become commonplace.

on the object, never handle a book ... I cannot look up from my writing and sharpen my impression with a straight, unhampered view of the author's work; to glance at a book, though the phrase is so often in our mouths, is an impossibility" (CF, p.2-3). Because of this impasse, criticism strays from its rightful subject: "we discuss the writer, we discuss people in the book ... But meanwhile the book ... lies imprisoned in the volume, and our glimpse of it was too fleeting, it seems, to leave us with lasting knowledge of its form" (CF, p.5). Indeed, a book doesn't reach the reader as a "single form" but "as a moving stream of impressions, paid out of the volume in a slender thread" or as "a procession that passes before us as we sit and watch" (CF, p.14-5). As such, the critic, though he talks of a book as a "material work of art," finds that he confronts "a process, a passage of experience" (CF, p.15). The question facing the critic is how best to marshal and concentrate this procession. In short, the critic's object is a work of his own imagining.

In this, Lubbock has anticipated the key problem that will make fiction such a challenge for the New Criticism. Unlike the short lyric, a novel proves difficult to render into an autonomous object. As critics struggled to make the novel amenable to the techniques of close reading that had proved so fruitful with poetry, they deployed a vocabulary of novelistic technique developed, by and large, in fictioneering but applied it from the side of the perceiver as a set of "concepts." Thus refitted, technique in these terms formed a sophisticated hermeneutic apparatus interior to the novel that allowed the reader to enter an autonomous world. Allen Tate's seminal "Technique in Fiction" (1944) offers an early, explicit instance of the way the novel was brought into the oracular system, marking its second ascent to the status of Fine Art, though now in recognizably Kantian terms. The climax of Tate's essay is a close reading of *Madame Bovary*, what he calls an *exemplum* of the art of fiction. Though this set piece seems pedestrian now, the

crucial build-up to this finale takes us as near as we can approach to the very birth of the practice. It might not be the first close reading of fiction that we have, but Tate consciously and systematically sets it up as if it were, making the piece an *exemplum* of critical activity.

Picking up the problem where Lubbock left off, Tate reiterates that the difficulty of treating a novel as an art is our inability to see it in full. “Who,” he asks, “can remember, well enough to pronounce upon it critically, all of *War and Peace*, or *The Wings of the Dove*, or even *Death in Venice*”?<sup>104</sup> Although he had read all three within the preceding year, Tate nonetheless goes on to say that “for the life of me I could not pretend to know them as wholes, and without that knowledge I lack the materials of criticism” (“TN,” p. 130). Whereas Lubbock’s solution to this problem makes the reader into a co-novelist who helps complete the work, Tate rejects this attempt precisely because doing so would render the novel less whole. On his view, only inferior books require any effort on the part of the critic to make them entire; the critic’s job is to reveal the whole, not create it. Thus, the achievement of the modern novelist was to do “the complete imaginative job himself” (“TN,” p. 138).

Turning to Virginia Woolf for confirmation, Tate rehearses the arguments she made against the Edwardians. Woolf had directly engaged her predecessors at the level of technique, speaking of tools and conventions, but all of this drops away in Tate’s recounting: the tools are carefully hidden away in the shed. The “late Virginia Woolf,” Tate argues, “sharply perceived” the “difference between the novelist who ... merely bounces us along and the novelist who tries to do the whole job” (“TN,” p. 137). Whereas inferior novels seem to urge some further outward directed action – Woolf had suggested that works by Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy make

---

<sup>104</sup> Allen Tate, “Technique in Fiction,” *On The Limits of Poetry* (New York, 1948), p. 130; hereafter abbreviated “TN.”

one want to “join a society” or “write a cheque” – modern novels “put this overworked and allegorical check *into* the novel, into its complex texture of scene, character, and action” (138). The interior migration of the “check” brings the novel under Dennett’s “design stance,” and the design that Tate understands the modern novel as having is that of “Art” more generally. Modernist fiction (which he dates to Flaubert) transcends the previous limits of its genre as it breaks free of the producer model. In Tate’s formulation, when “literature reaches this stage of maturity, it is anonymous, and it matters little who wrote it” (“TN,” p. 138). Tate recognizes that to speak thus of fiction is a departure. Immediately after making the preceding claim, he pauses to reflect on the consequences of his pronouncement: “This is extravagant language. Or is it? It is no more than we are accustomed to when we talk about poetry, or music, or most of all the classical drama. ... I am only saying that fiction can be, has been, and *is* an art, as the various poetries are arts” (“TN,” p. 139). Having elevated fiction to an art on the contemplation model, Tate then proceeded to disqualify it as art under the construction model. Though he grants that the great modern artists “understand” how they do it, he does not think that either the artists themselves or the critics who follow them can render the process visible:

The fine artists of fiction ... because they produce these effects must understand them. And having produced them they are silent about the ways they took to produce them. ... [F]or some reason the moment the secrets of this aptitude come within the *provenance* of criticism, they vanish. They survive in the works themselves. (“TN,” p. 134)

Once suitably objectified in this fashion, the “novel” form of the modernist novel was understood as dictating its own terms of its study; however much it might be a “Fine Art” and the peer of music, poetry, drama, and the rest, fiction’s unique structure required specialized instruments. The preface of Leon Edel’s landmark *The Modern Psychological Novel* testifies to

this tension but resolves it by making the art novel not an object that demanded contemplation for its own sake, but one that demanded to be close read. Edel outlines his project thus: “What I have tried to show – and largely from the *reader’s point of view* – is that the modern subjective novelists cannot be read like their predecessors: that a whole new educational practice in fictional reading is implied from the moment the novel asks us to become a camera, as it were, and a recording apparatus as well.”<sup>105</sup> The subtle switch of agent from novelist to novel exposes the way that the new techniques for reading fiction, laboriously developed over decades and borrowing heavily from the resources of fictioneering, could then be read back into the novels as if the novels themselves had “asked” for them.

Such demands were not only read back into fictions, but into documents that eventually composed the foundations for the theory of the novel. As much as any novel, then, James’s “The Art of Fiction” emerged as an oracular work. In the way that it has been read for most of the last century, Henry James’s “The Art of Fiction” is one of the most oracular texts within literary studies. It in fact seems to presciently foresee everything else that James will write, and because James is one of the very, very few major novelist-critics – along with Virginia Woolf and perhaps a few others – it becomes a partially self-fulfilling prophecy on the future of the novel (as another of his critical pieces has it, one that has itself been characterized as “prophetic”).<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Edel, *The Modern Psychological Novel* (New York, 1955), vii (my emphasis). *The Modern Psychological Novel* is a revision of his *The Psychological Novel: 1900-1950* (1955).

<sup>106</sup> Those interested in taking the notion of Henry James’s prophetic skills further will be remember that his amanuensis Theodora Bosanquet received posthumous dictation from the novelist via Ouija Board in the 1930s. See Pamela Thurschwell, “Henry James and Theodora Bosanquet: On the typewriter, In the Cage, at the Ouija board,” *Textual Practice* 13, no.1 (1999): 5-23. The fictions thus produced give a metaphysical inflection to the notion of “late style.”

The prescient vision contained in the piece has had the effect of cutting it off entirely from its originating context as a work concerned with the writing of fiction. The way that the retrospective view provided “The Art of Fiction” with an entirely new context paradoxically made a conundrum of its original one. The more the essay came to speak to the reading of fiction, the more critics puzzled over why James had responded to a “bumbling hack” like Besant at all and why he chosen to do it in a mainstream venue like *Longman’s*.<sup>107</sup>

Resituating James’s essay as unfolding within a conversation about the production of fiction rather than starting one about the interpretation of fiction is far more than just a matter of proper contextualization. They touch on the most fundamental questions of literary study. Extravagant claims have been made on behalf of “The Art of Fiction.” For a truly extravagant claim we might start with James Miller’s claim that the essay “has made its way to become the most popular and surely the most influential brief statement of fictional theory ever made.”<sup>108</sup> Few may fully believe these sorts of statements today, but they work anyway because nothing has emerged to fully take their place, so it is worth pressuring exactly what sort of “influence” Miller took the essay to have and to inquire after how it was supposed to have exerted this influence. Miller’s *Theory of Fiction: Henry James* (1972) is a fascinating systematization of James’s thoughts on the novel that makes for, in Miller’s estimation, “the most comprehensive, exhaustive, and innovative volume of fictional theory ever published,” and thus a virtual gospel on birth of novel theory (*TF*, p. xv). In this dense, rigorously cross-referenced collection of James’s thoughts culled from his critical essays, prefaces, letters, diaries, reviews, and even his

---

<sup>107</sup> Norman Feltes poses the puzzle of James’s decision to publish his essay in *Longman’s* before going on to give a high-church Marxist reading of it in his *Literary Capital in the Late Victorian Novel* (Madison, 1993).

<sup>108</sup> James E. Miller, Jr., “Introduction,” *Theory of Fiction: Henry James* (Lincoln, 1972), p. 27; hereafter abbreviated *TF*.



fictions on writers, Miller elevates “The Art of Fiction” to what is nothing short of the centerpiece of Anglo-American novel theory. Although Miller notes that the piece is a reply, he insists that “James presents enough of a summary of Besant’s points to enable his essay to stand by itself.” This allows Miller to situate James’s remarks not by looking at its historical context, but by putting them “in the context of the entire range of James’s views on the art of fiction,” an action made possible by the fact that despite “a few shifts and redirections,” the Master “remained remarkably consistent in his views from the beginning to the end of his career” (*TF*, pp. 27, xv).<sup>109</sup> “Reversals,” Miller continues, “are much less frequent than simply a growth or development in complexity with an accompanying complication in language and elaboration of figurative explanation” (*TF*, p. xv). To emphasize the centrality of “The Art of Fiction,” Miller not only places it at the head of the collection, but he numbers the individual paragraphs and cross-lists each paragraph with “amplifications” found elsewhere in the collection. The head notes of subsequent chapters likewise refer back to key points from “The Art of Fiction” such that the “volume as a whole is in a sense filling out, amplifying, and completing the task” initiated by the 1884 essay (*TF*, p. 28). Miller makes a larger argument, however, and claims that if “The Art of Fiction” prophesies James’s entire theory of fiction, James’s theory of fiction prophesies the subsequent development of the novel and its theory:

[James] was the forerunner, model, and source for the Modern period, pointing the way to the remarkable innovations in fictional technique of the twentieth century. Most of the technical experimentation of the 1920s and beyond, by such major figures as James

---

<sup>109</sup> A point clearly in tension with James’s reputation as one of the great revisers and rewriters. More pointedly still, James significantly revised “The Art of Fiction” itself (and did so largely in response to Robert Louis Stevenson’s criticisms of the essay in “A Humble Remonstrance.” Miller presents only the 1888 version.

Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner can be found in embryo in James, in both practice and theory. His influence was felt not only where he was respected, but even by those who denied him. (*TF*, pp. xv-xvi)

Miller may be a zealot, but a chastened form of this claim is liable to be one of the chief objections leveled at the counter-narrative I am proposing. Put more modestly, it might run thus: surely, what James had to say about the novel and what he showed through his works influenced not only the canonical modernists but twentieth-century fiction in general. My only answer can be, *of course he did*. And that is precisely the problem because the nature of the influence is rendered impossible under the oracular model.

In the second half of this project, I will insist that James's influence was filtered through the medium of fictioneering, that it was part of a larger conversation featuring long-forgotten voices, and that fictioneering influenced literary naturalism and literary modernism as both an antagonist and an unacknowledged mentor. But more than anything, examining fictioneering offers the chance to make a fundamental and desperately needed intervention in the art of reading. The process through which James – or any other artist for that matter – achieved his influence has not been properly examined and cannot be properly examined under a critical procedure premised on the oracular model of literary composition. This model may well seem a relic, but it continues to exert a much wider influence than may be supposed and has become so naturalized that we generally fail to notice it.

The issue can be put another way by asking the question, what precisely is novel theory supposed to do, particularly on a practical level? There's an intimation, tied to the false history charted above, that it somehow guided novelists as they wrote. When Miller claims both that "The Art of Fiction" was the most "influential" statement of fiction ever written and that James

pointed the way for Joyce, Woolf, Hemingway, Faulkner and the rest, he clearly links novel theory with fictional practice. Yet there's no explanation whatsoever of how this link works. The assumption seems to be that understanding fiction – that possessing a theory of fiction – somehow directed the novelist in their writing. Even if novel theory did exist in the form in which it is supposed by many to, which it didn't, the sort of teaching it is purported to have offered is entirely at odds with its own principles. The centerpiece of the whole apparatus puts it as clearly as it can be put that novel theory cannot offer advice. Surely, we are not willing to premise all the formal changes in literary technique to the suggestion that “you must do it as you can.” Moreover, the alleged practical influence is also at odds with the view of skill – not just artistic skill but skill in general – that has by and large dominated thought in the social sciences and humanities. This view holds that skill, once fully developed, is automatic and that “knowing how” is categorically different from “knowing that.” I turn to this point more in the next and final section but will simply point out for the present that the oracular model offers a clear instance of how literary studies has fully endorsed (wrongly, I argue) this view of skill. Having done so, it found itself facing an impassable gap between novel theory and the practice of writing fiction.

To bypass this obstacle, literary studies has turned the writer into a kind of reader. All novels, in a sense, become theories, and here again it is James who – for the criticism of fiction at least – operates as the lynchpin, no doubt since he so conveniently manages to be both a theorist and a practitioner. Moreover, few, if any, novelists have been more dedicated readers of their own work (indeed in James more agonized moments, he thinks of himself as his only reader). So fully have we come to regard the writer as a reader that the eventual recognition that our critical methods largely produce the object of our studies (rather than vice versa) simply

pushed this assumption further out of sight. As critical paradigms shifted decisively away from formalism, writers became different kinds of readers, but they remained readers nevertheless.

To give a very brief example, even work that is devoted to contextualizing James continues to treat “The Art of Fiction” as an essay on interpretive *reading*. Michael Anesko’s path-breaking work, for instance, explicitly sought to challenge the “romantic archetype of the artist’s existence” by arguing that “James was continually engaged in an active, if ambivalent, dialogue with ‘the world,’ and that his finished works were not shaped merely by the imagination alone, but by a constant and lively ‘friction with the market.’”<sup>110</sup> Rather than an aloof master, James becomes a representative figure whose works both internalize the social conflicts of his time and shape their outcomes: “In the role he himself defined for the novelist, Henry James was both a contemporary witness and unofficial historian of the development of literary professionalism.”<sup>111</sup> While this approach gives a new role to novels and novelists, its treatment of the literary object remains continuous with the very sort of criticism it is intended to complicate. As Dorothy Hale has shown, while critical historicism like Anesko’s no longer treats the novel as “a formalist world apart, [the novel] nonetheless retains much of the representational autonomy it enjoyed under the old new-critical regime.”<sup>112</sup> Using “the belief that the novel can formally both encapsulate and fix a social world” as the link between these two seemingly divergent modes, Hale reads “against the grain” criticism against the grain, “showing that cultural studies is more dependent than it knows upon novel theory.” In the end, Hale argues that “recent novel theorists have only refined James’s foundational recharacterization of the novel as the genre that does not

---

<sup>110</sup> Michael Anesko, *Friction with the Market: Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (Oxford, 1986), p. vii.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>112</sup> Hale, *Social Formalism* (Stanford, 1998), p. 5.

simply represent identity through content but actually instantiates it through its form.”<sup>113</sup> As the novel becomes more “social,” other texts become more novelistic gaining in “representational autonomy.” Thus, the non-literary materials Anesko includes in his analysis – publisher’s records, contracts, payment receipts, and the like – take on the status of fictions. Indeed, together with his traditional fictions they might even be said to constitute a meta-textual object, an entire social world that both represents and shapes identity. The underlying continuities with the New Critical approach, however, means that Anesko, even for all of the connections he draws between James’s fictions and the literary marketplace, continues to look at his “The Art of Fiction” as a statement of critical interpretation, going so far as to suggest that the essay “was intended to prepare the reading public for the new kind of fiction that James was about to attempt.” It’s unlikely enough that James could have known precisely what sort of fiction he was about to attempt before he went through the process of actually writing it. If James’s prefaces make nothing else clear, and it’s uncertain if they do, they show that his writing functioned as a process of discovery at every stage of his career. He did not know where he was going ahead of time and so could not have prepared the reading public for where he ended up. But even if James did have a better idea of what he was “about to attempt,” treating the essay as a guide to reading nonetheless reinstalls the very separation between James and his historical context that the intervention is intended to erase. For Anesko, the essay’s point is to give the novelist a “legitimate role as a social historian.”<sup>114</sup> Its point, to put it a little differently, was to make the

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 4, 13.

<sup>114</sup> Anesko, *Friction with the Market*, p. 88.

novelist a particular kind of reader, in the case a New Historicist *avant la lettre*.<sup>115</sup> In the plainest terms, New Historicism democratized the role of oracle.

An even more recent and more telling version of how deeply submerged the figuration of author as reader remains appears in Sara S. Chapman's *Henry James's Portrait of the Writer as Hero*, a book which would be much more accurately described as giving a portrait of the reader, that is, the critic, as hero. For Chapman, James's writings about artists are interesting insofar as they turn writers into critical proxies, illustrating "a central tenet of his mature artistry: the necessary authority of the individual consciousness in defining and interpreting reality, in fiction as in life."<sup>116</sup> Divorced from the realm of practical activity, "the challenge of the writer-hero became for James ... the prototypical modernist challenge: to think and to feel, to organize and to interpret."<sup>117</sup> In short, Chapman propounds a theory of fiction premised on the individual consciousness and addressed solely to cognitive, or at least immaterial, work that floats entirely free from practices of writing and patiently mastered narrative techniques.

Through attention to these practical details of literary technology it becomes possible to reintroduce writing practices into the field of analysis alongside reading practices, enabling us to treat the writer as a writer instead of as a proxy reader. Intention, seen from this angle, does not

---

<sup>115</sup> The continuity in method that a work like Anesko's displays arises in part from the way that literary critical methodology was exported to other disciplines in the early 1970s – notably influencing Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* and Clifford Geertz's *Interpretation of Cultures*, both of which appeared in 1973 – before being imported back into English departments under the cover of an historically inflected interdisciplinary turn. For the influence of literary studies on history and historical sociology see the introduction to *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley, 1999): pp. 1-32.

<sup>116</sup> Chapman, *Henry James's Portrait of the Writer as Hero* (London, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

resolve into a hidden master code lurking within the text as a form of final meaning, but rather is distributed through the assorted exercises and practices that went into making both the author and her work. It's impossible to completely translate this practical knowledge into that naïve form of authorial intention solicited by the question: "what did the author *really* mean?" for the reason that literary knowledge does not completely resolve into "meaning."

## V.

This essay thus urges that we unsettle critical inquires by consulting the oracle. The consultation intended, however, asks not what the oracle knows but what she does. There are many ways that this could be done, no doubt, but the archive of fictioneering offers a robust array of exercises and strategies that permit a view of skill and practical knowledge in flight together. The emphasis on practical "doing" might at first seem like a regression to a naïve models of authorial intent, but the protagonists of this story are not masterful artists acting in full control of their situations. The focus of this study rather falls on the mental, physical, and perceptual calisthenics that aspirants employed to master their craft.

One central advantage in focusing on such processes, which are guided by reflection and belief but unfold as worldly practices, is that it shifts the epistemic interests of literary studies such that the full range of actions comprising literary craft – the ways that writers developed material, gave it form, and then took it to market – become available as historical evidence. A variety of terms might encompass this particular constellation the activity: craft, tacit knowledge, know-how, or perhaps practical knowledge. The signature distinction between this type of knowing and the more discursive knowledge that literary studies has long sought within a text is the one Gilbert Ryle drew between "knowing how" and "knowing that."

The fact that mathematics, philosophy, tactics, scientific method and literary style cannot be imparted but only inculcated reveals that these too are not bodies of information but branches of knowledge-how. They are not sciences but (in the old sense) disciplines. The experts in them cannot tell us what they know, they can only show what they know by operating with cleverness, skill, elegance or taste. The advance of knowledge does not consist only in the accumulation of discovered truths, but also and chiefly in the cumulative mastery of methods.<sup>118</sup>

This distinction supported, rather than undermined, the oracular view outlined above. The strictness of the division, and particularly the prohibition against skilled performers possessing declarative knowledge, supported a view of practical capacities as entirely separate from theoretical ones. While Ryle's arguments helped liberate skills from the subordinate position that a purely intellectualist viewpoint consigned them to, the separate but equal scheme importantly voided aspects of the skilled performer's agency. In the case of the literary artist, the distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how reinforced the wall drawn in "The Intentional Fallacy" by Wimsatt and Beardsley between the public science of criticism and the private culture of fictioneering.

Even as the behaviorist project which subtends Ryle's argument lost credence, the distinction he helped install gained traction across an astonishing range of disciplines.<sup>119</sup> As the philosopher Jason Stanley recently observed,

---

<sup>118</sup> Ryle, "Knowing How and Knowing That: The Presidential Address," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 46 (1945-6): 15.

<sup>119</sup> Joshua Gang makes a similar point in relation to I.A. Richards in "Behaviorism and Close Reading."



The view that skills, be they the social skills that mark group membership in a culture, tribe, or class, or the practices that constitute tasks like midwifery, or the motor skills that allow us to drive a car or find our way home, are independent of cognitive states like knowledge and belief may be the only uniform 20th century point agreed upon by philosophy of every tradition, and adopted across the disciplines, from sociology to neuroscience.<sup>120</sup>

Within philosophy, Stanley cites Hubert Dreyfus as the most influential current exponent of the position. As Stanley and the neuroscientist John W. Krakauer point out, while Dreyfus admits that propositional knowledge in the form of explicit rules may be necessary in the early learning stages of skill acquisition, he maintains that “as one becomes more proficient, one’s actions move from being guided by decisions based on knowledge to being rather more like perceptual states.” Dreyfus’s argument holds that, “The difference between the merely proficient performer and the expert precisely is that the expert no longer needs to make decisions about what to do based on her knowledge about the activity.”<sup>121</sup> This particular attitude might help explain the relative lack of interest literary scholars have had in the exercises of fictioneering. The various technical strategies contained within a how-to manual on fiction can be brushed off as not very interesting preliminaries to legitimate literary activity. Certainly such an idea is implicit in the

---

<sup>120</sup> Stanley, “Knowledge, Habit, Practice, Skill,” accessed online:

[https://www.academia.edu/15605934/Knowledge\\_Habit\\_Practice\\_Skill](https://www.academia.edu/15605934/Knowledge_Habit_Practice_Skill)

<sup>121</sup> Stanley and Krakauer, “Motor Skill Depends on Knowledge of Facts,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (August 2013): 10. Stanley and Krakauer, in contrast to Dreyfus, “reject the view that skill and knowledge are independent. In our view, skilled action is action guided by ongoing accrual and improving application of knowledge of facts about an activity, though skill is not exhausted by such knowledge” Stanley extends this point through a number of articles and in his *Know How* (Oxford, 2011).

mid-century critiques we have already seen of Besant, where merely practical advice is seen as more suited to the construction of furniture than of a novel.

Shifting to a specific focus on literary studies, we can find in Pierre Bourdieu's work the most significant recent articulation of the view that separates skill from knowledge. Bourdieu's work is intimately concerned with practices and has stimulated much attention to the processes of literary production. As such, it would seem of particular use to the current project. Crucially, however, Bourdieu's theory of practice intensifies the division between "knowing how" and "know that" to the point where the rules derived from practical knowledge actually work to obscure the objective truth of the situation. As he puts it in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, "the subtlest pitfall doubtless lies in the fact that such descriptions freely draw on the highly ambiguous vocabulary of *rules* ... to express a social practice that in fact obeys quite different principles."<sup>122</sup> The mastery of a practical skill is displayed, for Bourdieu, is in fact defined by a learned inability to account for its own procedures, and: "The explanation agents may provide of their own practice, thanks to a quasi-theoretical reflection on their practice, conceals, even from their own eyes, the true nature of their practical mastery, i.e. that it is *learned ignorance* (*docta ignorantia*), a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles" (*TP*, p.19). Any explanations provided by the skillful actor function primarily to reinforce this ignorance by way of self-deception: "It follows that this learned ignorance can only give rise to the misleading discourse of a speaker himself misled, ignorant both of the objective truth about his practical mastery (which is that it is ignorant of its own truth) and of the true principle of the knowledge his practical mastery contains" (*TP*, p. 19). The objective truth, by contrast, consists in practices as working in a circular fashion along with a system of dispositions that comprise the

---

<sup>122</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 18; hereafter abbreviated *TP*.

*habitus* to produce social “fields.” The circularity sustains a particular set of historically contingent, but self-perpetuating, objective relations: “the *habitus*, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history” (*TP*, p. 82). The *habitus* is deeply rooted in the body, inscribed by practices that make the cognitive life of individuals almost akin to perceptual states in their automaticity. Such automaticity can be seen clearly in aesthetic taste wherein what is often thought of as a reasoned judgment becomes equated with an automatic reaction. While the unequal relationships that obtain in any particular field produce a certain amount of movement and change as the individuals within a field scramble for distinction, Bourdieu’s theory of practice describes an essentially static structure in which objective conditions are continually reproduced. Indeed, because Bourdieu premises action in a field on a practical logic whose central end is the maximization of capital, and because economic and cultural capital are treated as functionally equivalent, even strategies that appear new tend to reproduce existing conditions. In short, the *habitus* represents “a past which survives into the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles” (*TP*, p. 82). As a consequence, for Bourdieu practices are objective, standing outside the individual engaged in executing them:

Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. Because his actions and works are the product of a *modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery, they contain an “objective intention,” as the Scholastics put it, which always outruns his conscious intentions. The schemes of thought and expression he has acquired are the basis for the *intentionless invention* of regulated

improvisation. It is because subjects, strictly speaking, do not know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know. (*TP*, p. 79)

As Michel de Certeau has observed in his criticism of precisely this passage, Bourdieu's approach implies an epistemological model that produces knowledge both "foreign and superior to the knowledge" the subjects have of themselves.<sup>123</sup> In Bourdieu, there stands, on the one hand, a network of practices that flawlessly but unconsciously reproduces the social structure and, on the other, a body of theoretical knowledge with access to the objective meaning of those practices. That this practice of analysis neatly reproduces a version of the art-as-such model, albeit in a thoroughly deaestheticized form, might well explain the appeal of Bourdieu for literary studies. When it comes to understanding the production context of the work, intention proves both unavailable and undesirable, just as it had for the analysis of a work of literary art. The intention as realized, as Brooks had it, is the 'intention' that counts.

Bourdieu's theory of practice renders the object of its analysis as a static form. While theoretical knowledge deepens and evolves through its contact with the objective truth of the structure that it analyzes, the practicing individual is stuck in a circular pattern of reinscription. As Anthony King has argued,

Despite Bourdieu's claim that the habitus enables 'agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations,' if his definition of the habitus is taken at its word, then these new situations could never arise nor could the habitus allow any transformation in practice. Social practices would be determined by *a priori* dispositions, embodied unknowingly by social agents, and consequently, their flexibility and creativity in the face of changing situations would be curtailed. Since the habitus imposes itself upon "willy nilly," they can

---

<sup>123</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 56.

never construct new strategies for new situations because they are not aware of their habituses and, therefore, cannot begin to reinterpret them.<sup>124</sup>

In contrast to such a view, the practices that comprise fictioneering are not so much being reproduced as being produced, and very self-consciously at that, for the first time. In other words, the very strategic moves that individuals make, while no doubt constrained by larger economic and social structures, do not arise from a deeply internalized *habitus* because they are being invented on the spot. The collective enterprise of fictioneering, forming far too loose a collective to be considered a proper “field,” was, from its very outset, aware of the novelty of its procedures and invested in continually reinterpreting them. Indeed the novelty was the point: the exercises of fictioneering aim to make ordinary observations and perceptions non-routine, thus remaining as bodily based as Bourdieuan notions of practice even as they are rendered more present to conscious attention.

This is not to say that implicit or unconscious processes go away; the recognition that awareness and even knowledge persists outside out of conscious intention animates the pursuit of these very things. Certainly the deeper structures that these social practices provide have something in common with his notion of the *habitus*. However, as individuals within the field clearly recognize in ways that anticipate Bernard Lahire’s criticisms of Bourdieu, the life of a writer is nearly always a “double life”: for all but a very few, the literary life is lived only

---

<sup>124</sup> King, “Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A ‘Practical’ Critique of the Habitus,” *Sociological Theory* 18:3 (November 2000): 427. King finds two competing versions of practice in Bourdieu: essentially the “bad Bourdieu” with the reductionistic tendencies evident in the preceding excerpts from *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and a “good Bourdieu” emphasizes that social practices are virtuosic and intersubjective. Needless to say, as King points out, the former has dominated his oeuvre and extended the greater influence.

intermittently.<sup>125</sup> The writerly training aims to render visible aspects of the *habitus* that might otherwise pass unnoticed in both ordinary life. As we will see in later chapters, the graduated exercises of fictioneering are structured around the idea both that a deliberate approach is needed and that even the most systematic approach to fiction writing is likely to yield unexpected results. Focusing on practice and practical knowledge attends to the middle ground between the micro-level of the individual author and the macro-level of an encompassing institution. The practical knowledge of the fictioneer includes discursive knowledge. A form of the rational control that could certainly be loosely termed authorial intent – as long as we understand intent to be distributed across a range of actions, states, and beliefs, which interconnect and often vie for control – guides skilled behavior. What we need, however, is a more nuanced version of rational control that avoids a return to a naïve and implausible version of authorial intent featuring the godlike author, who is both hyper-idealized and psychologically implausible. To do justice to the social interactions that unfold within literary production requires a more flexible notion of writerly intention that is not reduced to a cognitive state or a single fixed meaning. A finer-grained version of the way that production contexts act on the individuals laboring within them is

---

<sup>125</sup> Bernhard Lahire, “The Double Life of Writers,” trans. Gwendolyn Wells, *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2010): pp. 443-465. Pierre Bourdieu *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, 1996), p. 227. Lahire uses the egregiously mobile existence of writers to mount a larger criticism the way Bourdieu conceptualizes the relation of the field to its main agents. The larger point for Lahire is to use the example of writers to show that all actors in a social field are “plural.” Any observant member of the literary field around the turn of the nineteenth century – such as the writers examined in this essay – would have seen Lahire’s central argument that “the frequent double life of writers is not an anodyne or insignificant fact, but an absolutely central fact of literary life” supremely obvious (p. 446). Literary advice in this era is dispensed under the premise that even the most dedicated would-be writers are living plural lives; that, after all, is why aspirants need handbooks.

needed as well and both, I argue, can be found in a view of skilled practice that is not divorced from theoretical knowledge.

After all, and more or less by definition, practice isn't practice unless it is *for* something, directed by a design and with a particular intentional aim in mind. Even on a view that holds art as intrinsically valuable – *art pour l'art* – becoming a better artist, indeed the very capacity to improve, justifies and defines the exercise regimen that allows an activity to be done for its own sake.<sup>126</sup> With fictioneering texts, the thing intended is what follows the “how to” and it is often a dual goal: how to write *and* sell a work of fiction (and to become a writer in the process). As a product of a moment when the art of fiction became both an art and a business and did both successfully enough to engender the hugely productive paradox of “The Great Divide,” fictioneering offers a particularly rich vein to mine in pursuit of the practical knowledge embodied in skilled performance. Any proper history of this moment needs to account for the beliefs, and belief-based practices, that lent dignity to both sides of the enterprise and not merely to the social forces generated by medial and material innovations and changes. The fictioneering archive, filled as it is with exercises, strategies, tips and self-tests that together address all the crucial aspects of the writer's life, offers a vast field in which to observe the social interactions of a live literary culture. That this culture has always been associated with “mass culture” has encouraged the unfortunate tendency to treat it as a single mass.

A very different notion of practice from Bourdieu's, one that puts the intentional improvement, rather than intentionless invention at its core, appears in Peter Sloterdijk's work on

---

<sup>126</sup> On this point, see also Peter Sloterdijk's criticism of Bourdieu in *You Must Change Your Life*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 178-188.

what he calls “anthropotechnics.”<sup>127</sup> Practice – which Sloterdijk defines with deceiving simplicity as “any operation that provides or improves the actor’s qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared as practice or not” - crucially mixes the practical and the theoretical, or, in Sloterdijk’s terms, the “active” and the “contemplative.”<sup>128</sup> Practice is, on this view, “a mixed domain: it seems contemplative without relinquishing characteristics of activity and active without losing the contemplative perspective.”<sup>129</sup> When applied to an activity that produces art objects, as Sloterdijk has suggested in reference the study of art history, orientation around practice

shifts the focus from the work to the artist by defining the production of art producers as an independent dimension of art history – which, incidentally is the opposite of conventional biographism. The refocused art history thus becomes a branch of the general history of practice and training.<sup>130</sup>

Adopting an angle that Sloterdijk describes as a “conceptual stage rotated ninety degrees”, provides the chance to “see every phenomenon on [the art] field more or less from a side view and, alongside the familiar history of art as a history of completed works, we could obtain a history of the training that made it possible and the asceticism that shaped artists.”<sup>131</sup> This history

---

<sup>127</sup> See Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics and The Art of Wisdom* (trans. Karen Margolis, [Columbia, 2012]). While the training schemes of fictioneering could certainly fit under the heading “anthropotechnics,” I take the term as integral part of Sloterdijk’s idiosyncratic and irreverent personal brand of theorizing and will employ it only in direct reference to his work.

<sup>128</sup> Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy*, trans. Karen Margolis (Columbia, 2012), p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, p. 362.

<sup>131</sup> Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy*, p. 9.



fills in the spaces between discrete objects, whether finished texts or bounded contexts, in the way that it reveals the practical, and very intentionally pursued, uses of literature.

In the end, “How to Become an Author” does not primarily aim to add a body of objects to literary studies. One of its central concerns is, in fact, quite the reverse, for it rather seeks to trouble literary studies’ reliance on fixed objects by tracing instead the insistently self-conscious social acts that shaped writing and writers from the 1880s to the 1940s. Its ultimate field of study then is not so much the documents themselves as the practices they produced, the processes they allowed, and the techniques they elaborated. In short, the texts in this archive are useful precisely because they are not very interesting aesthetic objects in themselves. The approach taken here will therefore treat its abundant material data – the how-to manuals, advice columns, practical tips, author interviews, training plans, and fictions about fiction making – as opportunities to glimpse something far less tangible, the movement of literature itself as a creative unfolding, one that is, in Samuel Johnson’s resonant formulation, “sometimes advanced by accidental hints and sometimes slowly improved by steady meditation.”<sup>132</sup> Indeed, some of the most interesting aspects of fictioneering feature as the steady mediation *on* accidental hints. Reading up to the practices of fictioneering permits a more nuanced idea of how knowledge guides action including skilled action that avoids reverting to an intellectualist position of the kind Ryle attacked in his seminal article. Declarative knowledge alone is not the only kind. Literary knowledge offers another kind. Represented action, including the action of being a certain kind of character, likewise can guide action in part because it offers a nuanced alternative to the intellectualist position in which settled beliefs precede and determine an action.

---

<sup>132</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets* (Oxford, 1905), p. 124. The quote comes from Johnson’s remarks on *Paradise Lost*.

## Part II: Chapter One

### Learning Fiction by Subscription

Early in 1895 Nikolai Leskov died, though his passing is most famously announced some four decades later in Walter Benjamin's "The Storyteller." For Benjamin, Leskov represents a vanishing figure whose disappearance marks the ominous retreat of the "moral world," a retreat directly owing to the inability of narrative art to serve as a vehicle of wisdom.<sup>1</sup> At the outset of his essay, Benjamin famously declares that reading someone like Leskov brings the realization that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end. One meets with fewer and fewer people who know how to tell a tale properly" ("ST," p.143). The felt consequence, Benjamin goes on to say, "is as if a capability that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, has been taken from us: the ability to share experiences." We have lost the capacity to transmit accumulated wisdom through stories for the "obvious" reason that "experience has fallen in value" (143). The decline of both the value of experience and the value of the story that conveys it have much to do with the arrival of the news media that flourishes in the magazines and periodicals. Arriving in such force at the end of the nineteenth century, the periodical press conveys not experience but "information." According to David Rando, Benjamin found the turn-of-the-century newspaper and periodical market to be an

instrumental, distancing, and inauthentic mode for representing human experience.

Moreover, experience itself is seen as the victim of the numbing media assault, as meaningful experience (*Erfahrung*) is displaced by the fleeting sensations of media

---

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, trans. Harry Zohn, (Cambridge, 2002), p. 143; hereafter abbreviated "ST."

experience (*Erlebnis*). The information age not only threatens the traditional means of communicating meaningful experience, but also, according to Benjamin's formulation, diminishes one's capacity to even have real experiences. Experience itself becomes impoverished and atrophied by the negative shocks of modernity, exemplified in many ways by the stream of news.<sup>2</sup>

The news on Benjamin's view, in fact, actively seeks to impede such assimilation. As he puts it in "Some Motifs on Baudelaire," the "intention of the press" is "to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader."<sup>3</sup> In short, the news cannot be used, only consumed.

Hugh Kenner similarly starts his 1988 framing of modernism *The Sinking Island* also 1895, similarly remarking on the media deluge. Offering a cross-section of reading habits, Kenner notes that in 1895 British readers "read newspapers. They read *Tit-Bits* and *The Strand Magazine*. They read romances and histories. They read Dickens, and thruppenny pamphlets of excerpts from Dickens .... They read themselves to sleep. Never in human history had there been so much read."<sup>4</sup> For Kenner, all this reading signaled the beginning of the end of authentic literary experience. That year of transition "saw reading publics fragmented and reading become a drug."<sup>5</sup> The arrival of mass culture in the great flood of newspaper and periodical literature did spur, for Kenner, the counter-reaction of international modernism, but the unequal contest between the two had to come to its predestined, and unhappy, end. Though more narrowly concerned with literature than is Benjamin, Kenner sees 1895 as encapsulating that particular

---

<sup>2</sup> David Rando, *Modernist Fiction and the News* (New York, 2011), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs on Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York, 1969), p. 158.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

moment in which the beauty of a vanishing figure can be appreciated, just as it is being swallowed by the flood:

The events of that year might have been synchronized for our convenience. Not only did Conrad make his debut in 1895; the harbinger of another future date too, H.G. Wells, with *The Time Machine*. Oscar Wilde climaxed his career with *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*; he also stood trial, twice, and went to jail. That event not only ended Oscar's career, and Aubrey Beardsley's connection with *The Yellow Book*; it ended too, in Richard Garnett's judgment, any prospect for innovative writing in England for ... well, his guess was 50 years.<sup>6</sup>

Kenner goes on to list a series of notable shifts from the year: Hardy and Meredith both wrote their last novel. More dramatically, in both senses of the word, 1895 marked the end of Henry James's playwriting career with the embarrassing and very public failure of *Guy Domville*. The episode, however dispiriting for James personally, who counted January 5 – the evening of the play's debut – among the most humiliating days of his life, nonetheless inclined him to turn “resolutely” back to fiction, lonely as that occupation would prove. For Kenner, who prizes the international modernist rather than the storyteller, the last gasp of great literature is thus written in direct opposition to the mass cultural machine that imposes itself on the public. Enfeebled and addicted by the deluge of a “new class of bilge,” the mass reader loses her taste for great writers and can only passively, though greedily, consume what the newspapers and magazine offer up.<sup>7</sup>

To look at the literary field in 1895 from the angle of fictioneering, however, is to glimpse a parallel universe with a very different orientation to the press. In this alternate world,

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

familiar names appear in diminished roles and unexpected capacities while unknown figures loom forth, rivaling the artists we now take to define the period. From this angle, 1895 marks not a moment of beginning or ending, but a steady, sustained progress, capped, in June, with Walter Besant knighting for his service to literature. If the contrast between Sir Walter's elevation and Henry James's humiliation – more than a decade after they crossed swords in “Art of Fiction” debate – provides the most suggestive clue of how differently the literary field can be viewed, a vastly more substantial if less striking body of evidence testifies to progress that the art of fiction as a practical science had made in just a decade.

Whereas in his 1884 lecture, Walter Besant, could ventriloquize the reading public's skepticism by pointing to a lack of training apparatus, by 1895 such apparatus has become so overwhelming that guides to the guides had begun to appear. In 1884 Besant had asked,

How can that be an Art ... which has no lecturers or teachers, no school or college or Academy, no recognized rules, no text-books, and is not taught in any University? Even the German Universities, which teach everything else, do not have Professors of Fiction, and not one single novelist, so far as I know, has ever pretended to teach his mystery, or spoken of it as a thing which may be taught. (*AF*, p. 14)

In the ensuing decade, the want had been amply filled, but not by German universities, Academies, or Professors of Fiction, though these would come in time. In literary education under the lights of fictioneering, one learned the art of fiction not at the feet of a Professor or even by way of informal, but face-to-face, lessons from a master, but by subscription. Aspirants to literature learned the craft of writing from magazines and, not long after, from the handbooks that systematically codified the techniques of fictional composition circulating through the periodical world. The initial focus of this chapter will be to show how the periodical culture of

the late nineteenth century, rather than imposing on mass-market writers and directing their literary efforts, offered them an interactive field of training. First, particular attention will be given to the famous debate between Besant and James, which here marks the beginnings of fictioneering. We will then turn to the advice trade journals that appeared in the years immediately after the exchange, attending in particular to *The Writer* and *The Author*. These give rise to the first wave of full-length advice manuals, oriented to providing an informational account of the writing life. In this world of literary exercise, the short story emerges as the ideal mode of training, and the *Atalanta*, a late-Victorian “Girl’s Magazine,” exemplifies the purveying of a systematic practice in literary art.

What the initial decade of fictioneering presents, I argue in my final section, is an interactive literary culture that is shot through with commercial interests but is nonetheless starkly at odds with the usual accounts of the mass market’s impact in literary activity (such as Bourdieu’s). The central difference is that the impersonal system of the literary mass market does not simply impose itself, but rather provides an array of practices that individuals put to use. Because it is anything but disinterested in its aesthetic endeavors, fictioneering may well seem uncomfortably instrumental, but what is instrumentalized is the use of non-instrumental language. Rather than reducing literature to mere disposable commodities, the interactions engendered within mass-market magazines produced the distinction between authentic literature and its degraded rival.

## I.

The decade following the “Art of Fiction” debate marks the rise of fictioneering in earnest, as the practical approach to fiction is both fleshed out and applied. While Walter

Besant's talk provides the initial impetus, it is a rise that plays out almost entirely in periodical culture. If "modernism began in the magazines" – as Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman recently claimed – so too did fictioneering. Indeed they often co-existed in the same issues.<sup>8</sup> Besant's lecture, in fact, owed its immediate preservation and its lasting impact to the newspaper and periodical press. Within a few weeks of the talk, the *Times* offered a leading article on the occasion and the *Pall Mall Gazette* offered two – a short notice and a more substantial piece by the Scottish man of letters Andrew Lang, yet again titled the "Art of Fiction." The interest thus generated in the event led to Chatto & Windus publishing the lecture in pamphlet form with an appendix on, fittingly enough, how to publish. Henry James, who did not attend the lecture, worked from this text to compose his famous response. Before *Longman's* published James's article, however, Besant's pamphlet spurred further comment from *The Spectator* and a number of other journals in Britain as well as the *Nation*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Tribune* in the United States.

Contrary to the usual scholarly narrative, James's essay, published in September 1884, did not put a definitive stop to the discussion, but rather brought in new voices, just, it seems, as James suspected it would. One of the more important further contributors was Robert Louis Stevenson, whose "A Humble Remonstrance" directly argues back against James. Also

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (New Haven, 2010) p.43. J. Berg Esenwein in *Poetry* magazine example here. As Scholes and Wulfman note, even *Poetry* – "that ideal example of the little magazine" – had some advertising including a notable full page ad for J. Berg Esenwein's *The Art of Versification*. Esenwein was the mogul of the fictioneering manual, offering a line that included nearly half a dozen how-to works on fiction in its various forms, the volume on the poetry, a how-to manual on writing for the movies, and even *The Art of Public Speaking*, co-authored by none other than Dale Carnegie (*Modernism in the Magazines*, pp. 36-7).

published in *Longman's*, Stevenson's essay forcibly reframes the discussion back in terms of the practice of writing. "Mr. James," Stevenson observes,

spoke of the finished picture and its worth when done; I, of the brushes, the palette, and the north light. He uttered his views in the tone and for the ear of good society; I, with the emphasis and technicalities of the obtrusive student. But the point, I may reply, is not merely to amuse the public, but to offer helpful advice to the young writer. And the young will not so much be helped by genial pictures of what an art may aspire to at its highest, as by a true idea of what it must be on the lowest terms.<sup>9</sup>

The force of Besant's lecture, as Stevenson recognizes more clearly than even Besant himself did, is that it opens a space for talking about literature as a form of practice rather than as a "finished picture." James himself took the rebuke as both serious and substantial, and made significant revisions to "The Art of Fiction" on its basis.<sup>10</sup> In a letter thanking Stevenson for his criticisms, James wrote that the ideas in his essay "were only half of what I had to say, and some day I shall try and express the remainder."<sup>11</sup> If James was not half-done with what he had to say, neither was anyone else, and the discussion initiated in the debate rapidly grew in scope, progressing both by way of ramification and by way of repeat. The original pieces by Besant,

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance", *Longman's Magazine* V (Dec 1884): pp.146-7.

<sup>10</sup> The revised (and now standard) version appeared four years later in *Partial Portraits*.

<sup>11</sup> Qtd in Janet Smith, *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism* (London, 1948), p. 102-3. How much of James's later criticism might be considered in terms of advice to the young writer remains a question beyond the present scope of this essay, but James himself thought of the prefaces to his New York Edition along these lines. In a letter to W.D. Howells, he wrote that they "form a sort of comprehensive manual or *vademecum* for aspirants in our arduous profession" ["Letter to W.D. Howells, 17 August 1908, quoted in R.P. Blackmur, "Introduction," *The Art of the Novel*, New York, 1934].



James, and Stevenson were reprinted in magazines, pamphlets and even pirated books that bound together the contributions in a single volume. But contrary the current practice in which James's essay is published as a stand-alone piece, the various essays often featured alongside one another as evidence of a new way of talking about fiction as a practical art and the weight given to the various entries figured differently.<sup>12</sup> In an appendix on further reading, the 1901 handbook *How to Write a Novel*, for instance, lists Besant's essay at the head of list, while James's article comes tenth and Stevenson's twenty-third. A similar perspective appears in Brander Matthews's seminal "The Philosophy of the Short Story" (1885), a work contemporary with "The Art of Fiction" debate, and also first published in the magazines. Initially published in the October issue of *Lippincott's*, Matthews's essay "eavesdrops" on that controversy, from an adjacent column, as it were:

If it chance that artists fall to talking about their art, it is the critic's place to listen, that he may pick up a little knowledge. Of late, certain of the novelists of Great Britain and the United States have been discussing the principles and practice of the art of writing stories. Mr. Howells declared his warm appreciation of Mr. Henry James's novels; Mr. Stevenson made public a delightful plea for Romance; Mr. Besant lectured gracefully on

---

<sup>12</sup> Until quite recently, it was fairly difficult for anyone without ready access to a research library to even access Besant's essay. As David Lodge noted in his 1995 talk "Creative Writing: Can it/ Should it be Taught?," "Everybody interested in the subject knows James's essay, but not many have read the text which provoked it, for it is quite difficult to obtain" (David Lodge, "Creative Writing: Can it/ Should it be Taught?," p. 172). Within literary criticism, James's essay has long been thought to stand entirely on its own, with his brief summary of Besant's views serving as a more than sufficient explanation.

the Art of Fiction; and Mr. James modestly presented his views by way of supplement and criticism.<sup>13</sup>

Matthews's remarks usefully map the field of the debate from a contemporary perspective, putting British and American novelists in dialog along the way and giving such different relative weights to the disputants that James's essay become a "supplement." It also crucially emphasizes that the discussion consisted of artist's shoptalk, but noted how the extension such a topic was capable of achieving: "The discussion took a wide range. With more or less fulness it covered the proper aim and intent of the novelist, his material and his methods, his success, his rewards, social and pecuniary, and the morality of his work and of his art."<sup>14</sup>

The important point about this discussion, however, is that its audience was meant to do much more than listen. The most eager listeners were not critics looking to pick up a little knowledge, but aspirant writers looking to learn practical skills. Treating the literary market, to which it was so recent an addition, as a newly discovered world whose riches were open to the enterprising, fictioneering promised at once to map this complex and treacherous terrain and to make their readers an important part of it. Some version of this freshly discovered country can be glimpsed in *New Grub Street*. Readers of George Gissing's novel will recall that one of the few characters with the competitive fitness to survive in this unsentimental environment is Mr. Whelpdale, who abandons writing novel writing to set up as a "literary adviser." Whelpdale's success strikes Edwin Reardon, the novel's model of aesthetic purity, who notably does not survive, as a "confounded swindle", but to Jasper Milvain it is "one of the finest jokes I ever

---

<sup>13</sup> Brander Matthews, "The Philosophy of the Short Story," *Lippincott's, a Popular Journal of General Literature* 36 (October 1885): 366.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

heard. A man who can't get anyone to publish his own books makes a living telling other people how to write!"<sup>15</sup> Joking or not, fictioneers guided their charges by teaching them craftiness as much as craft, sometimes bringing home their lessons at the expense of less wary. Whatever their scruples, fictioneers cultivated a highly self-conscious attitude toward the market and adopted an attitude toward the information communicated by the newspapers and magazines that little resembles the figure of the Benjamin's anxious modern whose "imagination" has been "paralyzed" by the newspapers ("SM," p.159).

The practical orientation toward the news is evident than in the specialty periodicals devoted to literary laborers that spring forth in the years immediately following the "Art of Fiction" debate on both sides of the Atlantic. Taking the shoptalk of the writer to a vastly more detailed level, these magazines urged a very different relationship to the "information" of the nascent "information age," teaching their readers to turn the space of the news media into a training arena. The stories offered in the newspapers and magazines were to be studied, imitated, cut into clips, and sorted in plot files; they were the places one submitted one's own work and if the editors proved unresponsive or unscrupulous, one could find out how to deal with them too.

The first periodicals – including *The Writer* (1887) – devoted exclusively to the interests of literary workers came close on the heels of the debate, encouraged no doubt by the lively interest the debate had generated. As Henry James noted in his essay, "within [the last] year or two" "the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened" ("AR," p. 502). James's view of the discussion shows a prescient awareness of how theorizing about how to write fiction had become almost as absorbing as fiction itself. James in fact brings the discussion of how to write novels before the sole "obligation" he's willing to demand of a novel

---

<sup>15</sup> George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (New York, 2002), p. 156.

– that “it be interesting” – and finds that it satisfies that demand.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the opening line of his essay justifies its “comprehensive” title by reference to the “*interesting* pamphlet lately published under this name [“The Art of Fiction”] by Mr. Walter Besant.” The reaction to Besant’s pamphlet “appears to indicate that many persons are *interested* in the art of fiction” (“AR,” p. 502; emphasis added).

Mr. Besant has set an excellent example in saying what he thinks, for his part, about the way in which fiction should be written, as well as about the way in which it should be published; for his view of the ‘art,’ carried on into an appendix, covers that too. Other laborers in the same field will give it the light of their experience, and the effect will surely be to make our *interest* in the novel a little more what it had for some time threatened to be – a serious, active, inquiring *interest*, under protection of which this delightful study may, in moments of confidence, venture to say a little more what it thinks of itself.

If fiction is an art, then paying attention to the state of the art, the leading edge of technique, becomes part of the art. The reflexive representation of this interest – the “venture to say a little

---

<sup>16</sup> This demand is even more emphatic in the magazine version. In the revised version he substitutes “sincere” for “interesting” in the line towards the end of his essay that reads “But the only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel is, as I have already said, that it be interesting” (“AF,” p. 520). Given that he’s earlier used the word “composition” to refer not to the finished thing itself but to the process of making that thing – “I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks” (“AF,” p. 511) – one could perhaps make a further relay between the craft of fiction and fiction itself. Sianne Ngai notes a similar point in passing, albeit from the perspective of literary criticism, in her “Merely Interesting”: “the history of interesting (and its usage in contemporary criticism) is in some deep way bound up with the history of literary criticism itself—or, more specifically, with the history of its autonomization and professionalization” (*Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 4 (Summer 2006): p. 790).

more of what it thinks of itself” – is tied up with both attention and mode of expression. In short, writing about writing becomes a form of essential experience for the novelist and an essential way of making fiction into more of an art. Such a view suggests that even when it came to his theories, James was far less aloof than he was long taken to be. Closely attuned to the burgeoning interest in fiction though he was, James must still have been surprised at just how many laborers were soon to offer up the light of their experience.

The “era of discussion” took an immense step forward in 1887 with the launch of *The Writer* in Boston by the intrepid William H. Hills. Subtitled “A Monthly Magazine to Interest and Help All Literary Workers,” *The Writer* closely echoes the key terms of James’s “The Art of Fiction.” So interesting did literary workers find Hills’s magazine that he soon followed it up with a sister periodical called *The Author* in 1889. In 1891 Besant began “conducting” a periodical also called *The Author* to serve the “organ” for the Society of Authors. The mid-1890s saw *The Editor* (New York: “The journal of information for literary workers”), *The Writers’ and Artists’ Year-Book* (London), and *Bookman*, which introduced the world to best-seller lists.

Conveying practical advice submerged in rhythms of working life, these magazines depended on scattered contributors who wrote in from afar. A periodical such as *The Author* not only provided professional advice, but it conferred its own title on the hopeful aspirant who had something to say. One could thus first become an author by writing for *The Author*. Such modes of compilation produced interestingly diverse results. The Boston-based *Writer*, for example, featured all of the following between its covers: lead articles on writing fiction, short stories, “Gossip on Authors,” “Queries,” “Book Reviews” of literary texts, notices of useful articles in other magazines, and “Helpful Hints and Suggestions.” Here is how the magazine describes what it is looking for:

Readers of THE WRITER are urged to tell for the benefit of other readers what little schemes they [sic] may have devised or used to make their own work easier or better. By a free exchange of personal experiences every one will be helped, and, no matter how simple a useful idea is, it is an advantage that every one should know about it.<sup>17</sup>

The schemes of the magazines' readers covered an astonishing array of topics, with nothing too minor to escape notice. Debates raged over the typewriter in particular, whether it was better to invest in buying one and learning to use it, or whether it was wiser to outsource the work.

Contributors weighed in on the benefits and drawback of various models and often proposed modifications for the machines such as a "cheap arrangement" for "persons who prefer the typewriter knee-shift at the right."<sup>18</sup> Filing systems were likewise much discussed, testifying to the various attempts to manage the deluge of information and turn it to profitable account. Philip G. Hubert, who admitted to collecting "twenty-five thousand newspaper articles and perhaps five thousand magazine articles" over the course of a decade, discussed his "various methods of keeping and filing away for reference" such a colossal bundle of material in "The Filing of Clippings" (July 1888). The hazards of the occupation both minor – sleeplessness, writer's cramp, and methods for removing ink from clothing (clear spirit of camphor does the trick) – and major – libel and copyright infringement – were regularly addressed. Even the magazine's ads, featuring typewriters, shorthand instruction, and other services for literary workers fell under the general mission of the magazine. As Hills, the editor and publisher of the journal, put it,

---

<sup>17</sup> Hills "Helpful Hints and Suggestions," 3, no. 10 (October, 1889): 233.

<sup>18</sup> B.T., "Helpful Hints and Suggestions," 2, no. 3 (March 1888), p. 71.

“Readers of *The Writer* who skip the advertising pages do not get the full value of the magazine.”<sup>19</sup>

Individually, the various tools and tricks of the trade may seem insignificant enough, but taken together, they represent a marked shift in the art of writing. An April 1888 article on “Method Needed in Literary Work” by A.L. Hanscom testifies to the profession’s emerging practical philosophy. “It is no longer necessary,” Hanscom observes, “for a literary man to wear long hair, roll open his shirt collar like Byron, or have the delirium tremens with undoubted regularity.”<sup>20</sup> What is necessary is a undoubted regularity of a different sort, namely a practical method for managing both oneself and one’s work that was founded on the solid base of practical knowledge. This knowledge, however, was the possession not of the individual writing alone in a garret surround by half-empty bottles, but of the community of writers at large, a community linked by the magazines.

Besant’s *The Author* renders this communal, guild-like aspect with particular clarity, and adds a new dimension to the key term “interest.” The Society, founded on the idea that knowledge of the profession could effectively be circulated through face-to-face social interaction, had found itself in need of a new principle of association. The original plan “to hold frequent meetings for the purpose of conference and discussion” had come up against the fact that “a large number of our members live in the country” and so “we could seldom hope to obtain a really representative gathering, and the discussions would have the tendency to drop into the hands of a few, and still be robbed of half their value.”<sup>21</sup> Even if large, representative

---

<sup>19</sup> Hills, “Front Matter” 12, no. 2 (February 1899): 38.

<sup>20</sup> A.L. Hanscom, “Method Needed in Literary Work,” p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Besant, “The Author,” *The Author* 1, no. 1 (May 15 1890), p.1.

gatherings had been possible, the Society further realized that discussions would be of little value if those taking part in them were not already informed: “no discussions can have any real value which are not founded on knowledge of the facts. Now, the ordinary member knows little of the facts.” What was needed was both a space for discussion and an avenue for the circulation of knowledge. “*The Author* is therefore founded to be the organ of literary men and women of all kinds – the one paper which will fully review, discuss, and ventilate all questions connected with the profession of literature in all its branches. It will be the medium by which the Committee of our Society will inform its members generally of their doings, and it will become a public record of transactions conducted in the interests of literature, which have hitherto been secret, lost, and hidden for the want of such an organ.” Despite the apparent breadth of its scope, *The Author* was more narrowly conceived than Hills’s magazines. Besant was most interested in “the importance of keeping members more fully and more regularly supplied with information ... on the various matters which concern the author in the safeguarding of his interests and the preservation of his property.”<sup>22</sup> Besant was interested in a different kind of interest than James or Hills, but the basic structure of the magazine was still interactive and contributor driven. Contributions were sought from members, particularly if they related to “*the safeguarding of literary property for the producer of literature.*”<sup>23</sup> While such an approach might not seem to make for thrilling reading, this focus nonetheless did make for moments of high drama as “each number,” among “other features of novelty and interest” contained “some one case” of attempted literary theft “brought

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 2.



before the society.”<sup>24</sup> Usually the antagonists in such cases were publishers. Besant’s especial enemies, but the June 1890 number offers a more relevant example for the present purpose.

At issue here for that month was George Bainton’s *The Art of Authorship* (1890), itself a supremely artful exercise in becoming an author that validated the hazards of this new landscape for even successful and experienced writers. Posing as a devoted but overwhelmed educator “wanting to address our young people, in response to their request, by way of a lecture upon the art of composition and the means essential to secure a forcible and interesting style of expression,” Bainton solicited “the personal testimony” of successful authors on the topic of “whether in early life you gave yourself to any special training with a view to the formation of style, and also whether you can give us any information of your own methods that would aid us to realize, in some degree at least, the secrets of your own great powers.”<sup>25</sup> He mailed a virtually identical request to hundreds of prominent authors – though within each letter he claimed merely to be consulting “one or two of our most skilful and honoured authors” – and received a stunning number of lengthy replies. He duly reprinted them between the covers of his book, adding only a preface and a few brief head-notes to such chapters as “Good Writing – Is It a Gift or an Art?”, “Methods – Conscious and Unconscious”, and “The Influence of Reading on Literary Style.” That, among many others, Wilkie Collins, Edmund Gosse, H. Rider Haggard, Thomas Hardy, Bret Harte, W.D. Howells, Henry James, George Meredith, George Moore, Walter Pater, Christina Rossetti, and Mark Twain all “personally contributed” to the book reveals both the market for information about the “special training,” “methods” and “secrets” of successful

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.. p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> I here quote from Bainton’s letter to Louisa Parr, indignantly republished in *The Author*. See *The Author*, 1:2 [June 16, 1890]: 44-7.

authors and the innocence that even such authors as these could display before this market at this particular moment. After receiving a number of concerned queries from authors featured within Bainton's book, *The Author* launched an investigation and devoted several pages to the affair, airing the complaints of R.D. Blackmore, H. Rider Haggard, George Meredith, and Charlotte Yonge and several others. Most responses were in general agreement with Grant Allen's statement that "I was not aware that Mr. Bainton meant to publish [my response] in book form. Mr. Bainton only mentioned that he wished for the information for an apparently private lecture to young people [...] The details I gave were far more personal than I should have dreamt of making them had I expected them to be published. What is perfectly allowable in answer to a private question about one's own methods may seem like impertinence and bad taste if obtruded on the general public, which never asked to know how one writes one's books."<sup>26</sup> Allen had badly misjudged if he thought in fact that the general public did not want to know how he wrote his books; more likely Allen fully realized just how interested the public was. Many of the contributors would, or already had, sold their secrets on the advice market.

Regardless of who profited, *The Art of Authorship* turned out to be a minor classic in the fictioneering field, advertised within literary magazines for the next twenty-odd years and eventually finding a second life as a source for an impressive array of literary-critical monographs, providing, as it does, the confidential stylistic reflections of so many eminent Victorians. It marks a new, if logical, impulse to collect and codify.

The practical advice scattered throughout the periodical press became so immense that one needed a guide to the guides. Percy Russell might have got there first in 1886 with *The Literary Manual, Or a Complete Guide to Authorship*, a text that attempts to live up to its

---

<sup>26</sup> Grant Allen, "The Art of Authorship," *The Author*, 1, no. 2 [June 16, 1890]: 45.

ambitious subtitle by covering not simply the writing techniques needed to compose poetry, drama, and fiction, but also those needed for the successful crafting of newspaper articles, book reviews, advertisements and specialty items for the religious press.<sup>27</sup> Russell also includes chapters devoted to copyright, libel, “scales of literary remuneration,” and effective reading habits. For Russell, succeeding in literature meant, above all, mastering an immensely broad field of specialized, even arcane, knowledge. On his view,

the successful writer must acquire the technics of literature ... and the success of his writings will be proportioned to the *thoroughness* of his knowledge of Literary Technology .... Now this, like other knowledge, can be vicariously acquired by means of proper instruction. This special knowledge can, indeed, be easily acquired from a book, and it is the object of the present work to supply a Manual that shall leave no technical or business point in the Literary Life unexplained or obscure.<sup>28</sup> (4)

Emphasizing the increasing complexity of the vocation in the wake of “universal education” and “the rapid advance of intellectual culture,” Russell cautions that “many a career has been hopelessly frustrated because the young aspirant to honours in Literature, supposed that the

---

<sup>27</sup> Russell’s text, eventually retitled *Authors’ Manual: A Complete and Practical Guide to All Branches of Literary Work* (London, 1891), reflects the varied careers of its self-made author, who published eighteen novels, several volumes of poetry, and much journalism after working his way up from a printer’s proofreader. *The Literary Manual* was his most successful book, but Russell himself might well have benefitted from sound advice. As Nigel Cross puts it in *The Common Writer*, “the final irony [of Russell’s career] was that his *Authors’ Manual*, which ran into eleven editions and gained him the devotion of many young writers [...], earned him just £25. He had written it on commission and received no royalties” (p. 239).

<sup>28</sup> Percy Russell, *The Literary Manual*, p. 4.

possession of what is known as the divine afflatus, would of itself suffice to compel that worldly success which is attained alone by a comprehensive knowledge of literary technology” (5).

Walter Besant would supply another such encyclopedic compendium in 1899 with his *The Pen and Book*. Mark Twain, perhaps wanting to abstain from further public discussion on how to write fiction after his unwitting contribution to *The Art of Authorship*, declined to review *The Pen and the Book* on the following grounds:

Besant is a friend of mine, and there was no way of doing a review that wouldn't cut into his feelings and wound his enthusiastic pride in his insane performance ... The book in not reviewable by any but a sworn enemy of his; ... there isn't a rational page in it. Why, a person might as well undertake to review a lunatic asylum.<sup>29</sup>

If it represents an incipient insanity, *The Pen and the Book* is nonetheless a representative work of the evolving handbook genre, unusual only insofar as its plagiarisms are self-plagiarisms (Besant reprints virtually his entire “Art of Fiction” lecture of fifteen years before as a chapter, a reminder that he did not feel as though he had lost the debate). If anything, *The Pen and the Book* already appears old-fashioned when put next to competing works from the same time.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Quoted from Fred W. Boege, “Sir Walter Besant: Novelist: Part Two.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 11.1 (June 1956), 36.

<sup>30</sup> After, in some ways, getting the whole thing going, Besant is left behind by the development of literary techniques. He added some new wrinkles in the early 1890s, as we will see below, but thereafter began to reiterate points already made. His attentions had shifted from the production of literary property to the protection of it, and *The Pen and the Book* is frankly more interested in the latter. Securing “property rights” for writers was the principle mission of both the Society of Authors – of which he was president – and, as we have seen, its “organ.” As Michael Anesko rather unkindly puts it, Besant’s views on the art of fiction “became even more abject as the Society prospered” (“*Friction with the Market*”: *Henry James and the Profession of Authorship*, p. 114). See the first

The comprehensive knowledge of the entire world of letters that Russell and Besant aimed to uncover and circulate becomes increasingly untenable as different modes of literary work are increasingly recognized to possess their own specificity. The late 1880s and early 1890s mark, after all, the period in which “literature” emerged as a separate category. As Patrick Collier observes of this period, “the historical distinction between journalism and literature was emerging in these years as part of a wider contestation about authorship, literature, and the cultural meanings of writing and literary work.”<sup>31</sup> Materialist histories often emphasize how changes in production contexts drive this distinction, but I want to add to these studies by suggesting that the split was driven in part by the developing modes of training that enumerated a separate skill set for the two types of writing. To be sure, one might write both journalism and fiction, and an increasing number of writers found their first success and sustenance by writing journalism, but the short story and the novel demanded something more. Yet, even as they grew apart, journalism and fiction remained interrelated, not least in the way that a writer of fiction came to use the news. As fictioneers increasingly recognized that the techniques of fiction diverged from those taught to journalists, they found that the news offered the readiest source of material and an ideal venue for the requisite study of human nature. That the fiction and the news often happened to inhabit the same locations in periodical culture only made it all the easier for the aspirant to see the differences between them. In the end, the split between journalism and literature was founded on the notion that the latter was an art, but, at the moment the divide

---

chapter of Peter Keating’s *The Haunted Study* for a more flattering view of Besant, one that credits him with exposing and combating the frank exploitation of authors by their publishers. See Mark Seltzer’s *Henry James and the Art of Power*, ([Ithaca, 1984], pp. 162-5) for a critique of Besant’s conception of literary property.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Collier, “‘Literary prestige is the eminence of nobodies’: Henry James, Literary Work, and Celebrity in the *Illustrated London News*,” p. 2.

opened, the model of art deployed was less that of the autonomous object to be disinterestedly contemplated for its own sake, than that of the construction model, where “art” signified a specialized body of technique. Fiction was an art because it required a higher level of craft from its maker, not because it required a contemplative consumer.

Fictioneering helped drive the split between practical and poetic language – between, in other words, journalism and literature – by involving the very public that supposedly stood idly by.<sup>32</sup> This distinction, I argue, is produced precisely in the attempt to figure out what non-instrumental poetic language was “for”; the experiments of fictioneering consisted in using as tools those literary forms that resisted reduction to purely discursive or propositional terms. Newspaper and magazines, far from “paralyzing the imaginations” of their readers as Benjamin and Kenner suggest, provided the ideal venue for such tests because they mingled journalism and fiction so promiscuously, reflected explicitly on that mingling in the advice columns, and offered their readers the opportunity to put the distinction between the two modes of writing into practice. Attending to these interactions lets us rethink how periodicals affected literary works and literary workers. In particular it supplies an opportunity to build a more robust model of

---

<sup>32</sup> Discourse on the art of fiction is deeply implicated in the emergence of a distinction between literature and journalism that was occurring at precisely the period I here address. Handbooks and trade articles rendered this distinction evident to the public by way of its abundant taxonomies and definitions. Percy Russell’s *The Literary Manual* (discussed at greater length below), one of the very first stand-alone handbooks, thus divides into two parts – one on the art of fiction and one on the art of journalism. Arnold Bennett, one of the other great examples of literary do-it-yourself fashioning, worked both sides of the divide early in his career, penning *Journalism for Women* in 1898 and *How to Become an Author: A Practical Guide* (New York, 1975) a handbook focused on fiction, in 1901. See Laurel Brake’s *Print Culture in Transition, 1850-1910* (New York, 2001) for more on the emergence of the literature/journalism divide. See Chapter 3 below for more on Arnold Bennett.

what practical literary knowledge looks like and how it shapes literary form at both the popular and the elite level.

## II.

In broad terms, the short story's evolution depends on the conviction that fiction is a craft-based art form and it also extends and even confirms that conviction by rendering legible just the sort of practical knowledge needed to pen an aesthetically worthy piece of fiction. As I will explain, contrary to the conventional account of the short story, the art of the short story was explicitly and exhaustively put into practice in the years leading up to the twentieth century. Long before the epiphany had come to assume its lofty position, fictioneers had carefully elaborated other first principles.<sup>33</sup> The modernist project was a continuation of this earlier one and crucially depended on it.<sup>34</sup> The venues in which the practical theories of fictioneering are aired and exercised strongly link the British tradition of the short story with the American one, making fictioneering a phenomenon that spans the Atlantic.

Within the British tradition, the short story is often considered the modernist genre "*par excellence*," and insofar as it has been assumed to be an art at all, it became so at the hands of

---

<sup>33</sup> It is worth pointing out that "epiphany" itself only came into currency with the publication in 1944 of *Stephen Hero*, wherein Joyce offers his now famous definition, and that it only becomes a broadly applied critical concept in the mid-1960s. While Joyce's stories were studied from early on in M.F.A. workshops, close attention to their use of epiphanies only appears to begin in the 1970s. The critical obsession with epiphany came long after the revolution in form. Consider that in the first edition of *Understanding Fiction* (1943), Brooks and Warren include only "Araby" and they do so in the final catch-all chapter on "Special Problems." Far from a central principle, the epiphany was for a long time a special case.

<sup>34</sup> This claim is explored at greater length below in Chapter 3.

James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, and their continental predecessors.<sup>35</sup> Other writers have received sustained critical attention, but only in that they exhibited proto-modernist, and anti-commercial, tendencies. Dominic Head, for instance, argues “the short story shows itself, through its formal capacities, to be a quintessentially modernist form.”<sup>36</sup> In Adrian Hunter’s view, “In many respects modernism has been, and remains, the short story’s centre of gravity — and not only in academic criticism.”<sup>37</sup> Modernist “innovations,” Hunter continues, “most notably the ‘epiphany,’ have assumed the status of first principles for aspiring writers of short fiction, not to mention the professionals who teach them on creative writing courses throughout the English-speaking world.”<sup>38</sup> Things appear differently from the American side, where the short story is taken to be the national genre, one that goes back to Irving, Hawthorne, Melville, and (especially) Poe. Its development, its theorization, and even its commercial viability are taken to long precede the arrival of fictioneering. Whatever dramatic increase the close of the nineteenth century saw in the production of short stories can simply be attributed to the increased demand brought on by the magazines. The craze for short stories was, on this view, simply an intensification of hunger for a well-defined genre. It thus appears that there are two quite separate traditions of the short story that become intertwined once the innovations of literary

---

<sup>35</sup> Angeliki Spiropoulou suggests that the short story genre is “often considered the modernist form *par excellence* due to its constitutional fragmentariness and elasticity” (Angeliki Spiropoulou, “‘In or about 1922’: Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Modern Fiction,” *1922: Literature, Culture, Politics*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté [Cambridge, 2015]: 76).

<sup>36</sup> Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story* (Cambridge, 1992), p. xi.

<sup>37</sup> Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



modernism were domesticated by academic criticism and writing programs.<sup>39</sup> I want to suggest, however, that the separate views are not only incorrect on their own terms but that their separation itself is misapplied. The modern short story directly emerges out of the “Art of Fiction” debate.

In narrower terms, not only did the poetics of the short story genre crucially depend on the notion that fiction was a “fine art,” but the most influential theory of its form featured directly in the conversation begun by Besant. Brander Matthews, whom we have already seen eavesdropping on the “Art of Fiction” debate, had his own contribution to make to it when he noted that, “with all its extension, the discussion did not include one important branch of the art of fiction: it did not consider at all the minor art of the Short-story.”<sup>40</sup> Following up on this oversight, Matthews added, “it has seemed to the present writer that there is now an excellent

---

<sup>39</sup> Such a separation is maintained even by those critics who resist the modernist-centered narrative of the short story’s development in Britain. Harold Orel argues for instance, that because the “market for [short] stories was established earlier, and the rationalizing of their aesthetics was defined more fully, in the United States than in the United Kingdom,” the two traditions need separate treatment. Noting that “the very few available histories” of British short stories “have not adequately accounted for the reasons why the English short story developed independently of those philosophy of composition, or why, for that matter, so many of the greatest writers in England turn enthusiastically to the writing short stories in the final decades of the century,” Orel argues that such late Victorian “writers of short stories [in Britain] may be best understood in terms of an English context, and of English historical development.” Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge, 1986), p. ix.

<sup>40</sup> Brander Matthews, “The Philosophy of the Short-story,” *Lippincott’s, a Popular Journal of General Literature* 36 (October 1885): 366; hereafter abbreviated “PS.”

opportunity to venture a few remarks, slight and incomplete as they must needs be, on the philosophy of the Short-story.”<sup>41</sup>

Matthews is an important figure in both criticism and fictioneering. A key member of the generation of literary scholars who pushed back against the philological model of research, he championed the short story in an eclectic body of work. Although primarily an academic, serving as a professor of literature, and later of drama, at Columbia, he did make some notable experiments of his own in short fiction. While Matthews’s own literary output was slight, he was friendly with many better-known writers including Besant, having worked alongside him to promote the 1891 copyright agreement between England and the United States. Matthews also put together an early anthology (1907) of short fiction similar to the classroom texts that would come to prominence in the middle of the twentieth century, and that would supplant, to some degree, fictioneering handbooks as the objects of classroom study.<sup>42</sup>

Matthews most important work by far, however, was “The Philosophy of the Short-story” which introduced (or re-introduced) some of the key terms that fictioneering would take up as it turned to the short story. He borrowed much of it from Poe; even the title of directly echoes “The

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, he provided the introduction for Clayton Hamilton’s 1908 fictioneering manual *Materials and Methods of Fiction* (New York, 1908), conferring some legitimacy on a manual that was the especial target of both Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. Forster mentions Hamilton in his *Aspects of the Novel* as part of an attack on criticism by classification: “I include weather [as a genre of novel: the *wetterroman*?] on the authority of the most amazing work on the novel I have met for many years. It came over the Atlantic to me, nor shall I ever forget it. It was a literary manual entitled *Materials and Methods of Fiction*. The writer’s name shall be concealed. He was a pseudo-scholar and a good one” (E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* [London, 1927], p. 26). Given that he consulted her before giving the lectures that make up *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster may well have looked at the work on Woolf’s “recommendation.”

Philosophy of Composition” (1846). Matthews, however, did not simply rehash Poe; he virtually resurrected him within the English-speaking world, elevating him as to nothing short of the “patron saint of the short story” and belatedly validating his vision of short fiction as the supreme modern literary art form, one both lucrative and aesthetically rigorous.<sup>43</sup> Matthew’s essay, with its instant history – almost a short story in its own right – of the form, also made lastingly influential (if inaccurate) claims for the short story as a distinctly American form that had flourished from the start. Arguing against “rash” assertions in American newspapers that “American literature has hitherto been deficient in good Short- stories,” and that “the art of writing Short-stories has not hitherto been cultivated in the United States,” Matthews instead proposes, “almost as soon as America began to have any literature at all it had good Short-stories” (“PS,” p. 371).<sup>44</sup> Drawing a tidy line that connected Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe with present day American writers, he concludes, “for fifty years the American Short-story has had a supremacy which any competent critic could not but acknowledge” (“PS,” p. 371). The progress of the short story was not nearly so uniform as Matthews implies, but his short fiction on the history of short fiction became deeply entrenched nonetheless. Over the years, his account

---

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Levy, *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story: America's Workshop* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 10. Levy claims, “Any history of the development of the short story in America must begin with Edgar Allan Poe’s review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842. This is not because Poe necessarily invented the short story; but rather, because later generations of short story writers, editors, and students invented Poe as the founder of the genre ... His review, in turn, was retrospectively canonized as the birthdate of the short story in America ... He was, and continues to be, both the patron saint and the local bully of the American short story.” (p. 10).

<sup>44</sup> Matthews adds the initial capital and the draw a clear distinction between the legitimate example of the art and the “story which is merely short” (“PS,” p. 367).

became considerably embellished and significantly less nuanced as subsequent critics sought to make large generalizations about national character that Matthews himself was careful to avoid. While he readily conceded that central reason for the short story's eminence in America owed to British magazine's preference for serial fiction and the "disastrous" influence of the three-decker on narrative practice, subsequent critics, often in the interests of establishing a national literature, attributed the supposedly divergent fate of the short story in Britain and America to differences in cultural temperament.<sup>45</sup> Despite the emptiness of such claims, and their subsequent and thorough debunking, the idea that the American short story had developed earlier than and separately from the British one continues to persist so completely that most scholarly studies treat them as entirely distinct.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever head start the American short story had, however, turned out to be fairly inconsequential, for in the forty years that intervenes between Poe's key texts on literary composition and "The Philosophy of the Short-story," few in the English-speaking world paid attention to Poe or his theories.<sup>47</sup> As the Fred Lewis Pattee, with only slight exaggeration, put it,

---

<sup>45</sup> Matthews revised his own views on the differences in national literatures, but only by way of additional comment. The text of his 1901 version remains intact for the most part, glossed only by way of footnote. The 1901 text duplicates the claim in his 1885 article Matthews that the system of the three-decker was "breaking up," adding only in a footnote that, "It is satisfactory to record now that three-volume system has disappeared at last, and finally, in the years that have elapsed since this paragraph was originally penned" (Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-story* [New York, 1901], p. 58).

<sup>46</sup> The effect can work by way of counter-reaction. Andrew Levy's otherwise excellent *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story* is intent on exposing the nationalist ideology at work in the American short story tradition that it sees almost nothing else at work in the genre, thus limiting the scope of Levy's often subtle readings.

<sup>47</sup> Famously, and as Matthews was aware, Poe had become influential in France owing to the efforts of Baudelaire, but his effect there proved more decisive in poetry. By way of Carl Grabo's fictioneering manual on *The Art of the*

The decade of the 'fifties that should have built consciously and artistically after Poe, and that should have deepened and broadened all its foundations after Hawthorne, stands in our literary history as the period when, with a few exceptions, the short story ceased to be distinctive, and for time, indeed, it seemed about to disappear as a reputable literary form.<sup>48</sup>

Concerning Poe's critical writings, Pattee commented,

Poe's influence had been almost nothing. There is no evidence in all the critical writings of the mid century or in any of the literary correspondence of the time that a single reader in 1842 had seen his review of Hawthorne or that anyone could profit at all from the brilliant technique of his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. For generation after his death his tales were mentioned only as terror-compelling things, strange exotics standing gruesomely alone and almost to be regretted among the conventional creations of American literature.<sup>49</sup>

Pattee's claims are born out at the economic as well as at the aesthetic level. As Dean Baldwin demonstrates, "it is chiefly in retrospect that the American short story appears healthy." The genre "rose and fell fitfully with the economics of publishing," emerging in "the 1830s when the flood of imports drowned the American novel . . . , but it subsided when the importers and reprinters foundered."<sup>50</sup> Only in the 1880s were the economics of publishing, the availability of

---

*Short Story*, Poe would also exert an influence on the Portuguese-language short story, though not until the twentieth century.

<sup>48</sup> Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey* (New York, 1923), p.145.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>50</sup> Dean Baldwin, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story, 1880-1950* (London, 2013), p. 8.

an eager public, and the interests of writers suitably aligned for experiments in fiction to flourish, and such a confluence obtained in both Britain and America.

Ironically, in his brief history of the form Matthews had thus turned a few scattered peaks into an immense continuous plateau, and in so doing largely erased himself from literary history. Nonetheless, Matthews was instrumental in establishing the short story as genre unto itself and is the crucial hinge between British and American traditions. Something of a story about stories, “The Philosophy of the Short-story” was a tale often repeated. As is the case with both Besant and James, who would both revise and republish their respective “Art of Fiction” pieces, Matthews revisited his essay several times over. He first published a brief – and anonymous – sketch in the *Saturday Review* (London) in 1884, before bringing out an expanded edition in 1885 in *Lippincott’s*. He then included it in an essay collection from 1888 before finally publishing it as a stand-alone volume featuring a new preface and an appendix that included excerpts from Poe’s critical writings in 1901. Its most lasting influence was to reintroduce Poe’s idea of the “single-effect” to sharply differentiate the short story from the novel:

The Short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the Novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the Short-story has, what the Novel cannot have, the effect of “totality,” as Poe called it, the unity of impression. The Short-story is not only not a chapter out of a Novel, or an incident or an episode extracted from a longer tale, but at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger or if it were incorporated into a more elaborate work. The difference in spirit and in form between the Lyric and the Epic is scarcely greater than the difference between the Short-story and the Novel. (“PS,” p. 366)

In so obviously and obsequiously reiterating Poe's commandment about the central feature of a "tale" (Poe notably never employs the term "short story"), Matthews appears little more than inveterate taxonomizer, sorting literature into one or another pigeonhole. And often enough he does give into the classificatory impulse, going so far as to invoke Ferdinand Brunetière, who pioneered the species model approach in his *Evolution of Genres in Literary History* (1891), in the revised version:

the Short-story – in spite of the fact that in our language it has no name of its own – is one of the few sharply defined literary forms. It is a genre, as M. Brunetière calls it, a species, as a naturalist might call it, as individual as the Lyric itself and as various. It is as distinct an entity as the Epic, as Tragedy, as Comedy.<sup>51</sup>

Because he takes such an approach, his influence on the short story form, when it is granted at all, is taken to be a definitional one.

The definitional understanding of Matthews's influence on the short story is well-summarized by Dean Baldwin when he argues that

Of all the demands and restrictions placed on short story writers, none was more pervasive than the requirement for plot. It represents the triumph of Brander Matthews's dictum that 'The Short-story is nothing if there is no story to tell; - one might almost say that a Short-story is nothing at all if it has no plot...' Matthews was less dogmatic than this excerpt suggests but his heirs in magazine editorial departments were not. In them, the need for form fossilized into the requirements for plot.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-story*, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup>Dean Baldwin, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story, 1880-1950*, pp. 91-2.

Winnie Chan offers a similar view when she suggests that middle-market British magazines of the 1890s such as *The Strand* “evolved and enforce a unique poetics for the short story” that emphasized “unity of effect,” though Chan here characteristically looks through Matthews’s mediating presence and attributes the influence entirely to Poe.<sup>53</sup> In Baldwin and Chan’s model, theory not merely precedes practice but entirely determines it by creating demands and restrictions for writers and then “enforcing” them. The actual work of writing stands merely as a response to market demands and restrictions, figuring as nothing other than rational calculation on the writer’s part; composing a story becomes a version of rational choice where the writer merely selects the appropriate market outlet for her wares.

From his own perspective, however, Matthews saw the genre and its demand for unity of effect in almost opposite terms. For him, the “Short-story” offered the opportunity to make writing a *more* self-conscious endeavor. It was the ideal genre for the aspirant who was learning how to write fiction because “its brevity makes its composition simpler for the ’prentice hand” (“PS,” p. 371). “Though the Short-stories of the beginner may not be good,” Matthews continues, “yet in the writing of Short-stories he shall learn how to tell a story, he shall discover by experience the elements of the art of fiction more readily and, above all, more quickly than if he had begun on a long and exhausting novel” (“PS,” p. 371). Matthews’s concern with the process of writing is perhaps even more evident in the way he applies Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition” to fiction. The few scholars who take Matthews at all seriously make virtually no mention of the fact that Poe’s essay is an account of writing poetry, one that attempts to render

---

<sup>53</sup> Winnie Chan, *The Economy of the Short Story*, p. 3.



the process as a highly-ordered one subject to conscious intervention.<sup>54</sup> “The Philosophy of Composition” was a direct rebuke, after all, of “writers – poets in especial – [who] prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy.” The central thrust of the essays is to “detail, step by step, the processes by which” Poe’s “The Raven” “”attained its ultimate point of completion” and to “render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referrible [sic] either to accident or to intuition.”<sup>55</sup> It is notable in itself simply that Matthews brings prose fiction under the same kind of attention given to poetry, but it is even more crucial that he suggested the short story as the point to which it could be applied. In drawing the distinction between the novel and the short story, Matthews was outlining different modes of composition; if fiction was indeed an art as Besant and James had insisted, Matthews suggests that their contention could best be realized in the short form because it requires the greatest technical exactness. The technical emphasis also drives the distinction between journalism and the short story, as Matthews was at equal pains to distinguish the true story from the “sketches” so often found in “English monthly magazines and in the Sunday editions of American newspapers” (“PS,” p. 368). As opposed to the Short-story, which “is a high and difficult department of fiction,” the “story which is short can be written by anybody who can write at all; and it may be good, bad, or indifferent, but at its best it is wholly unlike the Short story” (“PS,” p. 367). The distinction between literary art and mere narrative journalism here clearly rests not so much on

---

<sup>54</sup> Some critics have suggested that Poe’s account of how he composed “The Raven” may well have been meant as at least a partial satire. Regardless of how seriously Poe himself intended it, Matthews took “The Philosophy of Composition” at its word as did subsequent “generations of short story practitioners” (Andrew Levy, *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story*, p. 11).

<sup>55</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition” *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by G.R. Thompson (New York, 2004): 676-7; hereafter abbreviated “PC.”

inherent generic qualities as on the capacities of the writer, ones best developed by the concentrated work of composing short stories.

The gains yielded by such vigorous exercise of the prose form could later be applied to the novel, making the longer from more artistic still. “Indeed,” Matthews announces, “the present excellence of the American novel is due in great measure to the Short story; for nearly every one of the American novelists whose works are now read by the whole English-speaking race began as a writer of Short stories.” Matthews thus thought of the short story as both an end in itself and as a form of practice, going so far as to even consider them as physical training: “The physical strain of writing a full-sized novel is far greater than the reader can well imagine. To this strain the beginner in fiction may gradually accustom himself by the composition of Short-stories” (“PS,” p. 371). The idea that the short story is a natural starting place for the aspirant write may well seem obvious today in part because it has become the default pedagogy of creative writing programs, but Matthews’s assertion of the fact represents a significant rethinking of the short story that both depends on the idea that fiction is an art and helps further realize that idea by specifying its ideal venue of training.

In the end, with “The Philosophy of the Short-story” Matthews may well have influenced editors and helped establish a demand for a certain kind of product, but in reviving Poe and in articulating the short story as the ideal form of artistic training, he more importantly broadened the discussion of artistic process. In the wake of this particular contribution to the “Art of Fiction,” the short story would go on to become, in Henry James’s phrase, “an object of such almost extravagant dissertation” in the era’s periodical culture.<sup>56</sup> Paying close attention to the particular form that this “dissertation” takes permits us to move beyond a model of supply and

---

<sup>56</sup> Henry James, “The Story-Teller at Large,” *Fortnightly Review* 69 (April 1898), p. 652.

demand, where the magazines simply demand a particular product and writers supply it in bulk just as if it were a raw material to be mined and hauled off to market. More than anything, the discussion of the short story form reveals that information alone is not sufficient. One cannot simply advertise that a “single effect” is wanted; as a “high and difficult department” of art, the writing of short stories had to be learned through a rigorous apprenticeship. Knowing the definitional characteristics of a genre is not sufficient to produce a new example of it. Propositional knowledge, however complete, is never sufficient. But neither is skill entirely independent of such knowledge. A writer has to “have something to say” as Matthews makes clear.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps that something can be fully said only through the medium of fiction, but there turned out – in large part because of the “rise of the short story” – to be an immense amount to say about *how* it could best be said.

If the short story had not at first been considered in the “Art of Fiction” debate, it made up for the neglect by occupying a leading role in any discussions of the art in the subsequent decades. In the years after Matthews had published “The Philosophy of the Short-story,” the genre was approached from every possible angle. From its inception, William Hills’s *The Writer* frequently featured articles on the topic. 1888 alone featured Emily Wheeler’s “The Deceitful Short Story,” William Perry Brown’s “My Struggle with the Short Story,” Virginia G. Ellard’s “How to Write a Story” and A.M. Gannett’s similarly titled “How to Write Short Stories,” in addition to a wealth of quick tips and helpful hints.<sup>58</sup> The first-named essay notably argued for

---

<sup>57</sup> “An idea logically developed by one possessing the sense of form and the gift of style is what we look for in the Short-story .... the Short story, far more than the Novel even, demands a subject. The Short-story is nothing if there is no story to tell” (“PS,” p. 368).

<sup>58</sup> In Brown’s estimation: “the getting up of a good story seems to me, of all things, a veritable piece of intellectual tailoring, and the work when complete should have the effect of a trim concise perfectly fitting garment, made of the

the central importance of revision while the second highlights the difficulty of the form while conceding that “a ray of hope to sustain the young writer in his efforts” is that “in no other field of literature is success so directly a result of cultivation and determined zeal; for there is a literary mechanism about the work, which cannot be disregarded, and the secret of which can be acquired only by patient and persistent study.”<sup>59</sup> Gannett’s piece, by contrast, tells a story of its own by following the progress of an anonymous “lady who is rapidly winning a name as a writer of capital short stories” by revealing her hard-won secrets of success.<sup>60</sup> Similar columns with less anonymous writers giving their trade secrets away would become a regular feature of *The Writer*. The most emblematic of such stories might come from Horatio Alger, who explained the principles of his success in “Writing Stories for Boys,” a multi-part sequence of articles in 1896.

Other periodicals directed toward literary workers were similarly larded with advice articles. The March 1897 American edition of *The Bookman*, for instance, gave Jane Barlow, Robert Barr, Harold Frederic, and Arthur Morrison each a chance to weigh in on “How to Write a Short Story.” Among the contributions to periodicals of a broader audience, essays by Frederick Wedmore (1898; *Nineteenth Century*), Bret Harte (*Cornhill*, 1899), and Henry Harland (*Academy*, 1897) gained enough notoriety to feature in discussions of the short story for years to come, while *Lippincott’s* gave Frederick M. Bird the chance to take the inverse tack in his

---

best materials and in the best way of which the writer is capable.” Brown observes of his own work: “Having corrected the manuscript until it is often unintelligible to any one except myself, I copy it, punctuate, give it a final reading, with more corrections, so that by the time it is ready to seek its fortune I am as heartily sick of it as any editor could possibly be.” William Perry Brown, “My Struggle with the Short Story,” *The Writer* 2, no. 4 (October 1888): 249.

<sup>59</sup> Virginia G. Ellard, “How to Write a Story,” p. 239.

<sup>60</sup> A.M. Gannett, “How to Write Short Stories,” p. 86.

“Magazine Fiction and How Not to Write It,” (1894). Poe, suddenly resurrected, featured in many discussions, and copies of his Hawthorne essay and his “The Philosophy of Composition” circulated both in extract and full reprint.<sup>61</sup> When *The Critic* selected the “Twelve Best American Short Stories” of all time in 1897, both “The Gold Bug” and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” made the list. Meanwhile, short story contests for the living sprung up across Britain and America, featuring at every level, from the most provincial newspapers to the widest circulation weeklies. Magazines like *The Writer* and *The Author* were careful to bring the biggest prize contests to the attention of their readers, just as they also noted key literary articles that appeared elsewhere in the press. Then, of course there were the stories themselves, a seemingly fair proportion of which were fictions about writing fictions. Henry James’s are the most well known now, but not the best known then, likely in part because of his struggles with “compression,” that central virtue of the short story.<sup>62</sup> Besant seemed to offer a new collection of stories every year, several of which featured writer protagonists. Though not a short story, his longer Künstlerroman, *All in a Garden Fair* (1883), which was aptly dubbed an optimist’s *New Grub Street*, gained Rudyard Kipling’s everlasting gratitude for pulling him out of a period of

---

<sup>61</sup> Matthews included several key passages in his 1901 edition of *The Philosophy of the Short-story*, while numerous fictioneering handbooks, which will be the subject of the next chapter, often include Poe both as a reference and appendix. *How to Write a Novel* (anonymous, 1901) and *The Art of the Short Story* (Carl Grabo; 1913), for instance, both reprint “The Philosophy of Composition” in its entirety, while many other handbooks quote him at such length that they might as well have done the same.

<sup>62</sup> On Henry James’s struggles with brevity see Philip Horne, “Henry James and the Economy of the Short Story,” *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*. James’s fictions about fiction writers are collected in F.O. Matthiessen’s *Henry James: Tales of Writers and Artists*.

profound depression in 1886.<sup>63</sup> Among the bumper crop of self-reflexive *fin-de-siècle* stories, Carolyn Wells's satiric "The Vivisectionist" (*Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*; 1896) and Vernon Lee's "Lady Tal" (1892) bear particular mention as both women offered their own contributions to the art of fiction discussion.<sup>64</sup> Lee's stately "On Literary Construction" appeared in *The Contemporary Review* in 1895, while Wells would write what was the first full-length how-to book on mystery and detective stories in 1913 as part of J. Berg Esenwein's "How-to Write" line of handbooks. In some ways, *Technique of the Mystery Story* might well be considered the first work of sustained criticism in the genre, albeit from a fictioneer's perspective.

The intertwining of the short story and discourse about the short story – most notably about how to produce it – complicates the usual picture where its form, at least in its pre-modernist phase, is seen chiefly in terms of its commodification. To argue that the "single effect" form of short stories "facilitated the short story's easy consumption" ignores the very difficult efforts of composition that lie behind the commodity itself.<sup>65</sup> In fact, the ease of consumption was something that the discourse of fictioneering significantly troubled. The interested reader, of which there were a great many, did not simply consume the story. Rather she read it, clipped it,

---

<sup>63</sup> See William B. Dillingham's *Rudyard Kipling: Hell and Heroism*, p. 52 for a brief account of how Besant's novel was Kipling's "salvation."

<sup>64</sup> Wells's story was noticed in April 1896 "News and Notes" column of *The Writer*: "'The Vivisectionist,' by Carolyn Wells, in *Lippincott's* for April, describes the conduct of a novelist whom no scruples deter in the search for literary material. The story is a very amusing one." And adjacent notice announced, "The publishers of *McClure's Magazine* will offer \$20,000 for short stories during the coming year. Manuscripts should run from 2,000 to 6,000 words and liberal payment will be made for successful tales. The shorter the story, the more chance of success." "New and Notes," *The Writer* 10, no. 4 (1896), pp. 59-60.

<sup>65</sup> Winnie Chan, *The Economy of the Short Story*, p. xi.

filed it away, studied it, dissected it, imitated it, and then attempted to exceed it. The anonymous lady writer of “capital stories” profiled by A.M Gannett proceeded thusly:

She selected those stories in *The* -- which are best written, using them for her models. I do not mean that she copied or imitated. Far from it; but she studied them, learning the secret of their worth, just as an artist studies a fine picture or a bit of landscape, not for reproduction, but to get the key for producing beauty himself.

These sample stories she kept before her, checking them again and again to see whether she was “approaching her models.”<sup>66</sup> Used in such a way, the short story, such an absolutely central feature of the late nineteenth century periodical press, offers a quite different form of interaction than that of the “shocked” passive consumer.

Moving the focus of attention from finished products (stories) to the acts of production that they both required and inspired, thus permits a reading that goes against the grain of scholarly work on late-Victorian and early twentieth-century periodicals focused on how the magazine marketplace commoditized fiction and dictated the poetics of the short by way of economic imperatives. Without denying such imperatives altogether, we can nonetheless remember that periodicals and newspapers from the mid-1880s onward proved to be not only spectacular economic engines that provided a forum for fiction unprecedented in both circulation and remuneration, but they also served as a site of literary instruction and apprenticeship. The periodical press was a highly networked, self-organizing field that promised news both fictional and factual, and also provided instruction on how to make news anew by, for instance, ripping a story from headlines, running it through the lens of personal experience, shaping it according to that month’s column on “single-effect stories,” and submitting it to next month’s contest. Advice

---

<sup>66</sup> A.M. Gannett, “How to Write Short Stories,” p. 86.

on writing fiction circulated by both the same mode – writing – and the same avenues of publication –the periodical press – as their subject, making for a strange classroom indeed. To catch the texture of learning fiction by subscription more fully, I turn in the next section to the exemplary single case study of *Atalanta*, one of the many “classrooms” on offer in the magazines.

### III.

*Atalanta* debuted in 1887 under the editorship of W.T. Meade as a six-penny monthly literary magazine for girls and young women, aimed at rivaling the best content of other leading literary monthlies.<sup>67</sup> Meade, who was interestingly the leading author of girl’s school stories, used her credentials and connections as a writer to compile an impressive list of contributors including Christina Rossetti, Charlotte Yonge, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Margaret Oliphant, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, and even Walter Besant. Meade did not simply solicit established names, but rather used the venture as, in Janis Dawson’s words, “a unique chance to advance women’s interests in the male-dominated literary marketplace” by actively seeking the talents of young women writers and publishing them alongside established, well-

---

<sup>67</sup> In *The New Girls’ Culture in England*, Sally Mitchell more specifically observes that “*Atalanta*’s contents and advertising, as well as the rules for its contents and contributors’ pages, suggests that the readers Meade hoped to reach were daughters of the gentry and upper middle class between about fourteen and twenty-five.... In addition, *Atalanta* was carried by public libraries and was therefore available to working class and lower-middle-class girls” (p. 11). Janis Dawson suggests a similar demographic but suggests Meade had ambitions to put together a magazine for girls that would appeal to any literary individual. See Janis Dawson, “Not for girls alone, but for anyone who can relish really good literature”: L. T. Meade, *Atalanta*, and the Family Literary Magazine” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 475-498.



respected authors.<sup>68</sup> Meade, however, did not simply seek to gather talent she sought to cultivate it amongst her own readership.

Such an effort is most clearly apparent in the early contributions from Besant, who offered a two-part essay “On the Writing of Novels.” While specifically addressing the target audience, Besant spends most of his time in the first part rehearsing points he had already covered elsewhere. He does, however, notably recommend the writing of short stories as a form of practice and also discourses on the capital need to find a space of one’s own to write in.<sup>69</sup> Having become progressively more interested in issues of literary property, Besant concludes the first part by forcefully warning girls off paying to have their own novels published. The second part more interestingly attempts to stage the thought process of a writer who has mastered the basics outlined in the first part. While conceding that the “practised artist” will work more instinctively, Besant stages the invention and composition of a novel from start to finish. While the focus is, as the article’s title indicates, on the novel, Besant insists that his student work on “what is called a one-volume story” so that the entire process can be approached consciously, thus more effectively serving as a teaching tool.<sup>70</sup> The one-volume novel, he continues, is “a story which may be told in about 60,000 words, and may be divided into about fifteen or twenty chapters — the latter for choice, because the division into short rather than long chapters is a sovereign specific for the common tendency to sprawl, and instructs, moreover, in the arrangement of the incidents” (“ON,” p. 370). Having established the frame, Besant leads his students through the deliberate decisions that will need to be made at every stage in the outlining

---

<sup>68</sup> Janis Dawson, “‘Not for girls alone, but for anyone who can relish really good literature’: L. T. Meade, *Atalanta*, and the Family Literary Magazine,” p. 478.

<sup>69</sup> On this point in relation to Virginia Woolf, see Chapter 3 below.

<sup>70</sup> Walter Besant, “On the Writing of Novels: Part Two,” *Atalanta* I (1887-8); hereafter abbreviated, “ON.”

and composition, from choosing a setting, to doing research, to creating characters, to writing with style. In following the process through, Besant adds flesh to the more general principles he had previously outlined. Perhaps from the influence of short story technique, Besant's chief stylistic recommendations emphasize compression and selection:

Reserve explanations. As regards these, indeed, remember that though it may be necessary for you yourself to know all about your heroine- — the history of her early childhood, her favourite puddings, and even her relations with the dentist — your readers want to know little more than that she lived and moved in certain circles.... Explanations there must be, but they may often be conveyed bit by bit, with a little dialogue, with a line here and a paragraph there, so as to inform the reader of anything necessary. As to dialogue, remember that your characters should reveal themselves in dialogue as much as in action. They must speak as they think, each after his own manner. It is true that in real life most people seem to speak with the same forms and fashions and formula [but] you must ... in dialogue ... exaggerate: your talk must be crisp, it must never drag, and above all it must not be too long. (“ON,” p. 374)

In the end, Besant's article very much resembles Poe's approach in “The Philosophy of Composition,” where he offers “a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought” that go into constructing an artwork. While Poe chose to do so with his own “The Raven,” Besant, by contrast, takes James Payn's *The Confidential Agent* for his example, aiming to supply his students with a technique that they can employ on their own:

the beginner will do well to study the slower and more certain methods above indicated. Let her take other novels, and subject them to a similar analysis, first finding the central idea, and then considering how the story has been evolved, filled with characters,

provided with incidents, treated dramatically, and, above all, made interesting and exciting. (“ON,” p. 373).

Besant’s method was not the only one on offer at *Atalanta*, which aimed to supply its readers with instruction in literary method in even more explicit ways.

From the first issue, the magazine featured a “Reading and Scholarship Union” in which subscribers under the age of twenty-five could compete for a variety of scholarships and prizes.<sup>71</sup> The simplest contest revolved around “Search Passages from Literature,” essentially an ancestor of passage identification exam questions, where the reading not only had to identify the source of the excerpt but also both the speaker of the lines and the context in which they occurred. Passages ranged across classic and contemporary literature; the first issue, for instance, featured excerpts from Chaucer and Milton but also from Austin Dobson. More involved were the “Reply Papers.” Here readers wrote short, follow-up essays to that month’s critical piece. For the first issue, readers were to reply to Andrew Lang’s piece on Sir Walter Scott, read *Guy Mannering* as a follow-up, and then respond by answering either of the two following questions:

I. What seems to you to have been Scott's Ideal of a Prose Romance?

II. Discuss the Plot of *Guy Mannering*.

Instructions further stipulated, “Readers are free to select for answer either of the above questions, or to answer them both. But their Papers must not exceed in any case 500 words. Quality, not quantity, will be the test of excellence.”<sup>72</sup>

The most interesting of *Atalanta*’s competitions, however, appeared as part of the “School of Fiction.” Essentially an 1892 expansion of the Reading Union, the School offered a

---

<sup>71</sup> To insure that only subscribers competed, a coupon clipped from the magazine had to be included with each entry.

<sup>72</sup> “Scholarship Competition Questions,” *Atalanta* I (1887-8), p. 54.

monthly lesson on a select aspect of fiction, accompanied by competitive creative exercises. The first installment of the school was a lesson on “Style in Fiction” by W.E. Norris. Norris notes that “The art of writing fiction has of late years been made the subject of innumerable articles by persons most, if not quite all, of whom are doubtless competent and well-informed,” but he departs from what he sees as the settled dogma on the topic when he urges “the main thing” is not “to have a story to tell” but rather that the writer “should be able to tell it.”<sup>73</sup> Norris repeatedly emphasizes the need for practice in the art of style arguing against the idea that it is an inherent possession of every person:

the beginner who essays, without preparation or apprenticeship, to tell his story in his own way will very soon discover that that is precisely what he cannot do. The words, some how, will not come; or, if they do, they come in a manner palpably and grotesquely inadequate; the sentences are clumsy, tautological, badly rounded, and jar upon the ear; the effect produced is very far from being the effect contemplated. The tyro, in short, finds out to his sorrow that writing is not in the least the same thing as talking, and that even so modest an achievement as the production of a novel is, after all, an art, the inexorable requirements of which do not greatly differ from those claimed by other arts. And, indeed, why should they? Nobody would ever dream that they did, were it not that the literary art has no schools, colleges, paid professors, no system of salutary checks to intervene between the student and his public.<sup>74</sup>

Norris’s central point is that “novels do not give pleasure or meet with acceptance simply and solely by virtue of their subject-matter” but rather from the form in which they are expressed and

---

<sup>73</sup> W.E. Norris, “Style in Fiction,” *Atalanta* VI (1892-3), p. 59.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

which must be mastered in the same manner as the other arts. “The knack of manipulating language has to be mastered,” he continues “just as that of swimming, riding, shooting, and playing cricket has to be mastered, and that preliminary failures are more or less a matter of course.”<sup>75</sup> The novelty of Norris’s feature, however, is that the sorts of exercises needed to begin securing a sense of style immediately follow. The “Studies in Style” prize competition attached to the article offered three choices for a 500-word reply paper:

- A. A Dialogue between two well-known characters. (After the model of Landor’s *Imaginary Conversations*.)
- B. An Account of any Historical Incident — in the style of Macaulay.
- C. Description of an Imaginary Episode ; the Heroine has lost her way in a lonely tract of country, and night is approaching. Describe the situation.<sup>76</sup>

The winner entries paid a guinea for first and a half-guinea for second, while year-end scholarships of £20 and £10 were offered for the finest overall papers.

The School of Fiction ran in this form through the end of *Atalanta*’s sixth volume, In the course of the year, lessons had covered “The Short Story,” “The Historical Novel,” “On the Art of Writing Fiction for Children,” “The Novel of Manners,” and more, each with its accompanying reading recommendations and composition exercises. The novel of manners “lecture,” for instance, featured the suggestion “to read any of the following books: – Jane Austen’s novels, Miss Edgeworth’s *Tales of Fashionable Life*, Miss Ferrier’s *Marriage*, Miss Burney’s *Evelina* and *Cecilia*.”<sup>77</sup> Meade herself rounded off the course by discussing fiction

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>76</sup> “Studies in Style,” *Atalanta* VI (1892-3), p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> “Studies in Composition,” *Atalanta* VI (1892-3), p. 135.

“From the Editor’s Standpoint,” touching on the “very practical point indeed” of “how best the fiction-writer, when he has produced his work, can dispose of it.”<sup>78</sup> If fiction was an art, it was also a business, and there was a practical method to both. Meade offered a number of useful pointers from her behind-the-scenes perspective on how to place a work of fiction, claiming “there is no better opening for a young writer than to become a contributor to a good magazine.”<sup>79</sup> She forbade her charges from resorting “to a sort of false humility” when proposing a submission and offered the forceful commandment not to “send an article to a magazine until you have first looked through at least one of its numbers.”<sup>80</sup> She also recommended to “fiction-writers who are anxious to obtain magazine work” that they “turn their attention to the short complete story, and to avoid for many a day all attempts at Serial fiction.”<sup>81</sup> In lieu of the usual, follow-up exercises, the scholarship competition for the month was a sort of final exam, calling for a complete “ORIGINAL STORY” of less than 4,000 words with the winner to be published in the magazine and paid at the usual rate.<sup>82</sup>

A suspicious reading of fictioneering’s elaboration through the periodical market is certainly possible, exposing the various exercises, instructions, and advice as so many subtle ways of coaxing an individual into deeper patterns of commodification. It would make for somewhat nervous going, considering how closely the pedagogical practices of literary studies resemble those outlined above, not to mention that fictioneering got there sooner and offered its brand of education more cheaply and more widely. A more charitable reading might find in

---

<sup>78</sup> W.T. Meade, “From the Editor’s Standpoint,” *Atalanta* VI (1892-3), p. 839.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 839.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 840.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 841.

<sup>82</sup> “Scholarship Competition,” *Atalanta* VI (1892-3), p. 842.

fictioneering's undeniable – but also crucially undenied – immersion in commerce the opportunity to find an imagination not paralyzed by onslaught of the news media, but stimulated by it. This explicitly acknowledged connection between commerce and art offers a rare window of observation. Paul Delaney has, on this point, argued that “studies of authorship as a profession, and of the literary marketplace in general, have not been well integrated with what is inside the covers of books that are bought and sold – except for the inadequate idea that books simply reflect class interests.”<sup>83</sup> Having made her own study of authorship, the fictioneer knowingly brings these two competing impulses together in her own practice. The record of that practice, however, is not best accessed by reading it back out of the finished works, but rather by catching her at work.

#### IV.

The sudden emergence of literary self-help discourse in the periodical media of the late nineteenth century represents an immense populist awakening in the literary field. Fictioneering loomed larger in the public imagination than MFA programs ever have, and proved vastly more accessible. Taking advantage of the fact that it emerged at what Robert Colby nicely characterizes as a particularly “yeasty period” of literary history – one that “saw the rationalizing of copyright, the establishment of the royalty system, the entrenchment of the literary agent, the demise of the three-decker, the standardization of book prices, the expansion of outlets for the writers' wares, and technological advances that extended the meaning of authorship” –

---

<sup>83</sup> Paul Delaney, *Literature, Money, and the Market from Trollope to Amis*, p. 13.

fictioneering positioned itself as an art form particularly representative of its own day.<sup>84</sup> In its odd hybrid status as a “Fine Art” that was nonetheless articulated from the side of the maker rather than from the side of the spectator, fiction offered a uniquely participatory form of aesthetic education, and fictioneering’s promulgation of its principles and practices amounts to what may well be the broadest single expansion of such an education. Not least because of its low cost of entry and its grounding in the ordinary experiences of life, fictioneering appealed particularly to those long excluded from the more rarified forms of artistic experience. Armed with pen, paper, and a stack of magazines and newspapers, women, working class writers, and the emerging body of urban office workers who viewed their employment as a job rather than a career could all aspire to the condition of “artist,” honing their craft on the weekends, in the evenings, or even while riding to and from work.

If this was the moment that fiction was elevated into an art, however, it was also at this moment that it was, to adapt a phrase of Edward Gibbon, degraded into a trade. All the changes that permitted a new approach to art to so suddenly emerge also placed that approach more directly in touch with commerce. Never before had literature more vulgarly and visibly consorted with business than in the final fifteen years of the nineteenth century: cash prizes lured entrants into short story contests, print advertisements might interrupt the progress of a serial story (often to advertise another forthcoming serial), and lavishly illustrated “At-Home” author interviews tellingly lingered over the material fruits of the literary laborer’s life. The agitated coupling of art and commerce created a circle at once virtuous and vicious, making authorship available and attractive on an unprecedented scale at the same time that the connections between art and trade

---

<sup>84</sup> Robert Colby, “Harnessing Pegasus: Walter Besant, *The Author* and the Profession of Authorship,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* XXIII, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 111-119.



became ever more subtle and far-reaching. Nowhere was such coupling more evident than in the new periodical market.

From Benjamin's perspective, this periodical culture instantiates a "fully developed capitalism" with "the press as one of its most important instruments" and brings about an abrupt change in "communication." This "new form of communication is information" and it "confronts storytelling as no less of a stranger than did the novel, but in a more menacing way; furthermore it brings about a crisis in the novel. ("ST," p. 147). The magazine and newspaper thus figure in oppositional terms to both the novel and the story, forcing the former into the throes of modernism and compelling the latter to vanish altogether. As Benjamin puts it, "If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has played in decisive role in this state of affairs" because information is transparent, instantly understandable, and immediately plausible. Though it might take up the most stimulating events, information forces the reader into an entirely passive role by its very form of presentation:

Every morning brings us news from across the globe, yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because nowadays no event comes to us without already being shot through with explanations. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. ("ST," pp. 147-8)

If a proper story could convey living experience so effectively precisely because it kept itself "free from explanation" and did not force its "psychological connections" on the reader, modernity explained itself so fully and so endlessly that it could not actually be experienced. Whereas the person listening to a story was left "to interpret things the way he understands them," the consumer of information was insulated even from her own experiences by the self-evident nature of the news medium.

While Benjamin remained deeply equivocal about the novel's ability to convey experience – citing Proust's *Recherche* as an example of the “efforts it took to restore the figure of the storyteller to the present generation” – the general terms of opposition have been taken up with the modernist art novel figuring as a radical attempt to retrieve the ability to “convey” experience under the conditions of modernity.<sup>85</sup> David Rando's *Modernist Fiction and the News*, for instance, expands Benjamin's hint that information “brought about a crisis in the novel” into a full-length study that cast the modernist novel as the inheritor of the story. For Rando,

The novel had long enjoyed the privilege of representing life as a whole, of both entertaining and informing its readers with a comprehensive vision of reality that was free to seize any dimension of human experience as its object. This was precisely the representational territory that the news quickly colonized and transformed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>86</sup>

Rando consequently reads modernist novelists as mounting a counter-attack to would-be “colonizer,” seeing their formal innovations chiefly as a response to the “challenge” that the news media made “to the novel's privilege of narrating a broad swath of reality.”<sup>87</sup>

Much other recent scholarship sees the opposition between commercial periodical culture and the novel as only an apparent opposition, turning against the notion of the divide Rando wants to preserve. One of the more influential modes of reconciliation resorts to a theoretical bridge that makes all art into a kind of work and adopts, or rather extends, the economically inflected material analysis that has generally governed approaches to mercantile side of literary

---

<sup>85</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” p. 159.

<sup>86</sup> David Rando, *Modernist Fiction and the News*, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

activity. Scholars charting the emergence of the mass market for fiction at the end of the nineteenth century, in which fictioneering features so prominently, have long resorted to the explanatory models borrowed from economics and the work of Pierre Bourdieu has stimulated a reawakening of such approaches. Assuming “certain basic continuities between economic behavior” and the behavior of artists and other “players on the fields of culture,” scholars have followed Bourdieu in extending economic calculation well beyond the monetary realm.<sup>88</sup> Such calculation comes to include “*all* the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as *rare* and worthy of being sought after in a particular formation.”<sup>89</sup> The short story has provided a particularly appealing place to examine the literary field from this perspective because the genre has long been seen as both the modernist genre *par excellence* and the most commodified of all literary genres. As *the* magazine staple, the short story seems to bear witness to the stratification of the market that Bourdieu proposes because different kinds of short stories seem to nest at very different levels of the literary field, yet, despite the apparently radical differences between them, all seem to play by the “rules of art.”

In one such study of the late nineteenth century periodical market, Winnie Chan argues in *The Economy of the Short Story* that the market itself “developed the modern short story genre” because it “compelled writers to play by its rules,” which, however mutable they may appear to be, were nonetheless “governed by multiplying communities of taste.”<sup>90</sup> The periodicals in the market work as both agents that “construct” such communities and as “sensitive seismographs of taste” that register the precise demands of the various readerships, thus creating the very effects

---

<sup>88</sup> James English, *The Economy of Prestige* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 178.

<sup>90</sup> Winnie Chan, *The Economy of the Short Story in British Periodicals of the 1890s* (New York, 2007), pp. xxiii, 4.

that they so sensitively gauge. Whether such an argument simply illustrates its own assumed theoretical apparatus is less the point than the way in which such an approach entirely empties the work of writing – and more importantly of learning to write – of its specificity and installs instead a model of perfectly rational, but essentially unconscious, rule following in its place. Learning to write means simply acclimating oneself to the demands of one or the other of the periodicals so as to maximize one’s utility. In the case of mass-market writers, they simply acquire a “market understanding of literature of literary production.”<sup>91</sup>

The most profitable application of the Bourdieu’s thought – or at least select aspects of it – has been to the major artists who, until fairly recently, had been thought to transcend the literary market. With the advent of a more capacious cultural economics, it has become legitimate to inquire into motivations of iconic artists from a broadly economic perspective as well. With such a shift these artists have had their genius recast as the slick conversion of artistic labor into material wealth and social prestige. The stratification of the field of cultural production means that they are competing for more than simple economic capital, but the underlying principles prove the same however different they may appear at the surface. As Sean Latham suggests, “the presumed isolation” of high-culture artists “from the marketplace” became their most “saleable commodity.”<sup>92</sup> The brilliant marketer has replaced the godlike author for a number of reasons, not least of which is the economy of explanation offered. The market

---

<sup>91</sup> The phrase is Patrick Collier’s, used to characterize the *Illustrated London News*, a periodical that traded in “literary celebrity and the notion of fiction writing as ‘a job like any other,’ which can be mastered through training and experience.” Patrick Collier, “‘Literary prestige is the eminence of nobodies’: Henry James, Literary Work, and Celebrity in the *Illustrated London News*,” *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 2, No. 1 (2011): p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Sean Latham, *Am I a Snob?* (Ithaca, 2003), p. 4.

demands in its several ways, and wily writers of differing “dispositions” respond: the hack takes one road and the modernist master the other, but both play by the same underlying rules. A single explanatory model of the economic field can thus take into account, for instance, both the strategies of Henry James and the strategies of Walter Besant succeeded despite the widely divergent forms of success they attained. In both cases, in this line of thinking, the demands of the age, and chiefly of its markets in the broad sense, have become what fiction chiefly encapsulates. That these demands happen to be specific formal features is almost beside the point, embodying rather Bourdieu’s principle of “intentionless invention.”<sup>93</sup> Yet this “intentionless invention” works just as it did for the god-like author possessed of literary, rather than market, genius. Despite its theoretical sophistication, this approach relies on a rational choice model that has been adjusted for symbolic and social values and where the choice is made not at the level of conscious thought but at the level of the ingrained *habitas*. The institutional and commercial mechanisms lie open now before us, while the actors in the field, if not quite the thin abstractions of classical economics, nonetheless proceed by blindly maximizing their utility.<sup>94</sup> The very agonized postures that the “fine artists” of fiction and their modernist

---

<sup>93</sup> In this, Lawrence Rainey’s *Institutions of Modernism* (New Haven, 1998) displays an exemplary honesty in refusing to close read the texts it analyzes, explaining all of the actions in the field by way of “institutional networks.” See especially pages 6-7.

<sup>94</sup> Bourdieu’s terms might alter the phrase slight to render it “maximizing their capital.” The exact configuration of the form of capital sought – whether it figure as material, social, and symbolic – will depend upon the actor’s *habitas*, but Bourdieu is clear that reasonable actions within a given situation will follow the practical logic of capital maximization that most benefits the actor within her particular realm. See especially *The Logic of Practice* pp. 14-17 and *Outline of a Theory of Practice* pp. 183-4.

successors take toward the market place becomes the very strategy to succeed in it, though how precisely they managed to blunder into such success too often goes unmentioned.<sup>95</sup>

To approach literary production by way of extending Bourdieu's theory of cultural economics, however, is to fix in advance the ontology of the mass marketplace, committing ourselves ahead of time to the idea that it is populated by individual actors who make rational – if intentionless – choices in the making, buying, and selling of fiction and literature, often without knowing that they are doing so. It little matters what an individual knows or believes they know about the marketplace, much less about “art”; in fact, the system works more cleanly by discounting any knowledge that the agent might claim to hold and suggesting as Bourdieu does, that practical mastery works on preconscious, bodily level. Those that possess this so-called a “market understanding of literature” actually understand nothing at all, but have rather perfectly and effortlessly internalized the demands of commercial capitalism. The same goes for the high-cultural artists who have internalized not the dictates of the mass market, but of the “loser wins” or “economic world reversed” market.

---

<sup>95</sup> The very focus on success – which attends the work of literary scholars who borrow from Bourdieu more than Bourdieu's work itself – further adds an unwarranted air of inevitability to those strategies that “worked.” Daniel Kahneman and others have shown how the case-studies of successful businesses and business leaders seem more convincing than they are because they work backwards from an outcome yet systematically fail to account for randomness and “dumb luck.” Much also depends on at what point the outcome is fixed. Henry James provides an excellent example, given the vagaries of his reception. Think how different a case study from 1895 would look. Or consider how his New York Edition was a magnificent exercise in restricted production, but failed entirely until English departments reconfigured the literary field. Contrary to the idea that the intention that was realized is the one that counts, the effect of paying attention only to the intention that worked profoundly distorts the field of literary production, where failures vastly outnumbered successes. On outcome bias in retrospective case studies, see Daniel Kahneman *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York 2011), pp. 205-7.

Such studies treat intention, when it comes to playing the literary field, precisely the same way literary studies treated intention in the writing of the works. Both are simply presumed to be neither desirable nor available. In emphasizing that an individual's practical mastery of the literary field consists in a learned ignorance, Bourdieu's theory of practice entirely discounts that individual's "discourse" about her own field (and assumes, in fact, that it is misleading).<sup>96</sup> Yet this move does not discount intention altogether but simply offers a substitute for it. As Walter Davis once pointed out: "The interpreter who rejects intention is forced covertly to supply an informing principle analogous to it in order to make coherent interpretation ... possible ... Intention is unavoidable. The only question is whether we use the artist's intention or supply one of our own."<sup>97</sup> The intention assumed by Bourdieuan-inflected analyses generally manifests as a form of the principle of "utility maximization," in the ringing phrase of classical economics. Ironically, it is not the hack writer desperately trying to earn a living but rather the materialist literary historian who ultimately holds the "market understanding of literature," and whatever veneer of hard-headed theoretical rigor this model promises its validity is at best unproven – and likely unverifiable given the difficulty of evaluating its predictive capacities. The difficulty of knowing what we might gain is balanced by a clearer picture of what we give up, a concession that might best be expressed in Benjamin's accusation that we have lost the ability to convey experience. Whether that's true within the literature of this era will be the subject of the pages that follow, particularly in the next chapter, but I would suggest it's certainly true in versions of literary studies that extend economic forms of calculation to "literary production" and see the

---

<sup>96</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> Walter A. Davis, quoted in Francis Noël-Thomas, *The Writer Writing: Philosophic Acts in Literature* (Princeton, 1992), p. 19.

objective conditions of that field as imposing themselves on the actors operating within its sphere. Paul Delaney has suggested that a “model of literary culture as a dominating and relatively impersonal discursive field devalues not only the ontological objectivity of the authors, but also their economic subjectivity as it engages with the systems of literary production.”<sup>98</sup> Restoring such subjectivity by reading literary workers as if they had some sense of what they were actually up to when writing and selling their works – and could with practice, develop an increasingly better sense of what they were up to – offers an opportunity to recognize the particularity of these authors, but perhaps more significantly, also supplies the chance to rethink the available uses of literature itself from a perspective that attended so carefully to the market in order to make art.

While there are many avenues by which to approach these intentions, the field of fictioneering provides a particularly useful venue because it makes intentions so explicitly available. Competing practices for solving the deepest problems involved in both telling and selling a work of art appear in the open. Fictioneering explicitly and continually grappled with the competing demands of commerce and art, casting it precisely as the central issue any aspirant had to fiction would be forced to deal with, as many a handbook title would attest. One had to study the market, experiment with it, and shape one’s own self in relation to it. The practical knowledge a fictioneer might gain regarding the field of literary production might be wrong – they could entirely misjudge both what was wanted and what they were capable of providing – but such failures nonetheless still shaped action, and often had unintended consequences of its own. Ironically, Benjamin’s melancholy meditation on the vanishing storyteller helps bring the transformative practices of fictioneering as craft into clearer focus because the very things he

---

<sup>98</sup> Paul Delaney, *Literature, Money, and the Market from Trollope to Amis* (New York, 2002), p. 6.



claimed were being lost appear over and over again as the central problems of fictioneering. For one thing, the enterprise posits a discontinuity in narrative practice similar to the one proposed by Benjamin, though with the weights reversed. Among the pioneering fictioneers of the late nineteenth century who were Leskov's younger contemporaries, there was a distinct consensus that theirs was the age of storytelling *par excellence*, that the craft of modern fiction had advanced, and that the audience for narratives had never been larger or more eager. While the break is cast in almost diametrically opposed terms, the fictioneers takes up a very similar constellation of terms, namely: an "orientation toward practical matters," the artisanal melding of art and trade, the role of craft (and craftiness) in fashioning the raw material of experience into something communicable, and the "provision of counsel."

## Part II: Chapter Two

### The Making of the Self-Making Author

Fictioneering manuals debuted in their classical form, focused exclusively on short stories and novels and broken into chapters that separately explore the elements of the craft through case studies and exercises, in the final years of the nineteenth century. With this shift guidebooks ceased to be purely informative – they ceased simply to tell “The Truth about an Author” as Arnold Bennett had it – and aimed to become formative.<sup>1</sup> In this they took their cue from the increasingly interactive approaches offered in magazines such as *Atalanta*, but they had the advantage over periodical literature of containing a “complete course” between a single cover.<sup>2</sup> These fictioneering handbooks borrowed exercises from manuals on the art of rhetoric but moved beyond them by aiming to encompass the whole of a writer’s life, while also doing justice to the particularities of fiction. Writing well was a necessary but hardly sufficient condition for success. The new format shifted away from compiling the trade “secrets” of established experts to providing integrated courses of study. While literary middlemen had previously served mainly to relay the insider knowledge of successful authors – often, as was the case with George

---

<sup>1</sup> Bennett’s expose of the vulgar facts of the fiction market first ran anonymously in *The Athenaeum* from May 3 to August 2, 1902. He republished under his own name in 1911.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that the magazines became any less of a presence with the rise of the handbooks. The two worked symbiotically with the handbooks culling from the best magazine work and the magazines advertising, reviewing, and excerpting from the handbooks. Before the first quarter of the twentieth century had passed, a host of additional periodicals had emerged to keep the writer informed of her craft, including *Writers Monthly*, *Writer’s Own Magazine*, *Writing News*, *Popular Writing*, *Writer’s Medley*, and *Writer’s Digest* (which commenced life under the title *Successful Writing*).

Bainton's *The Art of Authorship*, by way of something resembling theft – formative texts proceeded without the need to claim any particular cultural authority at all. A number of the earliest fictioneering manuals in the formative mode were in fact published anonymously. What these works, and the great mass of others that followed them, gave up in ready cultural capital they recouped through the provision of practical exercises that promised to train skills, often ones not immediately connected with the technical rules of narrative craft.

Such a broader focus complicates the frequent criticism leveled against fictioneering manuals, particularly those dealing with the short story, that they were simply plot construction machines. In this common view, one merely adds in a couple of character names, some details about the setting, and a few bits of local color, and the story appears. Learning fiction on this model consisted in nothing other than memorizing a basic set of rules and mindlessly applying them. There is some truth to this critique, especially from the 1920s on, but – as this chapter discusses – the handbooks concerned themselves much more comprehensively with other aspects of the writing process and presented a more sophisticated model of how practice works than their opponents suggest. In particular, handbooks aimed to intervene in the writer's relation to her own experience. One aspect of the writer's experience that they were concerned to explore was her experience of work. The work of writing fiction was both an art and a trade; both parts of the writer's being had thus to be duly considered.

It would be difficult to find an approach to writing that more openly admitted its commercial associations than fictioneering, and yet fictioneers also insisted that they were artists. Seemingly every handbook title bears witness to a momentous collision of art and business. Some foreground art: Charles Barrett's *Short Story Writing: A Practical Treatise on the Art of the Short Story* (1898), C.E. Heisch's, *The Art and Craft of the Author: Practical Hints Upon*

*Literary Work* (1905), G.W. Gerwig's *The Art of the Short Story* (1909), G.R. Chester's *Art of Short Story Writing* (1910). Some foreground commerce: Michael Joseph's *Short Story Writing for Profit* (1923) and Elliot Blackiston's identically named *Short Story Writing for Profit* (1937). Most are glad to take both: N. Bryllion Fagin's *Short Story Writing: An Art or a Trade?* (1923), Walter B. Pitkin's *The Art and Business of Story Writing* (1912), J. Berg Esenwein's *Writing the Short Story: A Practical Book on the Rise, Structure, Writing, and Sale of the Modern Short Story* (1909). And all claim to be practical.

This chapter rethinks literary labor by taking this openly admitted confrontation between art and business as its starting point. Whereas the previous chapter charted how the periodicals schooled their readers in the art of fiction by providing new forms of training, this chapter argues that the work a writer does on herself has specificity of its own that we have failed to comprehend. For when it comes to literary labor, too often the focus has been exclusively on the labor part. Perhaps influenced by the prestige of economics, or at least its supposed explanatory power, literary scholars have regarded work as the practical activity *par excellence*.<sup>3</sup> Beneath the

---

<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, in the cases where a vestigial Marxism *elevates* art into labor, such a move might well be problematically circular. As David Saunders and Ian Hunter have argued, "There are good reasons, however, for questioning...[accounts of] the author as a creative labourer and indeed the current philosophical history on which it is carried. In the first place, the credentials of Hegelianism and Marxism as general theories of labor have themselves been called into question by research that traces a somewhat surprising genealogy for them. Philip Kain [in *Schiller, Hegel, Marx*] has argued that these theories of labour as a process of self-realization are themselves neither more nor less than improvisations on the aesthetic conception of art as a self-realizing activity ... if the attributes of the aesthetic author are now described in terms of the self-realizing subject of labour, that is only because the attributes of the latter were initially modeled on the aesthetic conception of authorship" (David Saunders and Ian Hunter, "Lesson from the Literary: How to Historicise Authorship," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 3 [Spring 1991]: 495-6).

surface of this category, however, has lain a troublingly empty rationality. Its illogic goes something like this: the field of social activity is laid out and the various choices it offers are accorded a certain amount of cultural or economic capital: whatever choice an actor makes reveals her intention of maximizing her utility in one form or another, regardless of whether she was actually aware of her choice's objective valuation. Yet the obviousness of the selected option depends, in a way much more than is usually admitted, on the fact that we already knew which choice was made and how it worked out. Because the inferred intention is retroactively applied, this version of rational choice theory works best when it explains success.

On this view, the encompassing but undifferentiated practical activity of work has born the burden of connecting the macrostructures of institutions and the microstructures of literary texts. Work has been the connective link between historical forces and fictions. Yet while historicist accounts of authorship and the cultural sociology of literary production have flattened artistic activity into a form of labor (albeit one that seeks remuneration in cultural capital as well as economic), my concern is that even the most commercial of the handbooks kept the fact that writing fiction is an art squarely in view. The handbook authors and their charges spent much of their time studying the market. The conclusions they drew may have been mistaken or even deliberately misleading, but they were anything but unreflective and remained steadfastly committed to the idea that their profession comprised one of the fine arts. To treat this particular aesthetic stance as simply a mystification is odd, for the commercial considerations were openly admitted, often from the title onward. Unveiling handbooks as the ideological training apparatus of market forces invested in manufacturing highly standardized, utility-maximizing individuals grossly simplifies the ways in which these texts conceive of what goes into both the making of fiction and the training of those individuals who desire to produce it. Not only is it likely wrong

to model the decisions made by both handbook authors and aspirants as something that could work so cleanly in even the most ideal circumstances – insofar as positing such a clear relay between market force and individual action simply fails to accurately describe what is actually a volatile and emotionally textured relationship (the central insight, grossly simplified, of post-Kahnemanian behavioral economics) – but, more importantly from my point of view, it deserts fictioneering at the very point where it becomes most interesting. Handbooks may have wanted their readers to believe the market economy more rational than it was – and this making of belief itself is worth unpacking – but most commercial handbooks went about training their would-be authors according to protocols derived from fiction: teaching plotting, dialogue, and so on such that the forms of fiction, in the end, form even the writer most eager to go to market. This point will be developed at greater length below, but perhaps the simplest way of putting it here is to note that the chapters on “selling your wares” always come last, at the tail end of a graduated and sequenced set of steps designed to turn the aspirant into a writer.

The conundrum investigated in this chapter is thus that, to take as nakedly a commercial example as possible from the most nakedly commercial handbook subgenre (short story handbooks), Michael Joseph’s *Short Story Writing for Profit* (1923) may end with chapters on “The Commercial Side” and “What Editors Want,” but to get to this point the reader has to pass through eight chapters on the formal elements of short story writing. Before the writer is ready to locate a “reliable market,” she must first master “Plot,” “Character,” “Dialogue,” “Style,” and “Local Color.” In the final non-commercial lesson, she is led through an analytical “dissection” of a “specimen” story. She is, in fact, instructed to read the appended and annotated *Cap’en Jollyfax’s Gun* by Arthur Morrison twice – “the first time in order to test its appeal to one’s personal palate, and the second, with a critical, analytical eye, in order to master for oneself the

use of ... established literary devices” – and is reminded that “very often an important effect is obtained not by what is put into a story, but by what is left out.”<sup>4</sup> What the aspirant needed to learn was how to make art despite the handicap of getting paid (or not) for it. What separates the art of fictioneering from those strains of self-help literature that espouse purely magical forms of thinking is a commitment to craft, a belief in practice, and the idea that these efforts must be applied to the raw material of one’s own experience.<sup>5</sup>

As I will explain in the first section of this chapter, the field of fictioneering offers a look at the various forms of practice that the history of literary criticism in all its permutations often seems precisely designed to avoid, favoring instead an oracular approach (in which artists create art whose meanings they most likely fail to understand). More than that fictioneering offers a view of the way practice formed both writers and the forms we call novels beyond the dictates of labor as classically conceived. The two particular practices taken up – and discussed in the third section of this chapter – both function as constraints. One is the rule to “write from experience and experience only” and the other the constraint demanded by the limitations on authorial omniscience. As I detail in this chapter’s final section, Jack London, whose career unfolds not

---

<sup>4</sup> Michael Joseph, *Short Story Writing for Profit* (London, 1924), p.163.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Sloterdijk has begun to rethink the work of work by way of his anthropotechnical approach. For Sloterdijk, the anthropotechnical turn “came into view for a moment when Marx and the Young Hegelians articulated the theory that man himself produces man,” but it was “immediately obscured ... by another chatter that presented work as the only essential human act. But if man genuinely produces man, it is precisely not through work and its concrete results, not even the ‘work on oneself’ so widely praised in recent times, let alone through the alternatively invoked phenomena of ‘interaction’ or ‘communication’: it is through life in forms of practice.” Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, 4.

only alongside fictioneering but very much within it, serves as the primary case study in which these two limits intersect.

## I.

At the turn of the last century, the Grant Richards company published “The ‘how-to’ Series,” a six-volume run consisting of diverse, if not altogether random, titles. The variety no doubt had much to do with the personal whims of the publisher himself, but it makes an agitating mix nevertheless.<sup>6</sup> The line opened with Henry Warren’s *How To Deal with Your Banker*; though logic would have suggested commencing with *How to Choose Your Banker*, the fourth number. Volume II – *Where and How To Dine in Paris* – complicates the theme, though the sixth and final volume – *How To Invest and How To Speculate* – returns to it. Rounding out the series are two volumes of advice on the art and business of writing. Unlike the other works in the series, both *How To Write for the Magazines* (1900) and *How to Write a Novel: A Practical Guide to the Art of Fiction* (1901) were published anonymously. The irony that two works dedicated to

---

<sup>6</sup> Richards’s various passions were perhaps too various, and the advice he sponsored little conduced to his own benefit, resulting in two bankruptcies and a final humiliation that saw him forced from his own firm. George Bernard Shaw suggested that Richards had the “tragic” fault of being a publisher who fell in love with literature, but he was less as a man riven by warring ideals and more a characteristic figure of a movement whose apparent contradictions stemmed from the exigencies of practical style. Now perhaps best known for his recurring part in the long and painful case of Joyce’s *Dubliners* (he enthusiastically agreed to publish the collection in early 1906 only to recant on the agreement months later; after a long interval he accepted it in 1914), Richards also founded what would become the Oxford World’s Classics (though doing so forced him into bankruptcy), played key roles in the careers of Shaw, A.E. Housman, and Theodore Dreiser, and left behind a few novels and memoirs of his own. His *Author Hunting: Memories of Years Spent Mainly in Publishing* (London, 1934) provides an impressionistic overview.



the cult of the author would themselves feature such a conspicuous blank is not altogether complete for the by-line of *How to Write for the Magazines* does contain a clear figure: “By £600 a Year from It.”

A similar anonymity shrouds the 1894 *How to Write Fiction: especially the art of short story writing: A practical course of instruction after the French method of Maupassant*. One of the few full-length fictioneering handbooks to precede those of the Grant Richards line, *How to Write Fiction* was supposedly composed by “An Old Hand.” It was in fact the handiwork of Sherwin Cody, age twenty-six and without any real claim to expertise in his field. While Cody would go on to become a prolific author of all manner of self-help texts, most famously his immensely successful and long running *100% Self-correcting Course in English Language*, in 1894 he was an author only in the most generous sense of the term, having but a few advertising pamphlets and a self-published volume of poetry called *Life’s Philosophy* to his credit.<sup>7</sup> Given

---

<sup>7</sup> Sherwin’s pioneering book on self-making through literary effort was itself very literally self-made. In a lengthy review of the first edition in *The Writer* magazine, William H. Hills observes that the work, “by a writer who modestly omits his name from the title page,” is not only new in “design” but also in “execution.” *How to Write Fiction* “is not printed in the ordinary way, but has been produced by the use of stencil sheets, made by the author himself upon his typewriter and printed through afterward on a cyclostyle.” Such a process makes it “an exact reproduction of the author’s typewriting, and while it is not so easy to read as if it were printed from ordinary type, its novelty makes it much more interesting.” Hills, noting number 53 out of 100 now sits before him, concludes, “the work possesses interest for collectors in addition to its merits as a helpful and instructive book” (William H. Hills, “The Art of Short-Story Writing,” *The Writer* 8, no. 4 [1895], pp. 48-9). The London firm of Bellairs printed the second edition in line with industry standards. For more on Cody and his impact on self-help literature see Edwin L. Battistella’s intriguing *Do You Make These Mistakes in English? The Story of Sherwin Cody’s Famous Language School* (Oxford, 2009).

the reaction that these manuals provoked, their authors had perhaps been wise in their choice to remain unnamed.

In a review titled “How Not to Do It,” G.K. Chesterton inveighed against the Grant Richards series as a whole, but saves his particular ire for *How to Write a Novel*. Chesterton complained, “The author exhibits no reverence in approaching literature. He does not seem to realise that so divine has the art of writing always appeared that the very word ‘scripture’ has come to mean sacred scripture.” Might we not expect, Chesterton wondered, the next volumes in the series to include “‘How to Become a Saint,’ ‘How to Fall in Love,’ ‘How to Die for One’s Country’”?<sup>8</sup> For the young Chesterton, the how-to manuals on fiction are a symptom of the larger forces of desacralization. They represent the extension of the “banker’s” point of view into ever more sacred areas of life. Their yoking of the speculative art of fiction with the art of speculation perfectly illustrated a reconciliation of art and business in which all the concessions were made from the side of the former. As Chesterton makes clear, however, it was not simply that commerce had sullied literature, but that the very attempt to approach literary production from a practical, systematic viewpoint was deeply misguided. In a word, there was something profoundly irrational about attempting to study the art of fiction rationally. Chesterton, however, was comforted by the fact that it would never work:

If the didactics of literature would be enough to bewilder anybody, the didactics of fiction are peculiarly shadowy. For there is no such form of art as the novel; not, at least, in the

---

<sup>8</sup> G.K. Chesterton, “How Not to Do It,” *The Speaker*, Volume III, no. 77 (23 March 1901): 686. The irony in some ways, however, is that fiction had only just recently attained the condition of an art just as “literature” had only recently taken on the sense that Chesterton employs.

sense that there are such forms of art as the lyric, the epic and the tragedy ... There can be no biology of the strange creatures.<sup>9</sup>

Fiction, Chesterton argues, deals with meaning and ideas, neither of which have any definite form. Any attempt to deal with it would result in a “pseudoscience,” like “alchemy or astrology.”<sup>10</sup> “Consequently,” he continues,

we have nothing to say to Wilkie Collins and Sir Walter Besant and other authorities from whom explanations of artistic method are quoted here, except that, with the deepest faith in their talents and veracity, we do not believe a word they say. We do not believe that they wrote their books as they say and think they did; we know that the power to write a good story is one thing, The power to analyze one’s own thoughts quite another, and we simply find evidence in the books themselves that they had their origin in the infinitely higher and more mysterious forces.<sup>11</sup>

Chesterton’s review, and others in a similarly incredulous vein, did nothing to stem the tide. Fictioneering handbooks proliferated and it soon came to seem that fiction was not the most shadowy of literary forms but the one that required the least application to mysterious forces. As more and more handbooks appeared, the problem that they posed was not that they were a con, but rather that they seemed to work. Perhaps they did not produce “scripture,” but they did produce enough literature, in the less elevated sense, that they could no longer be ignored.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 686.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 687.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 686.

By 1923, they had attained such eminence that the literary historian Fred Lewis Pattee dubbed the period from 1900 to his own day “the era of the handbook.”<sup>12</sup> Apparently unimpressed by the innovations of literary modernism, this pioneering scholar foresaw the end of literary history in the rise of the handbooks, thus concluding his survey with a cheerless final chapter marking the collapse of literature. Just a few years later, Edward J. O’Brien, founder of *The Best American Short Stories* series, offered an equally dismal assessment in his *The Dance of the Machines*, lamenting that his age had decided “that literature is merely a simple form of mechanical engineering which can be practised with success and profit by anybody.”<sup>13</sup> O’Brien mourned not so much for the loss of sacred scripture but for those who successfully practiced the mechanical arts of fiction writing.

In fact, for O’Brien and those who shared his sensibilities, the fictioneer was hardly any longer a person at all because of the time spent laboring at the machine that is the short story. The form of the short story, O’Brien argues, “is impersonal” because, “like a machine,” it “seldom creates character” but rather “manufactures ‘types’” (*DM*, p. 122). The machinic qualities are as evident in the story’s form as they are in its content. Stylistically, a short story must be “photographic and careful to include the most minute and irrelevant details. It must make no mistakes of omission or exactness” (*DM*, p. 116). To put it succinctly, the short story is not told from “first-person” or “third- person” point of view, but rather simply and perfectly reproduces the viewpoint of a machine. The fictioneer can automatically reproduce such a point of view because he has been made into a machine himself by way of his education under the

---

<sup>12</sup> Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey*, p. 364.

<sup>13</sup> Edward J. O’Brien, *The Dance of the Machines: The American Short Story in the Industrial Age* (New York, 1929), p. 126; hereafter abbreviated *DM*.

tutelage of textbooks and editors. These tell him how to make a story and “they insist that he shall follow mechanistic rules only” and the process merely intensifies should he find success (*DM*, p. 125).

For O’Brien, fictioneering is part of a larger logic of standardization that makes both art and life more machine-like, but, and this is the crucial point, the literature it produces is not merely index of larger forces. Rather, both writers and stories serve as vital cogs in the process by which life is being “organized on a machine basis” (*DM*, p. 7). Once trained by textbooks and magazine editors into the standard procedures, writers, without even being aware of it, go on to produce stories that “impose this ideal of standardization on the reading public” (*DM*, p. 130). The American magazine, as the most explicit nexus of commerce and art, best illustrates the “mass production of public opinion and standards.” In O’Brien’s analysis,

a popular magazine will show you how closely the stories, articles, and illustrations fit into the advertising pages. Many popular storywriters also write advertising copy. Even when they do not, their stories tend to be written in the high-flown manner which is characteristic of American advertising copy. Magazine illustrators carefully copy the styles of clothing illustrated in the advertising pages. Storywriters employ the automobile as an omnipresent character in most of their stories and describe at considerable length the widely advertised foods which are eaten at American breakfast and dinner tables. Their heroes display the same ambitions which are glorified in the advertisements of correspondence schools and mind-training courses. Many magazines designed to appeal to men publish articles preaching the gospel of “self-help” in a manner which sends the reader to their advertisers, who are prepared to practice “self-help” at the “self-helping” readers expense. (*DM*, p. 146)

As this passage makes evident with its repeated use of “copy,” the system works almost exclusively by way of reduplication. Style is not merely “copied,” but is copied from copy. Life imitates art, although in this case the “character” that serves as the reader’s model is not an idealized individual but an “omnipresent” model-T.

It is against this mode of mass production that the New Critics are presumed to have reacted. As Catherine Gallagher has it, the New Critics developed their mode of literary analysis in opposition to “the homogenizing tendencies of the marketplace” to protect “the endangered specificity” of the artwork.<sup>14</sup> They re-enchanted the literary text by bringing it under the auspices of the art-as-such model, agreeing with Chesterton that the great works of literature were a form of “scripture.” Yet, as we have already seen, in following Chesterton in “not believing a word” that the artists themselves said in relation to the creation of their fictions, the New Critics turn the work of writing into just as automatic process as O’Brien does. Whether machine or oracle, the writer knows not what she does. As we have also seen, the techniques that were painstakingly elaborated as writer’s tools, become retrofitted as critical concepts.

The return to historicism and the rise of cultural sociology as a form of literary study has democratized the oracle, though what the oracle conveys has changed substantially. Insofar as subsequent literary historians have looked at the fictioneering field, they have treated it precisely as a symptomatic by-product of market forces, one of the intermediary modes through which capitalism has coaxed individuals into ever deepening acts of self-commodification. Indeed, fictioneering on this view is a particularly insidious activation of capital in which individuals are invited to treat themselves as the raw material, mining their deepest personal experiences and most meaningful relationships in the hopes of turning out a saleable story. If literature ever

---

<sup>14</sup> Gallagher, “The History of Criticism,” p. 134.

offered an escape from such forces, such an argument contends, fictioneering manuals extinguish any remaining hope, smuggling the enemy straight into the heart of the citadel under the cover of self-improvement. The exercises and practice regimens prescribed by manuals on the art of fiction ironically promise individuality through standardization but only end up making individuality itself into a mass-produced commodity.

Andrew Levy's *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story* provides the best example of the symptomatic view of the fictioneering handbook. Levy is one of the few scholars to deal at any length with such texts, though his focus remains entirely restricted to manuals on the short story. While he finds handbooks "significant" both as "a cultural phenomenon" and as "a chapter in the history of American fiction," he also finds these them "dry, naïve, and almost unreadable" when put beside other early twentieth-century literary critical movements such as "Modernism, Marxism, and New Criticism."<sup>15</sup> While the formal contributions of handbook authors have become "a hard fact of the genre," the most interesting, perhaps the only interesting, feature of the movement is the way it can be read symptomatically: "the short story handbooks were perhaps the only commercially motivated, populistically modeled critical movement in the history of American letters" (CC, p. 78). For Levy, the form of the classic handbook, complete with technical terminology, frequent diagrams, and at-home exercises, is a form of ideological mystification, in which the "special language" of the handbook is permeated with a thoroughly market understanding of literature. "In the most explicit sense," observes Levy, "the handbook authors insisted that the short story writer accept that creative

---

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Levy, *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 77-8; hereafter abbreviated CC.

activity was a marketable service, and even a trade” (CC, p. 95). Indeed, the primary pedagogical goal of a manual was to align perfectly the writing subject with the commercial desire:

Ultimately, ... most handbook authors simply wanted their students to internalize the market – in effect to become representative men and women.... In this manner, the elimination of individual tastes and writing style would be countermanded by the creation of a mind-set that *spontaneously* wrote the kinds of stories people wanted to read. (CC, p. 98)

Precisely locating this allegedly simple “want” – the desire of the handbook authors for their readers to desire in accordance with market dictates – turns out to be a fairly complex maneuver. After all, market demand is here defined as “the kinds of stories people wanted to read.” In the end then, the aspirants are to want what they want and then they are to want to produce it spontaneously, i.e. without *wanting* to. The literary marketplace, on Levy’s account both grants individuality and obliterates it; the pre-existing individual tastes that drive the demand side of literary marketplace must curiously be “countermanded” on the supply side, leaving the human subject in the curious predicament indeed. While some of the circularity that inheres in this account of literary production derives from the fictioneering manuals and their authors, Levy’s historicist approach exacerbates it by seeing the training regimes as complicated but completely unnecessary auxiliary mechanism. In fact, in Levy’s view what fictioneering accomplishes is the unlearning of writing so the historical moment’s underlying “mercantile values” could be more efficiently transmitted. Such a notion depends on an alternate conception of writing as an authentic art that fictioneering worked against and degraded: for the fictioneer, the short story was a “technological device” and not “an intuitive or unrepeatable act of creation” (CC, p. 96). It is precisely this notion of authentic art – one that is crucially “intuitive” and therefore as



spontaneous as the fictioneering machine – that has been interrogated in the years since Levy’s 1993 study.

In the last couple of decades, few binaries have been more determinedly worn away than the divide between high culture and mass culture, between literature and commerce, between, in short, authentic art and business. A steady stream of scholarly works on the “(*Great Writer*) and *the Mass Market*” theme have brought to light the behind-the-scenes maneuvers and publicity efforts of literary artists once presumed aloof from such dealings. As I suggested in the last chapter, by extending principles of economic calculation to the cultural field such scholarship has the advantage of bringing a wider range of practical activity into the frame of analysis, but the disadvantage of divorcing the individual’s practical action from any substantial awareness of that action (and hence from any real ability to intervene in that action). Only the most tendentious versions of cultural sociology convert economic capital into cultural capital in perfectly straightforward terms, but the underlying principles generally fit within a rational choice model in which what counts as rational depends on the agent’s *habitus*, even in the relatively autonomous field of literary production. What many scholars have found attractive in the form of cultural sociology that Pierre Bourdieu’s work has inspired is the link it forges between the work on form and work more generally, connecting the production of art to the social field at large.

Such a link is most forcefully made in Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art*, which essentially inverts his more famous *Distinction* by moving the focus from consumption to production. The contribution that this work’s model of the literary field makes is to take seriously a writer’s actions outside of the pages of their books while nonetheless arguing that those larger actions, both economic and political, are nonetheless reflected in the books themselves. The relations in

the field thus come to include a much wider class of relevant actors (publishers, editors, booksellers, and even agents) and the interactions writers have with them. As the literary field becomes relatively autonomous – freeing itself from direct patronage and coming to depend on the cultural capital conferred by a growing class of other cultural producers – it paradoxically becomes more able to represent the larger society of which it is a part by reflecting the competitive struggles that define its structure. Crucially, however, the indexical qualities of the books represent the unintended, though nonetheless determined, product of a writer’s artistic labor. Thus “the structure” of Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*, “which a strictly internal reading brings to light ... proves to be at the same time the structure of the social space in which its author himself was situated.”<sup>16</sup> But Flaubert, engaged as he is in the practical struggles to establish his position in the field, is not himself aware of it (nor, for that matter, are any critics prior to Bourdieu):

Unless one sees as a sort of completely unintelligible miracle the fact that analysis can discover in the work – as I have done for *Sentimental Education* – profound structures inaccessible to ordinary intuition (and to the reading of commentators), it must be acknowledged that it is through this work on form that the work comes to contain those structures that the writer, like any social agent, carries within him in a practical way, without having really mastered them, and through which is achieved the anamnesis of all that ordinarily remains buried, in an implicit or unconscious state, underneath the automatisms of an emptily revolving language.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

According to John Speller, for Bourdieu, “It is as if Flaubert did not mean to represent the structures in his narrative: they only ‘appear’ as a sort of byproduct of the work on form, which was the author’s sole focus.”<sup>18</sup> Yet Flaubert’s focus on form derives from his relative position in competitive field, his agonized search for *le mot juste*, which is the most rational thing to do given his *habitus* and trajectory. Bourdieu’s generative principle of form is “nothing other than the basic pattern of action provided by the writers habits, as a result of social history, expressed through the grammar of the ‘space of possibilities.’” Thus, in Speller’s paraphrase, the author “may have no clear idea” where the labor of literary work “was leading,” but rather “was driven by the desires and emotions attached to his or her position in the literary field.”<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu’s model has room for mastery of methods, but because such artistic work, like all forms of practical mastery, is performed outside of conscious intention, those who succeed – who have the best “sense of the game” – will likely be those who have been submerged in the literary field from their youth on. It is these artists who, because of their background, will best be able to objectify their social position in the form of their work, thus maximizing their interests while not seeming to do so at all, even to themselves. Ultimately, all the players on the literary field pursue the course of action that best suits their ends as stipulated by their position and social history. What an author has to say about her own actions is itself simply a strategic action and should be treated as another move in the game.

While beyond the scope of the present essay, the serious challenges and revisions that have been made to rational choice theory’s applicability to fields that involve creative or intellectual work over the last few decades very often proceed directly from the very things that

---

<sup>18</sup> John R.W. Speller, *Bourdieu and Literature* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 107.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Bourdieu's model quite intentionally leaves aside. Depending as it does upon an analysis of objective relative position and the competitive dynamics produced by such inequality, Bourdieu's approach has very little room for things individuals tell themselves about themselves, for their narratives about who they are, what they do, why they do it, and how they might do it better. Neil Gross has argued, for instance, that schemes of competitive cultural calculation such as Bourdieu's lack what he calls a theory of "intellectual self-concept." For Gross, "the theory of intellectual self-concept holds that intellectuals tell themselves and others stories about who they are qua intellectuals: about their distinctive interests, dispositions, values, capacities, and tastes."<sup>20</sup> In other words, as Gross further observes,

meaningful behavior, whatever its ultimate cause, tends to be filtered through – and to some extent influenced by – cognitive and affective processes in which actors' conceptualizations of themselves and their lives figure prominently. This is obviously not to say that actors never act in instrumental ways, working in some circumstances to maximize what they conceive to be their utility. It is to say, however, that instrumental action of this sort, just like every other form of social action, is mediated by interpretations of the action environment colored by actors' past experiences and self-understandings – experiences and self-understandings to which they may and often do give conscious attention. Even in moments of habituality, action rarely bypasses actors' struggles to remain oriented toward lines of their identity.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Neil Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago, 2008), pp. 263-4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

Gross's theory is specifically directed towards intellectuals – whom he defines as “those whose occupational roles are centrally wrapped up with the formulation of knowledge claims”<sup>22</sup> – but because he regards intellectual self-concept as a narratively-based self-relation, it would seem to apply with particular force to those who work with narrative as the primary way of formulating knowledge claims. To put it in abstract terms, if the stories people tell about themselves modify the incentives they select, then explicit invitations to rethink those stories, of the sort offered in fictioneering, might carry particular weight. The idea is certainly not to return to what Bourdieu describes as the “classical doctrine,” where “the work of writing is ... a simple execution of a project, a pure imposition of form onto a pre-existing idea.”<sup>23</sup> Nor is it a retreat in a mentalistic domain where a project like Gross's might tend.<sup>24</sup> Rather, what the graduated exercises of fictioneering manuals demonstrate above all is that literature is not an unconscious translation of cultural forces. It is not an automatic discourse that gives symptomatic expression to an historically determined subjectivity.

Taken in toto, the practice regimes of fictioneering demonstrate that literary invention is a specific form of thinking, one of course conditioned by its historical moment (as the manuals know very well indeed because they must keep track of changes in the market, shifts in audience taste, and innovations in form), but it is a form of thinking one must *learn* to do. The way to become a writer is through practice and work, and practice is, more or less by definition, intentional. It aims at producing certain effects within the practitioner so that the practitioner can go on to produce effects in her reader. Yet, practice, in a creative field like literature, generates

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Gross, for instance, leans on Anglo-American social psychology to develop his theory. See *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*, pp. 266-8.

its own effects, ones that cannot be specified in advance, thereby making new modes of experience visible. There is no doubt that any artwork transcends an author's conscious intentions, just as language itself does, but the narrower point at issue here is that an author's intuitions are just as much the subject of training as their conscious choices. What an extensive reading of fictioneering manuals makes clear is that aspirants were to be aware, perhaps hyper-aware, of the audience for their work; they needed to take into account the editors of magazines, the readership of those magazines, but they also needed to be just as aware of the sources of their own intuitions. Following Poe, the patron saint of the fictioneer, the aspirant had to be aware of the "single effect" of her stories, she had to manage every word and make every formal decision with such an effect in mind. Yet, as Poe's stories show more clearly than "Philosophy of Composition" or his reviews of Hawthorne, a deliberate approach to composition did not by any means yield predictable results. The toggling between the deliberate and unpredictable, between conscious planning and unconscious intuition, appears most forcefully in the dictum to "write from experience." Hardened as that cliché has become, I argue that the phrase, particularly as it has been taken up in relation to popular or middlebrow forms of writing, has been widely misunderstood. The most common error is to separate the two terms, making the former into little more than transcription while transforming the latter into inert, raw material.<sup>25</sup> The

---

<sup>25</sup> Much the same thing can be said about the cognate phrase "write what you know." This version of the cliché, popularly attributed to Mark Twain, has come to replace the earlier version in workshop lore. Perhaps it merely indicates the preference for non-Latinate terms similarly preached throughout the Program Era, but it also appears to betray how creative writing needed to be figured as cognitive work once it entered the institutional space of the university. And, of course, experience is precisely what the undergraduate writer is typically supposed to lack and what the workshop continually fails to supply, even if it can supply a little knowledge.

fictioneering archive makes apparent, however, that to write on one's own past was to modify it. Writing fiction did not simply convey experience; it was an experience.

## II.

The mandate to “write from experience and from experience alone” appears as explicit literary advice at least as early as George Henry Lewes's 1865 *Principles of Success in Literature*.<sup>26</sup> Lewes writes, “Personal experience is the basis of all real literature. The writer must have thought the thoughts, seen the objects (with bodily or mental vision), and felt the feeling; otherwise he can have no power over us.”<sup>27</sup> Walter Besant reiterates the claim in “The Art of Fiction” placing it at the center of the “Laws which govern this Art”: “First, and before everything else, there is the Rule that everything in Fiction which is invented and is not the result of personal experience and observation is worthless” (AR p. 17-8).

---

<sup>26</sup>George Henry Lewes, *Principles of Success in Literature* (Berkeley, 1901), p. 35. Lewes's two-part essay originally ran in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1865 *Principles*, but found a second life in the post-“Art of Fiction” advice boom. It first appeared as a stand-alone manual in 1885 as the first entry in the “Academy Classics” series of textbooks. Herbert Spencer's *Philosophy of Style* (originally published 1852) soon joined Lewes's *Principles* as part of an opportunistic rehabilitation of earlier *Ars Poetica* texts as ready-made handbooks to be rolled out as “classics” of the genre. While Spencer's text seems abstruse when placed next to a more typical handbook, its central doctrine of “The Principle of Economy” appealed to an aesthetics so thoroughly shaped by the thriving short-story market that often aspired to scientific efficiency. Certainly, it played its part in Jack London's formation as a writer, although not, as we will see below, in the way usually supposed.

<sup>27</sup> Lewes's model here is Horace's principle of *si vis me flere*: “If you/ Desire to hear me weep, you must truly grieve ... and I'll/ Grieve as if I suffered your cause of grief” (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, trans. David Ferry, [New York, 2001], p. 159).

It was this particular rule more than any other that provoked the strongest reaction from Henry James in his rejoinder. On the literal level, James strongly dissents from a corollary of Besant's rule that the novelist must write from personal experience, namely that "a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to the lower middle-class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into society" (*AR*, p. 36). James finds this "remark about the lower middle-class writer and knowing his place ... rather chilling" ("AF," p. 508).

The difference between Besant and James is more dramatically apparent at a less strictly literal level, where James, in one of the most famous passages of the essay, offers his signature qualification of the rule:

What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative – much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius – it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.

("AR," p. 509)

The only practical lesson James thought could be drawn from this point was the lapidary – but entirely impossible – advice to "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!" ("AR," p. 510). Perhaps the odd thing is how very much subsequent advice on the art of fiction would aim to build a systematic program on top of his suggestion.

Even Besant, for his part, took the rebuke enough to heart that he clarified his position. In his later works of literary advice, he recasts lack of experience less as a permanent constraint than as a motivating force, encouraging writers to extend their fund of personal experience by



pursuing proto-sociological fieldwork. As he puts it in his 1888 *Atalanta* piece “On the Writing of Novels” the young novelist must make it her “her business to learn more of the world” even if for the moment “she be contented with the materials which she has.”<sup>28</sup> Later writers would attempt far more radical revisions of the rule, exploring the questions James had posed about the nature of what constituted experience and experimenting with ways of “converting faint hints into revelations.” Such work typically appeared in the beginning of a fictioneering manual with an examination of the character of the would-be writer’s own character.

As a general rule, handbook authors adopted a bluffly avuncular attitude toward their pupils, one decidedly marked by a skepticism little shared by other self-help texts. Unlike their contemporary gurus of optimistic, personal power through positive thinking approaches to self-improvement, fictioneering authorities were often doubtful that their would-be clients possessed the necessary aptitudes and background for succeeding in the art of fiction. Handbook authors, even those whose style was professionally impersonal and relentlessly technical, took pains to openly express such doubts as a necessary preliminary to any instruction in the craft proper. Dorothea Brande, whose very interesting *Becoming a Writer* resembles self-help books more than most other works in the genre, offers an comically exaggerated description of the general attitude when she claimed that

the usual procedure of those who offer handbooks for young authors ... in nine cases out of ten ... [is to provide], well toward the front of the volume, some very gloomy paragraphs warning you that you may be no writer at all, that you probably lack taste,

---

<sup>28</sup> Walter Besant, “On the Writing of Novels: Part Two,” pp. 371-2.

judgment, imagination, and every trace of the special abilities necessary to turn yourself from an aspirant into an artist, or even into a passable craftsman.<sup>29</sup>

Brande finds such pessimism puzzling – “Books written for painters do not imply that the chances are that the reader will never be anything but a conceited dauber” – but when she sums up the attitude of her fellow fictioneers in the monitory phrase that “genius cannot be taught” she hints at its deep roots. The aphorism rephrases the negative position in the old debate over whether, to use an alternate formulation, poets are made or whether they are born.<sup>30</sup> It is a debate quite that literally goes back to the very dawn of the *Ars Poetica* genre, finding its canonical expression in Horace’s eponymous letter. In his “Epistle to the Pisos,” better known as “*Ars Poetica*”, the Roman poet’s comments suggest that the argument was already a familiar and well-worn one in his time:

The question often comes up, whether a good  
Poem derives from nature or from art?  
The truth of it is, learning is nothing at all  
Without the bounty of nature, and natural talent  
Is nothing at all if left to itself untaught.

---

<sup>29</sup> Dorothea Brande, *Becoming a Writer*, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 22. One of *poeta nascitur non fit*’s other familiar formulations ran, *poeta nascitur orator fit*. While the poet receives his power “from nature, and from above,” the orator, as Thomas Lodge’s put it in his 1579 *Defence of Poetry*, “is made but by exercise” (qtd in William Ringler, “Poeta Nascitur Non Fit: Some Notes on the History of an Aphorism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, No. 4 [Oct., 1941]: 502). This alternative suggests a continuum of verbal skill, and skill in fictional prose might well sit in the middle. Fictioneering manuals, particularly in the way that they preach audience awareness, owe much to the art of oratory, differing most markedly precisely on the way that personal experience is meant to be a generative principle of original ideas.

Each has to depend on the other, and so together

They do the work as friends.<sup>31</sup>

Contrary to Brande's exaggerated characterization, the line taken by the fictioneers was close to Horace's middle position. Certainly they denied that "genius" was something they could promise to supply if it were missing, but, in the end, they had very little interest in genius at all. Thus, to admit genius wasn't something they could teach meant conceding very little and the confession in no way damned the entire enterprise. For the handbook author, when it came to genius, if you had to ask then you clearly weren't one, but genius was so far from being the province of the fictioneer that it was simply brushed aside as something unworthy of discussion. Though both were secularized, genius had become very much decoupled from inspiration. The Romantic poet and the decadent Bohemian *artiste* both make ready targets for the sneers of the manual writers, and no idea is more persistently attacked, and more apt to be blamed for the errors of aspirants, than a theory of inspiration.

Genius, bereft of any divine spark, simply amounted to a preternatural talent that instinctively knew ahead of time what science labored long to find. The theory of inspiration, on the other hand, was a myth that art and science had thoroughly debunked. And it was not merely a mistaken belief, for it caused a great deal of harm to those who might otherwise have had some success. In this too the fictioneers found a precedent in Horace. For the Roman poet,

The runner who wants

To win the race has, since he was a boy,

Put up with a lot in training, has sweated and strained,

And kept himself away from wine and women.

---

<sup>31</sup> Horace, *Ars Poetica*, p. 181.

The flutist who wants to play at the Pythian games  
Studies his lessons hard, scared of his teacher.  
But poets today find it perfectly easy to say,  
“I love this poem I wrote; it’s wonderful!  
I’m the king of the hill.” They wouldn’t dream  
Of being left behind or of confessing  
That they hadn’t learnt what they hadn’t tried to learn.<sup>32</sup>

Elliott Blackiston channeled this aspect of the poet, complete with the analogy to music and the “kids today” lament, when he observed in his *Short Story Writing for Profit* (1937) that

we have at the present time young, unrecognized writers who erroneously believe that to observe technicalities is to forfeit all claim to originality. ‘I’m simply going to write,’ these youngsters tell us. ‘Mine is a creative art, I can’t be bothered with rules, forms and fundamentals.’ Would it not sound ridiculous if the musician made a similar remark about his music? ‘I’m just going to play; I’m not going to bother to learn.’<sup>33</sup>

Inspiration and natural talent, which as William Ringler argues were mutually confused in the English Renaissance and then again during Romanticism, are here kept very far apart.<sup>34</sup>

Imagination, in a writer, is given a narrow field – it needs to be the “keen, unusual imagination of the story writer” that “speaks of things distinctive,” that evolves, “without a great deal of effort, unusual and outstanding plots.”<sup>35</sup> Defined in such a narrow way, creative ability is more

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>33</sup> Elliott Blackiston, *Short Story Writing for Profit*, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> William Ringler, “Poeta Nascitur Non Fit: Some Notes on the History of an Aphorism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, No. 4 (Oct., 1941): 497-504.

<sup>35</sup> *Short Story Writing for Profit* (Boston, 1937), p. 39.

readily amenable to training and the exercises, making practice the very thing that augments the imaginative facility rather than the thing that impedes it through standardization. The inspiration myth, from the perspective of the fictioneer, is in fact the very thing that produces so much uninspired writing among beginners:

Usually, we write too little. We can never hope to achieve anything worthwhile until we have disciplined ourselves to writing daily. Regardless of whether we spend fifteen minutes or six hours at a sitting, we should govern ourselves so that the same time each day finds us writing. In this way we form a habit that is conducive to greater spontaneity than if we write only ‘when the spirit moves us.’<sup>36</sup>

United in their agreement writer’s potential did not lie in the frequency or intensity of her inspired moments, the manuals sought other ways to give the aspirant other ways of doing some “personal stocktaking,” to see which particular sub-field of fiction might best suit her, to see, indeed, whether she was suited to write fiction at all. The first true exercise in many manuals saw the instructor nakedly laid forth the unique demands of the profession, and its various subfields, and task the aspirant with measuring herself against them. It was often the most directly personal moment in such texts. Walter Pitkin’s *How to Write Stories* offers a representative example:

“Nobody can do this for you. You must know your own mind. You must settle for yourself what you want to get out of life, and how you prefer to spend your time.”<sup>37</sup> Pitkin’s admonishment, which tellingly comes from a chapter called “Finding Yourself,” highlights one of the central oddities that lie at the heart of the fictioneering enterprise, a bi-cameral self that consists of an impersonal, though rational, manager and a deeply individual, if inarticulate, stranger within. It is

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Pitkin, *How to Write Stories* (New York, 1923), p. 13.

to the former that handbook authors address themselves, almost invariably in the familiar second person, if only because it is the managerial self that is susceptible to good advice.

The basic aim of fictioneering was to take these qualities of daily experience and make them less self-evident through the rendering of a previously automatic process into a form of conscious work. Basil Hogarth's *The Technique of Novel Writing* (1934) summarizes the constellation of technique, training, and point of view: "With the increased powers of observation brought into play by ... daily practice, you will find yourself gradually acquiring the technique of observing from the point of view of the trained novelist."<sup>38</sup> "You" learn, as the anonymous author of *How to Write a Novel* points out, how to observe your own observations by seeing your own point of view as a fictionalized one: "observe and inquire, read and reflect; look at life from your own point of view; and just as a financier manipulates events for the sake of money, so ought you to turn all your experiences into the mould of fiction."<sup>39</sup> Writing "from your own experience," under such lights, integrates the experience and writing into a single coherent, if nonetheless constrained, action.

### III.

If the scientific discourse of fictioneering, combined with the way it circulated through the mass media, made it the emblematic literature of the machine age, such a fact has been forgotten in the popular imagination. When it comes to literary labor today, the question to ask is not whether it is a form of mechanical engineering but whether, in its institutional phase, it is work at all. To a number of observers, the period of fictioneering now looks like the golden age,

---

<sup>38</sup> Basil Hogarth, *The Technique of Novel Writing* (London, 1934), p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, *How to Write a Novel* (London, 1901), p. 20.

when writers went out into the world and performed legitimate labor. While the criticism that fiction is too worldly has given way to the criticism that it is not worldly enough, the teaching of technique and skill remains highly suspect, seemingly fundamentally opposed to the soul of literary art. Beyond the clichéd question of whether fiction can be taught, which Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* has helped us move beyond, one of the most frequent accusations brought against writing programs is that they encourage technical mastery at the expense of real world experience. The cloistered novelist, or aspirant, is cut off from life outside the walls and can do nothing other than turn inwards and play with words. The most famous formulation of this sentiment comes from Tom Wolfe's "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," a "literary manifesto for the new social novel" first published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1989. "Writers in the university creative writing programs," Wolfe opined, "had long, phenomenological discussions in which they decided that the act of writing words on a page was the real thing and the so-called real world of America was the fiction, requiring the suspension of disbelief." The writing teachers professed the "theory that the novel was, first and foremost, a literary game, words on a page being manipulated by an author."<sup>40</sup> Wolfe points to Zola and Sinclair Lewis as counter-models showing that writers needed to move outside campus walls in search of real experience. Even as the idea that theory permeates the workshop (which was true only in very select workshops to begin with) has entirely given way, the general thrust of Wolfe's claim that experience lies outside the campus gates remains familiar. The irony is that the extramural pursuit of personal experience as an imperative proceeds from a literary movement that its first-hand observers found infinitely more emblematic of the machine age than of a supposed golden age.

---

<sup>40</sup> Tom Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," *Harper's Magazine* (November 1989): 49.

Few writers are more known for an undeniably rich fund of personal experience than Jack London. As one of his many biographies puts it, he is “an American Original,” exemplifying, it seems, precisely the virtues Wolfe opposes to program fiction. London anticipated the antipathy towards the university that Wolfe and others express; his classic 1909 novel *Martin Eden* – a work that has served, perhaps unintentionally and certainly in spite of its unhappy conclusion, as one of the bestselling manuals on the practice of fiction – can be read as a failed romance with higher education, one ending in the bitterest of disappointments. Yet, in many ways, no author was ever more thoroughly schooled than Jack London; few more avidly participated in fictioneering and none profited more profoundly by it.

His career was made possible by fictioneering not only because it provided means of instruction that would otherwise have been denied to him, but also because he participated in it, solidifying his position as an author by publishing advice articles whose primary audience may well have been himself. Although he is a writer whose life was marked by the most exceptional experiences, that life was most profoundly shaped by the experience of writing and of writing about writing. Despite the outsize fame he would attain, his stature as a writer has often been wildly underestimated in literary studies because his fictions have not proved especially amenable to the dominant modes of scholarship. As a deeply self-conscious writer of the widest experience, London is the thus perfect figure with which to rethink what it means to “write from experience.”

The usual approach to London is a loosely biographical one and it seems in fact that there can never be enough biographies of him.<sup>41</sup> If London’s standing inside the academy pales beside

---

<sup>41</sup> Here is a partial sample: Robert Baltrop, *Jack London: The Man, The Writer, The Rebel* (1976); Daniel Dyer, *Jack London: A Biography* (2002); James Haley, *Wolf: The Lives of Jack London* (2004); Joan Hedrick, *Solitary*



his popularity outside of it – for most of the twentieth century he was the best-selling American author outside America<sup>42</sup> – the biographical element remains heavily foregrounded even in academic studies, partly because of its inherent drama and partly because his apparent formal unevenness disqualified him from New Critical attention, permanently consigning him to the status of a “boy’s books” author. On this point, Jonathan Auerbach has observed, “The pull toward biography in London has been so strong, in fact, that it is difficult to conceive of a way of critically interpreting his work that does not assume the concept of a personal career as the organizing principle of analysis.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Auerbach further notes, “Most discussions of London begin by listing his many occupations – tramp, oyster pirate, sailor, gold prospector, socialist,

---

*Comrade: Jack London and His Work* (1982); Carolyn Johnston, *Jack London – An American Radical?* (1984); Alex Kershaw, *Jack London: A Life* (1999); Russ Kingman, *A Pictorial Biography of Jack London* (1979); Earle Labor, *Jack London: An American Life*, (2013); Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London* (1921); *Jack London and His Times: An Unconventional Biography* (1939); James Lundquist, *Jack London: Adventures, Ideas, and Fiction* (1987); Richard O’Connor, *Jack London: A Biography* (1964); John Perry, *Jack London: An American Myth* (1981); Jeanne Campbell Reeseman, *Jack London’s Racial Lives: A Critical Biography* (2011); Andrew Sinclair, *Jack: A Biography of Jack London* (1977); Rebecca Stehffoff, *Jack London: An American Original* (2002); Irving Stone, *Sailor on Horseback: The Biography of Jack London* (1938), Jay Williams, *Author Under Sail: The Imagination of Jack London, 1893-1902*. Jack London’s fame outside the United States is such that a dozen non-English language titles could easily be added to the list. Then there are, of course, the juvenile-oriented biographies.

<sup>42</sup>On this claim, see Hank Gutman, *How Others Read Us: International Perspectives on American Literature* (Amherst, 1991), pp. 5-6, and Jonathan Auerbach, *Male Call: Becoming Jack London* (Durham, 1996), p. 1. In *Le Monde*’s survey of the 100 greatest novels of the twentieth century, *Martin Eden* ranked sixty-first in a list heavily favoring French works. It came in fifth out of ten for American novels. By contrast, *Martin Eden* does not appear on the Modern Library’s list of the “100 Best Novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” (in English), though *The Call of the Wild* nips in at #88.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Auerbach, *Male Call*, p. 5; hereafter abbreviated *MC*.

and laundryman, among others” (*MC*, pp. 1-2).<sup>44</sup> Yet, the “single occupation” that London “cared most about – in fact the only one that allowed him to make sense of himself – was that of professional writer” (*MC*, p. 2). In the way that he treats London’s professional writing as primarily building his brand and making a name for himself, however, Auerbach turns even this singular occupation back into another career concept. London becomes an advertising man, building his own brand. In turning to London’s engagement with fictioneering, for instance, Auerbach sees the “how-to” discourse on the art of fiction as “literally” treating writing fiction primarily as manufacture, a largely mechanical process to be studied, broken down into its component parts (paper, stamps, typewriters) and component skills, and then duplicated. Sending the same kind of advice to those periodicals that he was also reading for useful hints, London thus helped to recycle a kind of information aimed at “literary workers” like himself. (*MC*, p. 23)

On this account, fictioneering discourse “remarkably” avoids “virtually any talk about the content of literature” (*MC*, p.22). The novelist seeks “popular validation” through publication, making a name for himself in the most literal way and striving to ensure that such a name

---

<sup>44</sup> Auerbach made this observation in 1996. Not much has changed. The preface of Earle Labor’s 2013 biography performs exactly such a listing: “‘Prince of the Oyster Pirates’ ... by the age of fifteen, able-bodied seamen and prize-winning author at seventeen, recruit in General Kelly’s Industrial Army (also hobo and convict) at eighteen, notorious Boy Socialist of Oakland at twenty, Klondike argonaut at twenty-one, the “American Kipling,” at twenty-four, internationally acclaimed author of *The Call of the Wild* at twenty-seven, Hearst war correspondent at twenty-eight, celebrated lecturer and first president of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society at 29, world traveler on his famous *Snark* at thirty-one, model farmer at thirty-four, blue-ribbon stock breeder and rancher at thirty-eight, and the producer of more than fifty books... before his death at forty” (Earle Labor, *Jack London: An American Life* [New York, 2014], p. xiii).

became ever more recognizable. Other recent studies of London have likewise treated his approach to the profession of authorship in much the same terms, thus re-installing the very career approach they attempt to avoid; literary work simply becomes plain work.

Marsha Orgeron contends, for instance, that “London was unusually aware of the degree to which his name functioned as a kind of cultural currency that could enhance the value of his work” and traces his “savvy self-publicity” in relation to the arrival of film. Noting his fascination with the medium, Orgeron asserts that “London was speculating on the potential of this new medium to translate both literature and personality into something new and, it may be inferred, newly valuable.”<sup>45</sup> That London seeks cultural and economic currency through the medium of fiction is almost entirely incidental, although, very conveniently, the content of his writing objectivized, by pure sheer happenstance, the strategies and maneuvers by which he navigated the field: “It so happens that while London was playing this marketing game, his own writing also began to reflect the influences of this medium that promised to circulate his thoughts and ideas as well as his image.”<sup>46</sup> Contrary to this line of thought, what London’s engagement with literary work demonstrates is that, in the form of experience that fictioneering provided him with, discourse *is* content. Work indeed features as the key term in a field that is distinctly about the making of the self-made writer, but such work is not labor as classically conceived. The mistake that accounts like Auerbach’s make is to see the advice that London “recycles” as information. What London absorbs and passes on is not a static set of propositions or “work rules,” but rather a form of training. To reduce the work of writing to the production of a name

---

<sup>45</sup> Marsha Orgeron, “Rethinking Authorship: Jack London and the Motion Picture Industry,” *American Literature* 75, no. 1 (March 2003): 98.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

renames the labor process without offering an alternative. In his signature style, Peter Sloterdijk speaks to this point when he proclaims

Any one who speaks of human self-production without addressing the formation of human beings in the practising life has missed the point from the outset. Consequently, we must suspend virtually everything that has been said about humans as working beings in order to translate it into the language of practising, or self-forming and self-enhancing behavior. [T]he weary *Homo Faber*, who objectifies the world in the ‘doing’ mode ... must vacate his place on the logical stage.<sup>47</sup>

Because of the central place that self-referentiality takes in this approach, thinking in terms of practicing has the advantage over thinking in terms of productive labor because it allows the work of writing to do more than incidentally reflect – in the way that Ogeron stipulates – its influences.

London called it “an ordinary working philosophy of life.”<sup>48</sup> London is careful to distinguish such a philosophy from either from a mere body of knowledge or a set of beliefs or a mass of information – the working philosophy

has no especial concern with any one of such questions as the past and future travail of the soul, the double and single standard of morals for the sexes, the economic independence of women, the possibility of acquired characters being inherited, spiritualism, reincarnation, temperance, etc. But it is concern with all of them, in a way, and with all the other ruts and stumbling blocks of the man or woman who really lives.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

And for London it is in “really” living that one acquires a working philosophy – “the only way to gain this philosophy is by seeking it, by drawing the materials which go to compose it from the knowledge and culture of the world.”<sup>50</sup>

The tendency to separate out theory from skilled performance (and to ignore that which is neither) makes London’s argument here seem either like an unsophisticated theory or like a dubious account of how he actually writes. What makes Jack London’s formulation of the “write from experience” rule interesting, and what makes him the ideal case study of fictioneering poetics, is its focus on the “working” ground between the active life and the contemplative life, though working should be taken in the sense of practicing or training. It is not a philosophy of work, but of how to work. London tellingly stages his writerly routine in distinctly heroic terms, “Heavens, how I wrote!” he exclaims in *John Barleycorn*, “The way I worked was enough to soften my brain and send me to a mad-house ... On occasion I composed steadily, day after day, for fifteen hours a day. At times I forgot to eat, or refused to tear myself away from my passionate outpouring in order to eat.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, London’s achievement was to make a compelling and even heroic fiction out of the modern writer’s mechanistic self-making, one often lodged in terms of battle of machine against machine. London’s tale of sitting at his cramped desk and doing battle with a stubborn typewriter – “It must have been a first model in the year one of the typewriter era. Its alphabet was all capitals. It was informed with an evil spirit. It obeyed no known laws of physics and overthrew the hoary axiom that like things performed to like things produce like results” – proved compelling enough that it outlasted many of his the adventure tales, and certainly those of his competitors in the adventure market, and defined for

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Jack London, *John Barleycorn*, p. 1049.

many what it meant to be a writer.<sup>52</sup> As Michael Szalay notes in his *New Deal Modernism*, “More than any other American literary figure, Jack London provided writers of the Depression era with an idealized image of the proletarian literary ‘professional’ who succeeds by virtue of a maniacal work ethic, by working at writing as if it were a physical discipline.”<sup>53</sup> His naturalistic portrait of the writing factory, while it borrows techniques he used to represent other forms of life – say the underclass of the East End in *The People of the Abyss* – nonetheless differs in the fact that its mode of representation and the subject of its representations perfectly coincide in such a way that they mutually influence one another.

According to his daughter Joan– during the years of his furiously concentrated apprenticeship, a period that begins in 1893 but takes on a particular intensity between 1898-1901, London “pored over the magazines whose acceptances he coveted” while “he worked laboriously through books on style and structure.”<sup>54</sup> Yet, these two activities were not in fact separable. Certainly his curriculum would have included prominent periodicals such as *Overland Monthly*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s Weekly*, *McClure’s Monthly* in which he placed early stories, and many others that didn’t accept his submissions. As discussed above, such magazines, in addition to supply a steady stream of specimen stories, prominently aired discussions on how to write fiction, featured story contests, and reviewed novels and collections according to the emerging aesthetics that fictioneering promulgated. London likewise made a close study of the trade magazines like *The Writer* and *The Editor*, compiling an ever-expanding list of practical tips and essential principles. He appears to have closely studied several

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 1049.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism* (Durham, 2000) , p. 29.

<sup>54</sup> Joan London, *Jack London and His Times* (New York, 1939), p. 195

fictioneering manuals including Charles Barrett's *Short Story Writing: A Practical Treatise on the Art of the Short Story* (1898) and perhaps even Sherwin Cody's *How to Write Fiction* (1894), making him one of the first writers to have done so. Even at this early stage of his career, indeed especially at this early stage, London wrote nearly as much about writing as he wrote about violent action and exotic adventure. Given how much the latter are taken as his native, and even exclusive, themes, it can be surprising to note how early he placed advice pieces. "On the Writer's Philosophy of Life," for example, was published in October 1899, close on the heels of his first real short story "To the Man on the Trail," from January of the same year.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps the best way to connect technique and experience is through the constraints on both. The limitation imposed by the rule "to write from experience" intersects, in London, with the technique of limited point of view. As is well known, "point of view" has today ossified into the most elementary of formal concepts as well as the most basic rule of the fiction workshop. "Violations" of the technique can be treated with almost moral fervor, displaying as they supposedly do nothing short of a fundamental slovenliness. Janet Burroway, in her seventh edition of *Writing Fiction* (2007), suggests that point of view inconsistency is the signature mark of the rank beginner, one so fundamental that it can void the "contract" between the professional writer and the reader: "a writer shows his amateurism in his failure to stick to a single point of view."<sup>56</sup> Michael Kardos, a teacher at Mississippi State, offers similar counsel in 2013 that "Whatever point of view you choose for your story, establish it quickly and remain consistent."

---

<sup>55</sup>Some six years before, London had famously won a story contest in the *San Francisco Call* at seventeen, earning him a small cash prize and his picture in the paper. This early success preceded his decision, made sometime in 1898, to become a writer, though of course it may have helped motivate the choice.

<sup>56</sup> Janet Burroway, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (New York, 2007), p. 311.

Departures from the point of view contract will “seem like a mistake – ‘a point of view violation.’”<sup>57</sup>

The force with which such points are expressed and the professional standards to which they appeal tellingly comment on the anxious position of the creative writer in the university. McGurl, for instance, compelling links the stringent rules of point of view to the fiction workshop’s “masochistic aesthetics of institutionalization” and exposes how New Critical theories of fiction directly fed into the professionalization practices of the MFA program.<sup>58</sup> What is curious about the way that the New Critical theory of fiction goes on to underwrite the professional practice of a writer like Flannery O’Connor – McGurl’s central example on this point and a writer notorious for her feeling that point of view violations amount to moral failings – was that the “concept” of point of view had itself evolved from a writerly tool into a readerly theory. I briefly outlined this claim above in relation to Percy Lubbock, whose work of codifying Henry James’s remarks on point of view remain crucial, but the migration is even more evident in Norman Friedman’s classic 1955 article on “Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept.” One of the most widely cited and frequently anthologized essays on the topic, Friedman’s article typifies the way an artistic technique becomes a “critical concept.” Friedman, however, is unusual in his open engagement with fictioneering and he cites some thirty manuals in his footnotes as well as another dozen that sit on the border between literary advice and literary criticism. Embodying my claim that critics treated fictioneering manuals as if they were simply confused critical treatises, however, Friedman handles the handbooks as though they

---

<sup>57</sup> Michael Kardos, *The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer’s Guide* (New York, 2013), p. 60.

<sup>58</sup> Mark McGurl, *The Program Era* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 135. In relation to point of view and the MFA workshop, see particularly Chapter 2, “Understanding Iowa: The Religion of Institutionalization.”



were descriptive rather than prescriptive. In his teleological take, such manuals function as a sort of proto-criticism, albeit a deeply confused one, from which more mature concepts evolve. In the end, there is no real dialogue between his main text and his footnotes; a wall sits between the modernist novels he close reads in the former and the advice literature he lists in his notes, testifying to the firm separation between knowing-how and knowing-that, between the contemplative life and the active life, between, ultimately, the critic's concept and the artist's tool.<sup>59</sup>

Point of view emerged as such a critical concept in formalist work on fiction because the introduction of limits on authorial omniscience did the essential work of objectifying the fiction. As Allen Tate argued in "The Post of Observation in Fiction" (1944), "The limited and credible authority for the action, which is gained by putting the knower of the action inside its frame ... is, in all the infinite shifts of focus of which [the modern novel] is capable, the specific feature which more than any other has made it possible for the novelist to achieve an objective structure."<sup>60</sup> Somewhat curiously, the careful critical distinctions that defined the practice of formalism becomes blurred in discussions over the retreat of omniscience. Friedman and other critics often talk about the "disappearance of the author" – or even more alarmingly, "authorial extinction in the narrative art" – when they clearly mean the disappearance of the narrator (a distinction that is more carefully observed elsewhere). The confusion, however, is perfectly understandable, as the disappearance of the narrator enabled the novelist to be brought under the

---

<sup>59</sup> Friedman's essay also usefully illustrates another point made above: his long list of manuals and textbooks instances the midcentury shift from how-to manual to classroom anthology, though the two genres tellingly intermingle in his lists as if they were simply the same.

<sup>60</sup> Allen Tate, qtd in Norman Friedman, "Point of View In Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," *PMLA* 70, No. 5 (Dec., 1955): 1167.

oracular model, where an author has no privileged access to her own compositional practice.<sup>61</sup> If talk of objective structures seems like a distinctly New Critical obsession, one that the field has moved well beyond, Dorothy Hale's work suggests that point of view remains the crucial link between the novel and the social world it encapsulates. Hale argues that the bridge between formalism and critical historicism rests with a continued belief that "the novel's deeper social power lies in its capacity to objectify points of view."<sup>62</sup> Crucially, such a capacity operates regardless of authorial intention, functioning as an inherent and automatic process. Crucially, point of view on this account requires no work. Even when it encompasses more than vision, point of view is perceptual. An impression is not made, but received. In fact, the unmediated nature of the act essentially undergirds the approaches of both social formalism and cultural sociology because it is what allows a world to be usefully encapsulated in the way that the reader or analyst requires. Regardless of whether what is being objectified by the novelist is a set of social relations or an underlying ideology, point of view is the mechanism that certifies the legitimacy of representational product, but this legitimacy depends on the automaticity of the process. London's Künstlerroman *Martin Eden* exposes, by contrast, point of view as both a form of training and a result of training.

From the perspective of today's workshop writer, however, *Martin Eden* seems like a distinct mess. Where the novel seems at least to have heard that omniscience is out, the narrative systematically violates the frame that it at other times takes pains to limit itself to. The opening scene, for instance, is largely filtered through the perspective of its eponymous protagonist, but discusses him in words that he himself couldn't possibly yet possess. Having just embarrassed

---

<sup>61</sup> Norman Friedman, "Point of View In Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," pp. 1160, 1163.

<sup>62</sup> Dorothy Hale, *Social Formalism* (Stanford, 1998), p. 18.

himself by attempting to relate the tale of a knife fight to Ruth Morse, the novel's emblematic representative of the middle class, Martin recoils and the narrative notes, "Such sordid things as stabbing affrays were evidently not fit subjects for conversation with a lady. People in the books, and her walk of life, did not talk about such things – perhaps they did not know about them, either."<sup>63</sup> Though narrated in a form of free indirect style, and expressing Martin's realization, the sentence structure and its lexicon entirely exceed his capacities. The novel even suggests that Martin might have even recognized his own thought thusly expressed. After listening to Ruth talk, Martin observes, "Yes, I ain't no invalid... When it comes down to hard-pan, I can digest scrap iron. But just now I've got dyspepsia. Most of what you was saying I can't digest" (*ME*, p. 43). Likewise, even when he self-consciously tries to talk her talk, Martin can only express himself in terms that his middle class interlocutors can barely comprehend, a point of which the reader learns when the focalization shifts from Martin's thoughts to Ruth's: "'Oh,' she said, this time with an accent of comprehension, though secretly his speech had been so much Greek to her and she was wondering what a *lift* and was and what *swatted* meant" (*ME*, p. 39).

London thus seems the autodidact that he is, painfully unschooled in the arts of proper narrative management. Because he does not observe such niceties of Jamesian limited narration, a number of critics have indeed suggested that London's novels are not best suited to formal analysis at all.<sup>64</sup> Auerbach, for instance, put it this way: "Despite the best efforts to make a case

---

<sup>63</sup> Jack London, *Martin Eden* (New York, 1993), p. 38; hereafter abbreviated *ME*.

<sup>64</sup> Then again, James did not observe Jamesian limitations too strictly either, as James Tilford's 1954 "James the Old Intruder" laboriously demonstrated. Taking down *The Ambassadors*, which is still often held up as the pioneering use of limited third-person narration, Tilford observes that James subtly shifts focalization, offers information outside of the Strether's possible "compass," and allows the narrator to intrude repeatedly, such as in the "sixty-

for his formal excellence, such claims tend to downplay what I take to be one of the very sources of his power – its passionate, awkward, hyperbolic, and frequently overwrought prose style and plotting.” The crucial thing such an accusation overlooks, however, is that point of view in *Martin Eden* is not a set of rules to be observed but the embodiment of the practical approach of fictioneering. The omniscient narrator does not aspire to the grand heterodiegetic figure of the classic realist novel with a comprehensive knowledge of the novel’s world, but serves as a partially embodied figure with limited access to the characters it observes, carefully inferred from details and surroundings. The novel exposes such access as an acquired skill rather than an inherent ability by providing the history of such point of view at the level of content in the experiences of its titular character. But this history feeds back into the ghostly presence of the narrator himself, applying the very lessons that Martin learns.

The novel in fact is more aware of its point of view than it typically gets credit for, showing itself to be well aware that the very privileges it indulges in are generic conventions.<sup>65</sup> In one of the many conversations about art that occur within its pages, Ruth and Martin argue over the opera, but their conversation self-reflexively interrogates convention:

---

five” instances where the protagonist is dubbed “our friend.” James E. Tilford, “James the Old Intruder,” *Modern Fiction Studies* IV (Summer 1958): 158.

<sup>65</sup> London’s awareness of the subtleties of point of view should not be too surprising. After all, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, whatever their other merits, had offered extended lessons in limited-third person narration, serving perhaps much the same purpose that *What Maisie Knew* had famously served for James. If Buck and White Fang often think not only anthropomorphically but even in London’s peculiar vernacular, so too does Maisie sound a lot like James. It might even be fair to observe that a young child has almost as little a chance with *What Maisie Knew* as a dog does with *The Call of the Wild*.

“But you misunderstand,” Ruth protested. “Every form of art has its limitations.” (She was busy recalling a lecture she had heard at the university on the conventions of the arts.) .... In writing, ... the author must be omnipotent. You accept as perfectly legitimate the author’s account of the secret thoughts of the heroine, and yet all the time you know ... that neither the author nor any one else was capable of hearing them.

“Yes, I understand that,” Martin answered. “All arts have their conventions.” (Ruth was surprised at his use of the word ...). (*ME*, p. 255)

The supposed point of view “violation” is not only double repeated on both sides of the explanation of the convention, but it is marked out more explicitly in this passage than it often is elsewhere in the novel. Indeed, what moments like this serve to show is that point of view began as a writer’s tool and not as an aid to interpretation. London’s seeming violations are not, however, the imperfect application of a critical concept but the practical use of a convention.<sup>66</sup>

The same category mistake is made by less rule-bound critics when they perform historicizations of point of view that attribute changing conventions to extra-literary epistemic causes. The limits imposed on point of view are of a different order than those required either by rules of the post-New Critical workshop or by the determinations of philosophical or scientific discourse, but are carefully observed nonetheless, in both senses of that term.

---

<sup>66</sup> The same point can be made in relation to James as well. When a Tilford catalogs all the point of view violations and treats them as errors, he applies a different one than James himself did. For his part, E.M. Forster found strict rules about point of view a bit silly. In his *Aspects of Fiction* he urged “A novelist can shift his point of view if it comes off .... Indeed this power to expand and contract perception ..., this right to intermittent knowledge: – I find it one of the great advantages of the novel-form, and it has its parallel in our perception of life. We are stupider at some times than others; we can enter into people’s minds occasionally but not always, because our own minds get tired” (E.M. Forster, *Aspects of Fiction* [London, 1927], p. 81).

The birth of the “perspective” that the novel applies to itself happens when Martin is on vacation, after his life-ebbing stint at the laundry, a job that helped clarify the meaning of work. Martin’s vacation featured all the usual appurtenances of machine-age leisure, as he explains to Ruth:

All I've done has been to love you and think. I read some, too, but it has been part of my thinking, and I have read principally magazines. I've generalized about myself, and the world, my place in it, and my chance to win a place that will be fit for you. Also, I've been reading Spencer's “Philosophy of Style,” and found out a lot of what was the matter with me – or my writing, rather; and for that matter with most of the writing that is published every month in the magazines. (*ME*, pp. 235-6)

All this thinking gave Martin a new “perspective”: “the upshot of it all – of my thinking and reading and loving – is that I am going to move to Grub Street. I shall leave masterpieces alone and do hackwork” (*ME*, p. 235-6). Yet the decision to do so is to that he will “have my spare time for study and for real work.” And “real work,” for Martin is really practice.

In fact it is precisely the sort of practice that will prepare him to write the sort of novel that *Martin Eden* is, and even more crucially that will enable him to create the perspective that the novel itself offers.

I'll study and prepare myself for the writing masterpieces .... When I first tried to write, I had nothing to write about except a few paltry experiences which I neither understood nor appreciated. But I had no thoughts. I really didn't. I didn't even have the words with which to think. My experiences were so many fleeting pictures. (*ME*, p. 236)

This passage exactly describes Martin as he is at the novel’s outset. This opening narrates a moment of coming to consciousness, but the consciousness depicted in the opening consists

largely of fleeting pictures. When he thinks of the “stabbing affray” that he attempts to relate to Ruth, the fight “occupied a place in a picture” which the narrative evokes in a verbal image entirely beyond the capacities of the character it describes (*ME*, p. 38). In the chapters between Martin’s introduction to Ruth and his epiphanic vacation, the groundwork is laid for the realization, but it comes from the changed relation he begins to have to his own experience. As “I began,” he tells Ruth, “to add to my knowledge, and to my vocabulary, I saw something more in my experiences than mere pictures. I retained the pictures and I found their interpretation” (*ME*, p. 236).

The chapter that follows the birth of the narrative’s perspective shows the work that went into closing the gap between Martin’s initial represented consciousness and the narrative that frames it. Here the details of his training routine are fleshed out in a portrait of his famous nineteen-hour-a-day self-making binge. The idiosyncratic history and self-conscious evolution of the very language with which Martin is described in the opening is accounted for:

He never lost a moment. On the looking-glass were a list of definitions and pronunciations; when shaving, or dressing, or combing his hair, he conned these lists over. Similar lists were on the wall over the oil-stove, and they were similarly conned while he was engaged in cooking or in washing the dishes. New lists continually displaced the old ones. Every strange or partly familiar word encountered in his reading was immediately jotted down, and later, when a sufficient number had been accumulated, were typed and pinned to the wall or the looking-glass. He even carried them in his pockets and reviewed them at odd moments on the street... (*ME*, 244)

A similar accounting takes place at the level of form, rehearsing the way the new words are put together and the effects that they attempt to achieve. Martin follows the by-now familiar routine

of dissection so often modeled in fictioneering manuals where a few specimen stories lay ready for the aspirant's knife in an appendix. The continual striving for technical mastery traces its own anxieties of influence:

Reading the works of men who had arrived, he noted every result achieved by them, and worked out the tricks by which they had been achieved – the tricks of narrative, exposition, style, the points of view, the contrasts, epigrams; and all of these he made lists for study. He did not ape. He sought principles.... He wanted to know how the thing was done; after that he could do it for himself .... He dissected beauty.... And, having dissected and learned the anatomy of beauty, he was nearer being able to create beauty himself. (*ME*, p. 245)

The understanding sought in these procedures is explicitly both practical and self-aware, standing clearly as a species of know-how, yet one that worked consciously rather than automatically, even as it acknowledged the limits implied by its own restricted range of experience.

He couldn't work blindly, in the dark, ignorant of what he was producing and trusting to chance and the star of his genius that the effect produced should be right and fine. He had no patience with chance effects. He wanted to know why and how. He was a deliberate creative genius, and, before he begin a story or poem, the thing itself was already alive in his brain, with the end in sight and the means of realizing that end in his conscious possession.... On the other hand, he appreciated the chance effects in words and phrases became lightly and easily into his brain, and that later stood all tests of beauty and power. (*ME*, p. 246)



The final but crucial aspect of his training regime was to write about it, attempting to turn it into the advice he had so eagerly devoured. “Filled with these thoughts” on his composition process, Martin wrote “an essay entitled ‘Stardust’ in which he had his flings, not at the principles of criticism, but at the principal critics.” The article “was promptly rejected by the magazines as often as it was submitted,” but “that it did not see print was a matter of small moment with him.” The “writing of it was the culminating act very long mental process, the drawing together a scatter threads of thought and final generalizing but all the data with which his mind was burdened” (*ME*, pp. 246-7).

This is not to say that Martin Eden himself – or Jack London for that matter – serves as the narrator. While the novel does provide the history of a writer at the level of content, the history it offers is not a form of biography but rather a history of the training practices that make a writer – one of whom happens to be Martin Eden and another of whom happens to be Jack London. As the narrative makes clear, these practices have their own history, but they are more than that. The narrative accounts for its own procedures of knowing – or perhaps even more accurately for its procedures of coming to know – but roots these in the practical mastery of the expert writer. In doing so it resists becoming a hand-maiden for the discursive scientific or philosophical epistemologies of its historical moment, as historicist criticism will often make it out to be. Rather merely encoding these other theories into a narrative form it puts them to work, as London suggested in his “On the Writer’s Philosophy of Life” piece. In the case of London, Herbert Spencer is often mobilized, but Spencer informs the narrative only by way of supplement, as the sort of extracurricular reading required of any aspirant to fiction. *Martin Eden* thus depends on the practical epistemology – or “working philosophy” – of the fiction writer,

who has mastered the requisite observational strategies and the techniques for expressing them  
but the work of writing serves as its own form of historical action.

## Part II: Chapter Three

### Changing the Character of Modern Fiction

It's no real exaggeration to claim that the train is the emblem of modernity as such. It's not much more of an exaggeration to claim that "trains of thought" are the emblematic formal subject of the modernist novel. The decisive coupling between the two, to offer just one more mild exaggeration, happens in the debate that Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennett conducted on the representation of character in modern fiction. Woolf's literally epoch-making "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" itself unfolds within a railway carriage because, according to Woolf, the space of the railway compartment presented the paradigmatic call to write: "I believe that all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite."<sup>1</sup> Her contribution to the debate conjoins modern fiction and modern life in the realm of "character," a point she makes through what is the most familiar statement of modernism's break with the past, wry though it may have been: "on or about December 1910 human character changed" ("MB," p. 421). Long understood as an aesthetic manifesto that forthrightly declares literary modernism's most characteristic pose – an aggressive break with the past – Woolf's piece has remained a central document even as the nature of that

---

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, "Character in Fiction," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London, 1988), III: 425; hereafter abbreviated "MB." A full version of Woolf's essay was first published under the title "Character in Fiction." Convention has opted for the alternate title of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" even though a substantially different, earlier essay appears under the same name. Although I defer to convention, I work from the "Character in Fiction" version as printed in Andrew McNeillie's *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume III*. McNeillie's volume usefully notes the very minor differences between "Character in Fiction" and the final version of "Mr. Bennett and Mr. Brown" as published by the Hogarth Press. McNeillie's volume also contains the illuminating and heavily revised typescript of the paper she delivered before the Cambridge Heretics Society.

break has undergone more than two decades of serious interrogation. “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” has gained currency during this period of revision because it ties, however vaguely, the still-celebrated formal innovations of modernism to historical context, thus providing a bridge between formalism of the New Criticism and the historicism of the New Modernist Studies. Woolf’s choice to focus her manifesto on the representation of character is fortuitous as no formal technique more obviously connects with social and political problems than the representation of character. “And when human relations change,” she observes, “there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature” (“MB,” p. 422). In the way it appears to root the modernist rejection of conventional narrative techniques in the most precise of historical moments, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” thus defines the modernist novel in terms perfectly suited to a critical climate that understands form as historically informed.

This chapter urges instead that modernism emerged not through a dynamic of wholesale rejection, but rather through an engagement with techniques first articulated in fictioneering. Turning from the work on oneself examined in the previous chapter, I take up the work of making *other* people through fiction. The chapter opens by showing how most accounts of modernist formal innovation, particularly in relation to the creation of character, lack any adequate account of how writers trained to become writers. Scholarly accounts tend to posit an epistemic break that is realized only subsequently by fictional practice. Against such a narrative, the next section turns to Virginia Woolf’s pre-Bloomsbury apprenticeship, suggesting that her very conventional efforts at becoming a writer matter as much as the revolutionary ideas that her later social circle would so famously put her into contact with. The third section works from the other side, showing Arnold Bennett – Woolf’s primary antagonist and himself a signature product of fictioneering – to be much more attuned to the contingent character of life than he and

the other Edwardians are often supposed to be. Bennett is, in fact, intensely fascinated by both the fluid forms of modern life produced through modern systems of transport and the opportunities that such systems present a writer with. With other fictioneers, he sought to render the sites of modernity into an active “practice context” for the art of fiction. The final section returns to Woolf and locates in her fictions a similar, externally turned, approach to writing. I focus primarily, but not exclusively, on “An Unwritten Novel,” arguing for a fundamental, but long overlooked, continuity between her methods of writing and those of fictioneering.

## I.

Critical work over the last few decades, particularly in the vein of New Modernist Studies, has fundamentally rethought the “Great Divide” narrative that Woolf’s essay articulates so clearly, showing the gap between the high cultural elite and their less radical predecessors and contemporaries to be narrower than once thought.<sup>2</sup> Literary modernism’s vaunted autonomy has steadily eroded as the declarations of its leading figures have been shown to be more strategic than historically accurate. Indeed, it is often by way of their *strategies* that artists like Woolf, Pound, Eliot, and Joyce have been connected with the larger literary field that they had previously been supposed to stand aloof from.<sup>3</sup> When seen against a larger background that

---

<sup>2</sup>Andreas Huyssen provides the reference point here. Huyssen invoked the “Great Divide” to show how modernism depended on the constitutive opposition between high and low, famously defining modernism as an “adversary culture” that “constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion” (Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* [Bloomington, 1986], p. vii).

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Rainey influentially re-defined modernism as “the strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits its commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes commodity of a special sort” (Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism* [New Haven, 1998], p. 3). Notice that the “work” is doing the work.

includes the commercial market, popular art, broader movements in world literature, and cultural institutions, the “Georgians,” as Woolf dubbed her cohort, no longer appear as a generation apart.<sup>4</sup> Critics now read the symbolic productions of modernism, once understood as centrally concerned with the cultivation of a world unto itself, as either subtle social interventions or calculated moves within a larger economy of prestige. On one front, however, the narrative of rupture still seems secure: literary modernism remains most coherent and recognizable as a regime change in technique.

Indeed, it is not so much that formal experimentation is a feature of the period as that it makes the period, a point that explains why “Make it New!” has come to serve as its imagistic slogan.<sup>5</sup> Debates over the beginning of literary modernism – as well as debates over the expansion of the movement outside of its once quite limited borders – at least implicitly invoke formal experimentation as the mode of entrée into the club. Seemingly the only way to be denied from the ever-expanding label of modernist is to possess the retrograde formal strategies of a realism that naively aims to capture a stable and abiding real. To be sure, however, technique is no end in itself. The ends of the experiments are now connected with social programs instead of formalist preoccupations, yet technical innovation remains the period’s hallmark. Pericles Lewis

---

<sup>4</sup> As is well known, “modernist” is chiefly a retrospective label. Robert Squillace offers the useful reminder that “modernist” in 1910 primarily meant a “reform-minded Roman Catholic” (Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett* [Lewisburg, 1997], p. 192).

<sup>5</sup> Michael North has recently exposed the merely retrospective currency of Pound’s phrase, noting that, “Make It New is now such common shorthand for modernist novelty that it is easy to assume that it was always so. Yet these three words did not appear in Pound’s work, it should be remembered, until 1928, well after the appearance of the major works of modernist art and literature, and the words did not become a slogan until some considerable time after that” (North, *Novelty: A History of the New* [Chicago, 2013], p. 162).

gives the textbook version of this shift when he argues that while the new “historical understanding of modernism” shares fundamental continuities with formalist criticism insofar as it “emphasizes the immersion of modernist literature in a culture of experiment,” the New Modernist studies connects those experiments to the “central” social and political problems “of their time.”<sup>6</sup>

This continuity remains particularly secure for the novel. However much the concept of modernism in general might fall apart when grasped too tightly, when it comes to the genre of the novel technical experiment continues to hold it together. As Stephen Kern recently put it, “innovative formal techniques... are the most significant aspects of the modernist novel” and thus define the period boundaries: “*realism* and *modernism* [do] not to categorize what is real or modern, because those features can be attributed to both styles, but to refer to techniques distinctive to the periods that are known by those terms.”<sup>7</sup> As Kern here implies, the formal nature of the novel remains definitive of the period because of the seemingly stable antagonist that the modernist art novel has push back against. Such antagonism is precisely the one thing modernism as a concept requires, and the one thing in ever shorter supply. Lacking the stable historical or geographical markers that contain (or at least once contained) other literary periods, scholars defined modernism as a mode of opposition from this first, and this opposition most clearly appeared in and through the formal innovations that distinguished the practice of modernist authors from that of the realists. Such contrast in styles is most evident in the way that the two modes represent character. Character in realism consisted in a stable whole gradually revealed – or formed – by the central action of the plot. A character might be influenced by her

---

<sup>6</sup> Pericles Lewis, “Preface,” in *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge, 2007), p. xx.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Kern, *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 3.

environment or be shaped by interactions with other characters, but she ultimately provided the solid core of the narrative. In modernism, by contrast, stable character dissolves into intersubjective flux, or vanishes altogether, leaving only a palpable sense of absence. Recognizing that modernity, with the train as its emblem, demanded more a mobile form of representation, modernist writers are understood as having responded to the changes they experienced by inventing new techniques for conveying fluidity and expressing the fragmentation of identity.

Perhaps the strangest thing about this eminently familiar account is its own remarkable stability. The techniques that supposedly define modernism have come to serve almost diametrically opposed purposes in literary criticism over the last seventy years or so. The basic repertoire of techniques remains virtually unchanged as does the fact of their emergence as a reaction to both their predecessors and modernity itself. Where once interior monologue, multiple narrators, and highly restricted focalization underwrote the autonomy of modernist fiction and allowed it to represent a world apart, they are now precisely what best reveal the imprint of a historical moment and surrounding social world. The curious persistence of this technical history of modernist fiction in the face of an otherwise wholesale renovation of literary critical approach owes everything to the way that technique has been, from the New Criticism on, considered as a tool of the reader. While this literary-critical history of modernist technique seems to place the practice of the modernist artists themselves as the very center of its concerns, the actual study of modernist craft – of technique as a practice – remains vitally excluded from the field of study. Rather, the operations of the artists have been, and continue to be, inferred from the objects they produce. The writer remains very much an oracle and technique her medium, however much the message contained therein has changed. To put it in terms of



Pound's "Make it New!", critics have consistently focused on the second and third terms to the exclusion of the first. This foregrounding of the objectified "it" – the literary objects themselves – and of the purported novelty that modernism instances have worked to obscure the artistic practices of making.

"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" has settled in as the great manifesto of formal technique in fiction because of the way it conveniently amplifies Pound's commandment and proposes a complete break in artistic practice. Using the invented figure of Mrs. Brown to represent human character post-1910, Woolf argues that the traditional conventions of narrative are no longer adequate to capturing life as it is and that an entirely new set of techniques are required to do the job. The pureness of the discontinuity is figured in pedagogical terms. Woolf claimed that she and her modernist peers learned nothing from the Edwardians: "the Georgian writer had to begin by throwing away the method that was in use at the moment. He was left alone there facing Mrs. Brown without any method of conveying her to the reader" ("MB," p. 432). The modernists had to learn everything for themselves because, from 1910 on, "there was no English novelist living from who they could learn their business":

The most prominent and successful novelists in the year 1910 were, I suppose, Mr Wells, Mr Bennett, and Mr Galsworthy. Now it seems to me that to go to these men and ask them to teach you how to write a novel – how to create characters that are real – is precisely like going to a bootmaker and asking him to teach you how to make a watch. ("MB," p. 427)

In Woolf's account, the fault in the Edwardians' technique rested with the fact that they were "interested in something outside the book." ("MB," p. 428). They were interested in material conditions, in "the unsatisfactory condition of our primary schools," in the exploitation of factory

workers by “employers in Surrey who are even now smoking rich cigars.” The effect of such concern is that their books “leave one with strange feeling of incompleteness” and the idea that it is “necessary to do something – to join a society, or, more desperately to write a cheque” (“MB,” p. 428). The task of the moment, in Woolf’s eyes, was to focus on character itself. The only person to be rescued was the fictive Mrs. Brown and a book should leave one “with no desire to do anything, except indeed to read the book again, and to understand it better” (“MB,” p. 427).

It is readily apparent why this argument would appeal to the New Critics. Allen Tate thought Woolf had gotten it exactly right in insisting on the novel’s autonomy, and cites “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” with approval, noting that the “late Virginia Woolf sharply perceived” the “difference between the novelist who ... merely bounces us along and the novelist who tries to do the whole job.<sup>8</sup>” What is less immediately apparent is how the terms of Woolf’s rejection square with the more recent historical understanding of modernism, which sees writers as intervening in the culture of their time by proposing literary solutions to its central social and political problems. There is no doubt an irony in the way that the Edwardians set out to capture their moment and to intervene in the social problems of their day but somehow created a world outside history, while the Georgians set out to create an autonomous world but instead captured their moment and intervened in the social problems of their day. Yet, however incredible such a situation may seem, explanations are ready to hand. Literary art works in unpredictable ways after all; artists are not by any means entirely conscious of their own purposes; the responses of readers are never fully determined by the structure of the work. That the break is announced in the manifesto, however, gives rise to a greater difficulty. A manifesto announces a conscious plan and an explicit program, and most critics treat Woolf’s essay in precisely this way. Adrian

---

<sup>8</sup> Allen Tate, “Technique in Fiction,” p. 137.

Hunter, for instance, argues that Woolf's criticisms of Bennett, H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and its companion piece "Modern Fiction" consciously articulate an ideological critique to be pursued through the medium of fiction. Woolf's cognizance of the "multi-dimensional quality of consciousness" leads her to reject realist conventions precisely because of their problematic politics:<sup>9</sup>

Understanding the nature of experience ... inevitably leads to the abandonment of structural conventions of plot, genre, and 'accepted style'.... The break with materialist conventions in narrative technique feeds back into an ideological opposition to materialism in its broader, socio-economic sense. By challenging the 'custom' of fiction Woolf targets not just the established devices of writing but the tendency of Bennett and his fellows to think about people in terms of class and money. As Woolf sees it, modern fiction must provide a means of transcending this superficial worldview; it must resist rather than collude with the dehumanizing process of commoditization.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from Woolf's explicit denial that she had any such interests (precisely because Bennett and his fellows were concerned with addressing the dehumanizing process going on outside of books), there is the question of how Woolf came to her "understanding of the nature of experience." It wasn't through her practice of writing fiction – the realization is clearly prior and determines what form the fiction will take once written. What Woolf aims to do on this account is to find the means to "render in fictional form" that which she already knows (although she does not seem to admit to knowing it). No account is given for how she came to her realization

---

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64-5.

nor is there reason given for why she needs to put it in fictional form; she herself seemed perfectly able to realize it without such an aid.

Benjamin Bateman's "Train(ing) Modernism" offers a very similar account of the project Woolf supposedly announces in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" but aims to offer a historicist explanation for revelation that undergirds it. For Bateman, Woolf's manifesto reveals how changed historical circumstances produce new ways of thinking about social life that then call for new techniques of literary representation. Attempting to connect the suddenly altered social and sexual relationships underwritten by train transport to formal innovation in fiction, Bateman claims that the space of the railway compartment offered Woolf "glimpses [of] a less compartmentalized intimate life made possible by, but also challenged by, the moving space of the train."<sup>11</sup> Woolf's cognizance of this new social reality forced her to view the existing Edwardian "tools for characterization as ... specifically unsuited to a person in modernity, in motion, and apart from the places of permanent dwelling that anchored previous periods in British history." As momentous a change as this account conjures, a telling but characteristic vagueness lingers in this phrase. It's not at all clear if the "person" who is in modernity and in motion is the author, the character, or the reader. One is tempted to assume it could only be the author – what use would anyone except a novelist have for Edwardian tools of characterization? – but the next sentence claims a much broader target: "Because modernity and the trains that connect its various locations multiply the opportunities for chance and ephemeral encounters – indeed, they transform such encounters into a primary relational mode – they simultaneously

---

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Bateman, "Train(ing) Modernism: Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, and the Moving Locations of Queerness," in *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement 1840-1940*, eds. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries (New York, 2015), p. 186.

demand a more direct, immediate, impromptu, and improvisational interpretive approach to human relations.”<sup>12</sup>

As familiar as this sort of claim has become, it too proves every bit as slippery as Mrs. Brown. That character has become fluid because of the altered conditions brought on by modernity is taken as a given as is the notion that Edwardian techniques of novel writing are not “suited” to capturing such flux. The required “interpretive approach” remains less clear, however. If it is meant to characterize modernist writing, it’s simply false. Marked by intense revision and rewriting, many of the central modernist texts are anything but improvisational and impromptu, a point that applies directly to the repeatedly, even obsessively, rewritten “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.”<sup>13</sup> If it suggests rather that modernist writing merely indexes a change in human relationality, no explanation is offered for how such encapsulation works or why previous tools prove inadequate. Moreover, as with Hunter, this second position makes the writing dependent on a prior, and crucially extra-literary, realization, one that the manifesto, in Bateman’s view, seems to already to articulate in a fully adequate way; the fiction that follows hardly seems necessary and, worse still given the notorious difficulty of modernist prose, it seems to obscure rather than render clear the very point it would make. While a strong causal principle seems to be at work – Woolf’s understanding “inevitably leads” to her rejection of convention and the train “demands” a new interpretive approach – it remains unclear how it

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Sullivan makes the case for revision as being the modernist quality *par excellence* in her *The Work of Revision* (Cambridge, 2013). While Sullivan offers a compelling reading of modernism as the moment when revision became the mark of aesthetic excellence (in clear contrast to romanticism), the practices of revision she treats as specifically modernist were anticipated within fictioneering, most particularly in the periodical press, where elaborate strategies for revision, rewriting, and even simply erasing were proposed and debated.

produces the very specific techniques of representation that it does, particularly since whatever innovation occurs happens in a the vacuum left by the break with the Edwardians. The formlessness of the formal demands made on Woolf by modernity and its infrastructure resonate most clearly in the Bateman's punning title – "Train(ing) Modernism" – where it seems that the locomotives themselves have taken over the role of writing instructor. Formal techniques, to invoke Pound, seem simply to be something "the age demanded." Somehow more attuned to the demands of the modern moment, only Woolf and her peers answered the call.<sup>14</sup>

What accounts like these precisely lack, in fact, is any workable account of training. Bateman and Hunter, like many others who aim to come to an historical understanding of formal change, work from a model in which understanding precedes practice. Formal literary innovation, on this view, not only comes after the historical changes but it also comes after the artist has comprehended those changes. Only then can the writer develop the appropriate tools to capture what she already knows and "convey" it to her readers in "unconventional ways."<sup>15</sup> Whatever plausibility this model might have in theory largely derives from the oracular approach, but it becomes far less credible if the artist is granted at least partial access to the knowledge she has of her own craft. From such a perspective, Woolf's manifesto, far from justifying the model that Bateman and Hunter rely on, repeatedly calls any such attempt to provide a purely historicist account of formal innovation into question. If we grant a writer a partial and continually evolving knowledge of her own craft, rather than an inexplicable insight into the historical forces that govern her moment, the character of modernist characterization

---

<sup>14</sup> This account also depends on making the Edwardians particularly dense. Thus Hunter will make the (patently false) claim that Bennett "is uninterested in the actual convolutions of human personality" (Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* [Cambridge, 2007], p. 64-5).

<sup>15</sup>Bateman, "Train(ing) Modernism," p. 196.

comes to appear very different indeed. To start with, the presumed clean break with the past no longer looks so clean.

While Woolf's precisely imprecise dating has done its share to stimulate the old debate about the particular relationship between modernity and literary modernism, leading to ever more attempts to uncover the exact context of the highly aggravated reaction, the ambiguous date equally stresses the difficulty of ever finding a precise point of rupture or the fully adequate causes for it.<sup>16</sup> As far as the essay's own attitude to history goes, it offers a problem to be investigated rather than an assertion of understanding. Perhaps most obviously, the railway was coming up on its centennial as Woolf was composing her essay. Other, more cutting edge technologies were ready to hand. If the train itself was what demanded the formal innovations of modernism, artists had been stubbornly refusing to hear the call for a very long time. Except, of course, they had been listening quite closely all along. As Woolf well knew, the railway had long served as a catalyst for literary innovation and she makes a point of treating it as if were even older than it actually was, so much so that the line runs right back to the start of the novel itself. The railway compartment is not so much the movement *of* history as it is a space *with* history, specifically literary history. "All novels," after all, "begin with an old lady in the corner opposite," and the carriage that carries both the novelist and her subject "is traveling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English Literature to the next" ("MB," p. 430). Though it may not run clear to the beginnings of the novel, the railway offers a paradigmatic

---

<sup>16</sup> Edwin J. Kenney, for instances, takes very seriously taken attempt to uncover Woolf's choice of date: "I think Woolf is deadly accurate about her choice of the date 1910, for the change in her bit of the world (and here I think Bell is showing the Bloomsbury fault of limiting his vision to Bloomsbury occurrences) corresponded to changes going on within the national public life of Britain, and she knew it" (Kenney, "The Moment, 1910: Virginia Woolf, Arnold Bennett, and Turn of the Century Consciousness," *Colby Library Quarterly* 13 [1977], p. 59).

space of observation already saturated with practices of reading and writing. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch has shown, the social architecture of the railway compartment, at least the upper-class compartments, discouraged intimate conversations, and the attendant monotony meant that “the traveler’s gaze could then move into an imaginary surrogate landscape, that of his book.”<sup>17</sup> Thinking about books on trains and thinking about trains in books also meant, as Jonathan Grossman argues regarding Dickens and his public, that “the novel as an art not only could enable [the] community, whose individuals were increasingly atomized, to come to know their manifold unseen connectedness, but also ... could help to produce its self-comprehension in terms of a crisscrossing journeying of characters circulating all around.”<sup>18</sup> Even the Edwardians – so often treated as the dullest generation – were well attuned to the interconnections between transport, social relations, and the practice of writing. Arnold Bennett, the central target of Woolf’s essay, focused so endlessly on the “opportunities for chance and ephemeral encounters” made available by urban infrastructure that it was precisely on such grounds that the following generation mocked him. All in all, the train, though still the most visible symbol of modernization, more convincingly offers a chance for to connect with the past than to break from it.

A moral local belatedness appears within the essay itself. “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” is a layered, gradual response – the famous phrase itself did not appear through the first several iterations of the essay – that does not attain its finished form until 1924, nearly fifteen years after

---

<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley, 1977), p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Grossman, *Charles Dickens’s Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Oxford, 2012), p. 6.



the supposed moment of revolution, and well after the acknowledged high point of modernism.<sup>19</sup> Even on a merely personal level, the essay comes too late to the show to do much work as a herald. However much it might be argued that “Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” portends the novels to come, it looks back much more strongly to work already done. Crucially, the essay also suggests that whatever revelations Woolf came to regarding the nature of character were arrived at through the work of writing fiction; a novel or a story does not simply convey or express knowledge of character, it creates it. Woolf, after all, employs the famous inset story of Mrs. Brown in the first place because she finds it “very difficult to explain” what novelists “mean when they talk about character.” So, “instead of analysing or abstracting” she tells the story of Mrs. Brown (“MB,” p. 422). Woolf cannot put her realization another way – she can only address “character itself” through narrative. When Woolf introduces Mrs. Brown – and her own self-representation – she announces that she will tell “a simple story which, however pointless, has the merit of being true” (p. 422). Before this simple story was a true one, however, it was an unwritten novel, or more properly, “An Unwritten Novel.” Woolf’s 1920 short story of that name, later collected in *Monday or Tuesday*, stages precisely the sort of observation that “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” is supposedly a plea for. I will turn to this story at the end of the

---

<sup>19</sup> The earliest and briefest version of the essay was published on November 17, 1923 in the *New York Evening Post* under the title “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown.” Notably, the story of Mrs. Brown scarcely appears and the change in human character seems already evident in 1900; the Edwardians simply fail to remark it adequately. Woolf next presented the essay to the Cambridge Heretics Society on May 18, 1924 as “Character in Fiction.” The phrase containing “on or about December 1910” does not appear until the next version of essay surfaces in T.S. Eliot’s *The Criterion* in July 1924. In October, the Hogarth Press re-issued *The Criterion* version with only very minor revisions – apart from the title, which became “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown.”

chapter in much greater detail; the point for now is simply that Woolf's understanding of the nature of consciousness and of human character comes through her experiments in fiction.

If "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" suggests that literary practice produces understanding, it thus also suggests that aesthetic manifestos themselves might need to be read differently than we are accustomed to reading them. It might even be suggested that literary critics have long read this signature nonfictional prose form of literary modernism backwards. We read them as if understanding had to precede innovation, and that invention must first be announced. We read them as a polemical form of theory when they might better be read as a form of polemical practice. As a genre, they are perhaps closer to the how-to handbooks of fictioneering than to anything else. How broadly this claim applies remains an open question, but it aptly describes "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and suggests that Woolf offers a hypothesis rather than a conclusion. Her understanding of human character does not determine her practice, but rather her practice generates her understanding of character and distances her from the immediate demands of the historical moment by playing those demands through the filter of literary activity. Woolf's use of the spaces of modernity works as a very deliberate practical exercise that makes these spaces into a training apparatus of sorts. The space of the railway offers certain opportunities and imposes certain constraints, and Woolf makes conscious use of both in her ongoing, but ultimately unsuccessful, pursuit of Mrs. Brown. Given such an approach, it makes most sense to think of the railway compartment as a "practice context." While rooted in a historical moment, such a practice zone brings into view an array of specific, self-consciously deployed literary techniques, many of which fail. Indeed, one of the advantages of thinking in terms of practice contexts is that it brings to light the intentions that are not fully realized in the finished work.

Attending to the practice contexts of literary modernism performs the now-familiar move of emphasizing how modernism participates in history yet, it also preserves a space of relative autonomy by insisting that the work of writing produces very specific material effects. Foremost among these effects would be the knowledge an artist becomes aware of in the practice of writing (and will self-reflexively apply to new situations). That is to say, practice is specific, it aims at both improvement and accomplishment – but does not always reach either. Though intentionally pursued, it creates – in both its failures and its successes – effects, and these effects often echo outside the arena of activity. Attending to Woolf’s development as a history of training brings into view the full range of her career, one which has itself often also been seen in terms of rupture. Just as modernism writ large has repeatedly been figured as a revolutionary break with preceding literary practice, so too has Woolf’s career been seen in terms of a sudden revolution that proceeds from an epiphanic revelation. On this view, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” announced not only a rejection of her Edwardian predecessors but also a rejection of her very long and surprisingly conventional apprenticeship. In what remains, I will argue that Woolf’s great innovations were achieved by working through the very conventions she is supposed to have thrown away. Her signature techniques developed as an intensification of conventional ones that she is often supposed to have abandoned altogether.

## **II.**

The traditional portrait of Woolf made her out to be utterly impractical. It’s an image she herself cultivated, most notoriously in her late screed “Middlebrow” but none the truer for it, as the New Modernist Studies has stressed. While Woolf’s relations with the market have become much more nuanced and while she has been shown to be very canny indeed in certain of her

strategies both in the marketing of her own work and in the marketing of other works from the Hogarth Press, a similar pragmatism has not been extended to her development as a literary artist. Most studies of her “apprenticeship” continue to emphasize the high cultural milieu that she had increasing access to from her early twenties on. Noticing precisely such a “gap in Virginia Stephen’s apprenticeship,” Beth Rigel Daugherty recently posed the question “How *did* the young woman learn her craft?”<sup>20</sup> The first possibility that Daugherty entertains is that Stephen learned her craft from fictioneering manuals, but she dismisses it quickly, finding it unlikely that the young author had “consulted” any manuals in first place and claiming that she would have found nothing useful even if she had. Ultimately Daugherty concludes that Virginia Stephen must have taught herself her craft by using her own book reviewing as a surrogate form of instruction. Comparing the situation with the MFA programs that have come to dominate literary instruction for the past half century, she writes “nothing parallel to such an apprenticeship was available to young writers in the early twentieth century and certainly not to Virginia Stephen.”<sup>21</sup>

In making her assessment, Daugherty relies on Peter Keating’s *The Haunted Study* (1989). While Keating’s classic work is notable for including any mention of fictioneering at all, the glimpse it does offer is limited. Paying very little heed either to the magazines or to the fictioneering manual in the classical form it attains after the turn of the century, Keating treats the broad surveys of the entire literary field, such as Percy Russell’s *The Literary Manual*, and the publishing pamphlets such as *The Methods of Publishing* (put forth by the Society of Authors

---

<sup>20</sup> Beth Rigel Daugherty, “Reading, Taking Notes, and Writing: Virginia Stephen’s Reviewing Practice,” in *Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace*, ed. Jeanne Dubino (New York, 2010): 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

in 1890) as the representative examples.<sup>22</sup> It is no surprise then that Daugherty, in working from such a limited sample, claims manuals “are more about breaking into the market, earning a living at writing, and preparing manuscripts than about how-to or craft.”<sup>23</sup>

As should now be evident, Woolf could have found an immense amount on how-to and craft both in the specialized manuals on fiction and in the magazines that were flourishing right at the moment of her apprenticeship. Indeed, fictioneering proved particularly useful and appealing for those who, like Woolf, were denied the opportunities offered by a university education.<sup>24</sup> For the advanced student, there were the specialized journals on writer’s craft that covered every phase of the writing process, but the eager aspirant could find advice almost anywhere in the periodical press. A writer of Stephen’s age and interest would have found *Atalanta* very useful indeed.

L.T. Meade’s magazine specifically aimed to fill the very void that Daugherty claimed above. From the first, the young female literary aspirant was Meade’s abiding concern, and she collected an impressive stable of teachers including Walter Besant, the original fictioneer. In his initial contribution to the magazine, which appeared in the third issue (1887), Besant offered some counsel that intriguingly parallels advice that Woolf would offer forty years later. In the first part of “On the Writing of Novels,” Besant observed, “It is sometimes difficult for a girl to command regular hours of work, and a study, or room, all to herself. Yet without both it is

---

<sup>22</sup> Although dismissive of the literary advice genre, Keating does single out Arnold Bennett’s *How to Become an Author* as an unusually useful manual. See below for more on Bennett’s manual, which serves as something as a transition from the encyclopedic manual to the classical how-to handbook.

<sup>23</sup> Daugherty, “Reading, Taking Notes, and Writing: Virginia Stephen’s Reviewing Practice,” p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> In such an exclusion, Woolf finds common ground with middlebrows and Edwardians she so resolutely criticizes elsewhere.

impossible to learn anything.”<sup>25</sup> In the various changes that human character would undergo in the years to come, Besant’s paternalism would distinctly lose its flavor, but the core of the advice, and it is a very material core, remains. Besant may be artless and overconfident where Woolf is sophisticated and ever-hesitant, but both strongly emphasized “the importance of material things”:<sup>26</sup>

The morning is the best time for work, and if the other rooms are wanted by different members of the family, a writing-table must be placed in the bedroom. But, above all, let it be distinctly understood that you want to work and must be alone and undisturbed for certain hours. Of course we know very well that there will be no kind of sympathy with this kind of work, and no belief in success. Nobody gets so persistently snubbed as the young person who declares her intention of writing. But be bold: never mind ridicule: say openly that you are going to learn how to write. State fairly, what ordinary people never understand, that Fiction is an Art, like painting, and that you are setting yourself resolutely to the acquisition of that Art, if it be in your power, whatever may come of it in the end.<sup>27</sup>

In the remainder of the article, Besant offers a *mélange* of practical tips, many of which he had rehearsed elsewhere, though here specifically directed to the readers of *Atalanta*. While he did issue an especial warning regarding the temptation to publish in vanity presses, Besant’s focus is squarely on how-to and craft throughout the piece. Besant places particular emphasis on regularity of work habits and the daily writing of “original material.” He then recommends

---

<sup>25</sup> Walter Besant, “On the Writing of Novels: Part One,” *Atalanta* 1 (1887–88): 165.

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (New York, 1981), p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Besant, “On the Writing of Novels: Part One,” p. 165.

beginning with the short story form, as “there can be no better exercise than the short story” for preventing the tendency to “sprawl.”<sup>28</sup> In an era when MFA programs have institutionalized such a procedure, this recommendation may well seem obvious beyond mention, but it was not so in 1887. The publisher’s practice of paying by the word had made “sprawl” a particularly useful strategy, and the previous generations leading novelists had typically seen short stories as distractions. The short story as a technical exercise could only begin to make sense in an era that viewed fiction as an art. The artistry of fiction is also emphasized in his further recommendation that poetry be employed in the service of developing a prose style. The poems themselves, he concedes, may amount little, but the aspirant will find that her prose will be “unconsciously benefited by the attempt to write verse.”<sup>29</sup> The point not to be missed here is that the art of verse is subordinated to the art of fiction. It was perhaps not an altogether radical point, but one that English departments would be hesitant to concede until the middle of the next century.

Much of the rest of article offers a condensed version of points he makes elsewhere, but the practical emphasis is foregrounded throughout. The eighth item in his list, for instance, turns to character and admonishes his readers to “*Avoid the sin of writing about a character*”: “Do not for instance tell us what she felt any more than is necessary. Make her, as much as you can, reveal herself in dialogue and action: or let her be revealed by the talk of her friends. Miss Charlotte Yonge, I remember, used to make the less important characters talk about the heroine a great deal, and it was sometimes effective.”<sup>30</sup> By way of conclusion, Besant announces that “a clever girl,” if she “patiently follow up for two or three years these simple rules,” can go on to

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

“construct the rest of the Art of Fiction for herself.”<sup>31</sup> He does, however, promise a second “more advanced” article should he receive sufficient encouragement from the readers of *Atalanta*.

Besant evidently received ample encouragement along these lines and duly sent forth the second article featuring the dissection of a sample story. Engaging the readership in this way featured broadly in late nineteenth century periodical culture, though the distinctly high literary pedagogical impulse of *Atalanta* was less commonplace, particularly as it came to rely more and more on guidance of women writers once Besant and author male writers had helped secure its early standing. Certainly, the ongoing “School of Fiction” feature, also discussed above, would have offered a young woman like Stephen instruction, opportunity, and the example of professional women writers with a solid mastery of their craft. The prize competitions seem to have stimulated a wide response and even those would-be writers who did not chose to pay for feedback could have compared their failed efforts with the winning prize stories penned by their peers. Another ongoing feature aimed particularly at women denied the opportunity to pursue formal literary studies. “The Scholarship and Reading Union” closed each issue. The “Union” was a variation the usual magazine prize competitions in that it featured an essay on a major literary figure with a follow-up essay prize competition on literary subjects. The prize questions depended on information given in the essay, but encouraged the “students” to take their own measure of the subject. The one from the January 1888 issue is typical:

SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION QUESTIONS.

- I. What do you conceive to have been the limits of Jane Austen's genius?
- II. Discuss the delineation of character in Emma.
- III. What is a Novel of Manners?

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 166.



N.B. — Subscribers are requested to select one or at most two of the above questions.

Answers must not in any case exceed the limit of 500 words.<sup>32</sup>

The top two prize-winning essays featured in a subsequent issue along with a list of “honourable mentions.” Virginia Stephen was likely too young to have followed *Atalanta* from its inception and may never have read an issue at all, even though it continued publication until 1898. But fictioneering advice had a tendency to echo through the years. Consider a glowing 1889 review of the magazine in the *Church Quarterly* that singled Besant out for particular praise:

Mr. Besant gives would-be novelists the benefit of his experience in two admirable papers ‘On the Writing of Novels.’ These abound in capital hints and warnings, which ought to be laid to heart by all youthful aspirants to fame in this walk of literature. The rules which he lays down for those who wish to acquire the art of fiction are so full of good sense and wisdom that we cannot forbear to quote a few of the most important, for the sake of those among our readers who have not seen the articles in question.<sup>33</sup>

Much counsel was reproduced in the manner, and many fictioneering manuals featured appendices directing aspirants to specific articles in periodicals. While *Atalanta* was uncharacteristically literary, fiction contests were common, most famously perhaps those conducted in *Tit-Bits*. The Stephens sisters, like Arnold Bennett, entered avidly.<sup>34</sup> James King

---

<sup>32</sup> “Scholarship Competition Questions,” *Atalanta* I (1887–88): 231.

<sup>33</sup> “Atalanta,” *Church Quarterly Review* 27(1889): 501.

<sup>34</sup> *Tit-Bits* was something of a common classroom for the Edwardians and the Modernists. As Hugh Kenner notes in his signature fashion: “Though craft of perhaps a low order, *Tit-Bits* fiction did take craft. Unsurprisingly, winners’ names recur: hacks, very likely, moonlighting. London teemed with hacks, doing work that is not for dabblers. One time a submission came in from Joseph Conrad, a penniless certified mariner; another time from James Joyce, a cheeky schoolboy. But neither displayed *Tit-Bits* skill, nor did the prepubescent Virginia Stephen, who tried too. She

suggests that one (now lost) story she sent in to *Tit-Bits* “contained the seeds of *The Voyage Out*,” Woolf’s first novel, “in miniature.”<sup>35</sup> Around the same time, in the mid-1890s, the Stephens children put together their own little magazine – *The Hyde Park News Gazette* – with Virginia taking the lead. Though light-hearted in tone, it seems to have resembled *Atalanta* in its general format and interests.<sup>36</sup> The precise reading and writing habits of the young woman who became the modernist icon can probably never be fully recovered, but the opportunities for learning fictional craft abounded, with articles on, contests in, and debates over fiction appearing in journals, magazines, and newspapers of every stripe. The most concentrated opportunities came in the full-length manuals devoted entirely to fiction that began to appear at the turn of the twentieth century. By the time Stephen had begun her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, in 1907 dozens were in circulation. Whether she consulted any during her apprentice years in even a glancing way is uncertain – perhaps she came across some while teaching evening courses at Morley College in the years immediately prior to beginning *The Voyage Out*. It is certain, however, that she read at least one in a later, and equally crucial, phase of her career.

In “The Anatomy of Fiction,” a 1919 review in the *Athenaeum*, Woolf took up the tenth-anniversary edition of Clayton Hamilton’s *Materials and Methods of Fiction*. Her scathing assessment of Hamilton’s fictioneering handbook instances a collision between the construction model of art seen from the maker’s side and the contemplation model in which the paradigmatic

---

and her sister, Vanessa were faithful readers [...] And by no means were all beginners rejected; Arnold Bennett first got published in its pages, age 24 (the contest winner, 20 guineas), and so did Aubrey Beardsley, age 17 (a column and a half, £1. 10s. od.)” (Kenner, *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers*, p. 20).

<sup>35</sup> James King, *Virginia Woolf* (London, 1995), p. 51.

<sup>36</sup> King reports that it featured “adventure and love stories,” “bulletins on the activities of the Stephen children,” and “potted” biographies of young women (King, *Virginia Woolf*, pp. 48-51).

experience is that of the spectator or reader.<sup>37</sup> This collision might be scaled to the terms of Woolf's writing career, where the work of her apprenticeship – with its *Tits-Bits* submissions, magazine story imitations, commercial journalism, and her first two relatively conventional novels – collides with Bloomsbury aesthetics.

An emphatically articulated version of the contemplation model lay very close indeed at hand to Woolf in Clive Bell. Bell was close at hand not only because he was her brother-in-law (officially at least), but also because an early version of his “Cezanne” appeared in the same issue of the *Athenaeum* as “The Anatomy of Fiction.”<sup>38</sup> Bell's *Art* (1913) offers what is nothing short of the cult version of the contemplation model, claiming simply that “art is a religion.”<sup>39</sup> *Art*, Bell continues, “is an expression of and a means to states of mind as holy as any that men are capable of experiencing.”<sup>40</sup> Crucially, however, it is not the artist but the spectator or reader who experiences this state of mind. It is not the creation of a work but rather “the contemplation of pure form” that “leads to a state of extraordinary exaltation and complete detachment from the concerns of life.” The contemplation of art in fact provides a “sanctuary from life,” one devoted to the “cult of aesthetic emotion.” As with any proper object of worship, art works served as “as ends in themselves” such that the “chief importance of art” is not “in its relation to conduct or its practical utility.” However much Bell may have sometimes, in his “giddier moments” that this cult could lead to the “salvation of the world,” its members undeniably consisted of those elect

---

<sup>37</sup> I borrow the terms from M.H. Abrams. See introduction above for a fuller explanation.

<sup>38</sup> The issue also featured E.M. Forster's “St. Athanasius.” Notably, John Middleton Murry – recently married to Katherine Mansfield – had been appointed editor just the month. The contributors he'd assembled for the May 16 issue testifies to the sudden resurgence of the venerable (founded 1828) journal.

<sup>39</sup> Clive Bell, *Art* (New York, 1914), p. 277.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

few “who can feel the significance of form.”<sup>41</sup>

Woolf finds a very different mode of worship at work in Hamilton’s handbook. Ostensibly open to anyone, Hamilton’s cult depends on works, in this case the exhausting work of learning the art of fiction. His dour acolytes, for instance, learn how to take a story apart, they learn the names of all its parts, and then learn to put it back together, not once, but “eleven times over,” each time “with a different kind of emphasis” (AN, p. 45). What do they hope for?

For long it seemed that nothing could reward [Hamilton’s devoted followers] for having written eleven themes upon the eleven kinds of emphasis. But now we perceive dimly that there is something to be gained by the daily flagellation of the exhausted brain. It is not a title; it has nothing to do with pleasure or literature; but it appears that Mr Hamilton and his industrious band see far off upon the horizon a circle of superior enlightenment to which, if only they can keep on reading long enough, they may attain.... Will Mr Hamilton be admitted? Can they have the heart to reject anyone so ardent, so dusty, so worthy, so out of breath? (“AN,” pp. 45-6)

Finding him a false prophet (and, perhaps even more damning, an American), Woolf avers that whatever glimpses Hamilton may catch of the promised land he will never reach it: “No; Mr Hamilton will never be admitted; he and his disciples must toil for ever in the desert sand, and the circle of illumination will, we fear, grow fainter and farther upon their horizon.” After such a harsh condemnation, Woolf gathers herself for a beat, only to conclude: “It is curious to find, after writing the above sentence, how little one is ashamed of being, where literature is concerned, an unmitigated snob” (“AN,” p. 46).

Woolf’s snobbery is well-worn territory; perhaps the only notable thing about it is how

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 35, 292.

nakedly it is expressed here, so much so that it belies her claims to be a sufficiently cultivated snob. The pose of the snob requires its own toil, but such toil must not show.<sup>42</sup> What the snobbery does cover over, however, is a more substantive engagement with the methods and materials of fictioneering that happens in a more secular register. As the title of the review article indicates, the other trope she applies to her review is one from the biological sciences, comparing Hamilton to an uneasy anatomy instructor standing before a thoroughly dissected frog, innards arrayed before him, but bound to the promise that he will make it “hop” again (“AN,” p. 55). The point was a cliché this time; Besant had recommended the “dissecting” of a story as an invaluable exercise in *Atalanta* and elsewhere in the 1880s, and the practice became a regular feature of fictioneering manuals and articles. Complaints that dissection took the life out of the story were nothing new either, but the attempt to capture “life” will become the guiding metaphor, or perhaps even obsession, of Woolf’s essays on the art of fiction for the next half dozen years. When Woolf engages Hamilton in this way, she does so as not in the quasi-religious terms encouraged by the contemplation model that Bell erected at the center of his aesthetic but in practical terms that center on the use of tools and techniques. As such, “The Anatomy of Fiction” figures into the larger debate over the representation of character in fiction and provides

---

<sup>42</sup> Woolf serves as the most conspicuous example in Sean Latham’s *Am I a Snob? Modernism and the Novel* (Ithaca, 2003). Latham charts both the work Woolf puts in to be a snob and the work being a snob does for Woolf, but finds her negotiations of his titular question (which comes from an unpublished essay of Woolf’s) more complicated than the end of “The Anatomy of Fiction” would suggest. Latham employs a Bourdieuvian framework to show how questions of snobbery circulate within the symbolic market of capitalism, but because he sees the trope of the snob as bringing negotiations of cultural and symbolic capital to conscious attention, his readings tend to exceed the theoretical framework he sets them in. For whatever reason, Latham neglects the blatant confession Woolf makes at the end of her review, but he would presumably see it as the misstep of a snob in training.

a useful reminder that the debate took up the “methods and materials of fiction” and did so from the perspective of the maker.

“The Anatomy of Fiction” appeared just weeks after Woolf’s far better known essay “Modern Novels” – which offers her first real sally against the Edwardians.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the title of Hamilton’s book title obviously echoes the central charge of “materialism” that she so famously levels against Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells in “Modern Novels.” The coincidence suggests that the charge of being a materialist might mean something more than what it is usually taken to mean. Bennett’s flaw is not only that he focuses solely on the externals to the neglect of what is inside or that he possesses a merchant’s understanding of literature as a commercial endeavor, but also that he is excessively attentive to the materials of fiction. Right after dubbing him a materialist Woolf observes:

Mr Bennett is perhaps the worst culprit of the three [Edwardians], inasmuch as he is the best workman. He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in. There is not so much a draught between the frames of the windows or a crack in the boards. And yet – if life should refuse to live there?<sup>44</sup>

Woolf’s worry seems to be that an excessive concern with one’s materials might itself lead to a worse, more general materialism. And yet, sometimes it doesn’t. In the less quoted follow-up to her charge against Bennett, Woolf admits that he did indeed “surmount” the “risk” of

---

<sup>43</sup> As with many of her essays, “Modern Novels” exists in a number of versions. I here quote from the version published in the *Times Literary Supplement* on April 10, 1919. She revised it for her *Common Reader* volume I and re-titled it “Modern Fiction.”

<sup>44</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Modern Novels,” *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London, 1988), III: 32; hereafter abbreviated “MN.”

constructing a book so well that it refused to admit life as well as decay. “His characters,” Woolf concedes, “live abundantly, even unexpectedly” (“MN,” p. 32). More curiously, she even notices that his characters are adapting rather well to the changes of the day. Contrary to Bateman’s charge above that the Edwardians’ “tools for characterization” were “specifically unsuited to a person in modernity, in motion, and apart from the places of permanent dwelling that anchored previous periods in British history,” Woolf observes that “More and more [Bennett’s characters] seem to us, deserting even the well-built villa in the Five Towns, to spend their time in some softly padded first-class railway carriage, fitted with bells and buttons innumerable” (“MN,” 32). Woolf and the characters she created – not least Mrs. Brown – will soon join Bennett on the line, though perhaps not the first-class carriage.<sup>45</sup> Once she does, however, she has a further question to pose: “it still remains to ask how do they live, and what do they live for?” (“MN,” p. 32).

How to live? No one more earnestly took the question to heart than Arnold Bennett. In her review of Hamilton’s *Methods and Materials of Fiction*, Woolf had seen fictioneering as a uniquely American phenomenon. Indeed, Woolf suggests that the only lesson Hamilton’s does offer is that it “teaches us a great deal about the Americans” (“AN,” p. 45).<sup>46</sup> Fictioneering, as shown above, originated in Britain, and however much it might have thrived once it crossed the

---

<sup>45</sup> To suggest that Bennett, however, somehow overlooked the masses is simply wrong. Bennett was of the masses, and many of his fictions feature neither well-built villas nor first-class carriages. The most vociferous voice on this front is John Carey, who made Bennett the “hero” of his distinctly anti-modernist polemic *Intellectuals and the Masses* (New York 1993).

<sup>46</sup> The assertion that it was a uniquely American “achievement” derives partly from the idea that the short story, to which so many fictioneering handbooks addressed themselves, was somehow a peculiarly American genre as was the how-to manual. Both claims are the vast oversimplifications endemic to any broad generalizations about national character – generalizations that were of course a part and parcel of the short story genre in this period.

Atlantic, it remained at play in the British literary scene, no where more evidently than in the person of Bennett. Alongside Jack London, Bennett is one of true fictioneers *extraordinaire*. London and Bennett have much in common, but the latter writer offered his advice more freely and more widely. Like London, and many other fictioneers, Bennett did not wait to offer advice until he was an established author. It might even be fairly said that Bennett learned to write in large part by overhearing himself tell others how to write. Bennett's subject, however, was not just how to write, but *How to Live*, to quote the immodest title he gave to the collected volume of his "Pocket Philosophies." Bennett's how-to books, both those on writing and those on life, have likely done irreparable harm to reputation, seemingly testifying to the insipid materialist imagination of the Edwardians. What could more clearly instance their limits than the fact that they not only thought that life could be solved but that they had found the solution?

*How to Live*, however, ought to have come with a terminal question mark, for even these works are animated by a persistent, if submerged, skepticism about the possibility of self-knowledge. Such skepticism is even more evident in his fictions, where it extends to the characters he represents, characters who remain opaque even to their creator. Like Woolf, Bennett found the life his characters displayed "unexpected." In this Bennett defies the common judgment that the Edwardians, in building their solid, stable characters, refused to acknowledge the contingent character of life. The Edwardians, and Bennett chief among them, were highly attuned to the interconnections between transport, social relations, and the practice of writing. The usual tendency to treat them as naïve realists not only amounts to a failure to understand their fictions, but a failure to understand the modernist novel as well since so much depends upon the opposition. When modernist novelists took up arms against the Bennett's generation, they specifically engaged them at the level of technique, but this very move makes modernist



experiments a culmination of the project their predecessors had begun. Long before Woolf stepped into the compartment with Mrs Brown, writers like Bennett had established the railway system and the other emerging “non-places” of modernity as ideal training grounds for novelists.<sup>47</sup> These locations, virtual fictions themselves, provided an ideal place to experiment with the techniques of the novel and short story in an attempt to make prose narrative the signature art-form of the modern. More than anything, Bennett’s self-conscious experiments with the representation of character revealed the deeply accidental nature of his own career, one most visible in space of the railway, that great symbol of modernity’s inexorable advance.

### III.

At first blush, Bennett’s career seems an improbable place to begin an exploration of the accidental. Perhaps the best-known English novelist in his time, Bennett worked over the subject of do-it-yourself-fashioning both in his own life and in a vast and varied body of writing.<sup>48</sup> He turned avidly to the materials offered by fictioneering because he had few other pathways to the profession of literature. He hailed from the grim industrial hinterlands of the Potteries – retaining a marked provincial accent even though he spent most of his life in London and Paris. He left school at sixteen, but made up for his lack of formal education by becoming a keen student of newspapers and journals, avidly participating in the interactive literary culture they offered. It was a fitting start for a figure who, in his later career as a taste-making journalist, “brought his

---

<sup>47</sup> On “non-places” see Mark Augé, *Non-places: an Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> On the claim for Bennett’s preeminence see Samuel Hynes, “The Whole Contention Between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf,” *Novel* 1 (Fall 1967): 35.

readers news about literature,” as John Gross puts it.<sup>49</sup> What kept his career going was the rigor he applied to developing his art. Keeping, in Robert Squillace’s apt formulation, “time schedules as inviolable as an English railway,” Bennett seemed a self-propelled writing machine.<sup>50</sup> His mistake was to candidly recommend such an approach to others.

Bennett’s inviolable time schedules helped produce an astounding corpus, but an oddly mixed one that appears anything except systematic. After his initial failures in provincial newspaper contests, his first success was fitting if modest, a prize-winning “humorous condensation” of a sensational serial in George Newnes’s *Tit-Bits*, the very weekly paper Woolf would unsuccessfully submit some of her earliest stories to. Months later he published a short story in the *Yellow Book*, separated mere pages from one by Henry James. His first novel, *A Man from the North* (1898), was a self-conscious art-novel. His next work of fiction abandoned all artistic pretensions and aimed at succeeding in commercial market by exploiting the public taste for sensational serials. In short order, he invented the “hotel novel” with his even more successful serial, the smash-hit *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902). In this same period, he was

---

<sup>49</sup> John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: A Study of the Idiosyncratic and Humane in Modern Literature* (London, 1969), p. 216. Bennett’s reviews in *The Evening Standard* were influential enough that they were thought to determine the course of a new novel’s receptions. In such a capacity, he was instrumental in introducing the modernist authors who would come to supplant him. While Joyce was the only novelist whom he considered to have truly advanced the art of the novel, he reviews of those who would go on to become the canonical modernists tended to be positive on the whole. Ironically enough, for all that has been made of his quarrel with Woolf, Bennett reviewed *Orlando* positively enough that she used a blurb from the to advertise the work. See John K. Young, “‘Murdering an Aunt or Two’: Textual Practice and Narrative Form in Virginia Woolf’s Metropolitan Market,” in *Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace*, ed. Jeanne Dubino (New York, 2010): 187.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Squillace, “Arnold Bennett’s Other Selves,” in *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*, ed. by Marysa Demoor (New York, 2004): 164.

also pouring out domestic advice under the pen name “Judy” in *Woman* magazine. His experiences here helped him with his first major non-fiction work, a self-help handbook titled *Journalism for Women*. Bennett kept up this indiscriminate literary output for the rest of his career, producing highly-regarded serious novels like *Anna of Five Towns*, *Old Wives’ Tale*, *Clayhanger*, and *Riceyman Steps*, alongside a great deal of light fiction that is now long out of print and forgotten. His short story collections earned enthusiastic critical praise, and while his plays, all moderately successful in their day, are very seldom performed, his film *Piccadilly* was recently restored and rereleased (2004). His output is perhaps even more impressive from a synchronic perspective. In a journal entry closing the account on 1908, he tallies it thus: “*Buried Alive*,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of *Old Wives’ Tale*, *What the Public Wants*, *The Human Machine*, *Literary Taste: How to Form It*; about half a dozen short stories including *A Matador in the Five Towns*; over 60 newspaper articles. Total words, 423,500.”<sup>51</sup> Other novelists have occasionally been as productive, but few, if any, have found success as both a literary novelist and a self-help guru. Bennett wrote at least eight how-to books, perhaps ten if generic conventions are slightly stretched, including the two – *The Human Machine* and *Literary Taste* – from 1908. In *The Human Machine*, Bennett laments that humans remain amateurs in the art of living because “no scientific sustained attention is yet given to the real business of living, of smooth intercourse, of self-expression, of conscious adaptation to the environment – in brief, to the study of the [human] machine.”<sup>52</sup> For Bennett, as he outlines in his most popular work of all, *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*, the best time for a human machine to study itself scientifically is when it is in

---

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Samuel Hynes, “Introduction,” in Arnold Bennett, *The Author's Craft and Other Critical Writings of Arnold Bennett*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Lincoln, 1968): xii.

<sup>52</sup> Arnold Bennett, *The Human Machine*, vol. 2 of *How to Live* (Garden City, 1925), p. 17.

the belly of another machine. As deliberate and systematic as this approach seems, however, it is precisely when Bennett himself worked most systematically at establishing his name that we can most clearly and usefully descry the presence of contingency.

His debut novel *A Man from the North* (1898) opens in a provincial train station and concludes atop an omnibus bound for the suburbs; everything that one would want to know about the plot can be deduced from the way it commutes its hero. As the title indicates, however, this hero is not a properly individuated character but rather a “certain type of youth” for whom the “metropolis, and everything that appertains to it, has for him an imperious fascination.”<sup>53</sup> Such is the draw of London that this youth spends his days at the station, gazes “curiously into the carriages,” “stands by the hot engine and envies the very stoker.” Though he never purchases a fare, the ticket clerk “knows him well” and “long before his school days are over [...] he learns to take a doleful pleasure in watching the exit of the London train from the railway station.”<sup>54</sup> The equation of education and transport is nearly complete and the time this youth spends loitering in the train station replaces any attempt to narrate his childhood, family life, or formal schooling. The materials that fill out the substance of this certain type, and that carry him from boyhood to early manhood, arrive everyday on the very London train he so identifies with but has not yet taken: “London is the place where newspapers are issued, books written, and plays performed. And this youth, who now sits in an office, reads all the newspapers.” Indeed, like the train and the newspaper this abstract character is, above all, a relay point for information: “He can tell you off-hand the names of the pieces in the bills of the twenty principal West-end

---

<sup>53</sup> Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (New York, 1911), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

theatres, what their quality is, and how long they may be expected to run.”<sup>55</sup> Later in the novel, this youth will find exactly the sort of articles Bennett himself would soon supply:

In a half-crown review he saw an article, by a writer of considerable repute, entitled “To Literary Aspirants,” which purported to demonstrate that a mastery of the craft of words was only to be attained by a regular course of technical exercises; the nature of these exercises was described in detail. There were references to the unremitting drudgery of Flaubert, de Maupassant, and Stevenson, together with extracts chosen to illustrate the slow passage of the last-named author from inspired incompetence to the serene and perfect proficiency before which all difficulties melted. After an unqualified statement that any man — slowly if without talent, quickly if gifted by nature — might with determined application learn to write finely, the essayist concluded by remarking that never before in the history of literature had young authors been so favourably circumstanced as at that present. Lastly came the maxim, *Nulla dies sine linea*.<sup>56</sup>

Yet it might ultimately be the information that doesn’t get conveyed makes this particular fiction a useful starting point for an investigation into the production of literary character.

In the interval between the opening scene of *A Man from the North* and its successor, the protagonist detaches himself from the iterative narration of the train station, travels to the metropolis, acquires a London address, the landlady attached to it, a “strange new sense of power,” and the name Richard Larch. Perhaps it doesn’t happen in that order, but one can’t say since all these events are omitted. If such liberties are hardly remarkable by 1898, it’s nonetheless worth minding this gap. Bennett himself had much to say about the elliptical

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

structure of *A Man from the North*, though he did so in *The Truth about an Author* (1903), a work that was first published anonymously and hence one that necessarily takes pains to conceal the title of the work it discusses.<sup>57</sup> In some sense, *The Truth about an Author* undoes all the progress the first ellipsis in *A Man from the North* had made, taking away the youth's name, denying that his sense of power was in any sense his, and eventually removing him from London. At its core, *The Truth about an Author* is a literary autobiography in the naturalist mode whose central chapter revolves around the writing of an early English naturalist narrative that happens by almost pure chance, strangely enough, to be highly autobiographical. Dwelling in the gap between "a man" and "an author," Bennett's anonymous text exposes the accidents and collisions that produced the signed book that that made his name.<sup>58</sup> Explaining one of the driving

---

<sup>57</sup> *The Truth about an Author* was anonymously published over three months in *The Academy* in 1903. As he later explained, Bennett explicitly cast this work, part *Künstlerroman* and part literary self-help manual, in the form of a "sensational serial" complete with cliffhangers, even distribution of incident, and frequent changes of scene, even as the work itself explained the secrets behind construction of just such a successful and saleable work. This curious autobiographical essay on his development as an artist concludes with the successful writer retiring to country life. It is a fitting climax for a work explicitly modeled on a "sensational serial" and something of a Parthian shot at the London literary establishment Bennett intended to stir up with his exposé. Safely away from the "infected air" of the city, the newly arrived author commences setting himself up as a country gentleman by studying, of course, "manuals on horses, riding, driving, hunting, dogs, poultry, and wildflowers." Once in his country retreat, however, Bennett spent less time on these recreations than he did on writing, using no small portion of his time to pen self-help guides.

<sup>58</sup> *A Man from the North* makes his name in more sense that one, as it's the moment when he begins publishing under "Arnold Bennett" rather than under his given name "Enoch Arnold Bennett," the name under which he had published his first magazine stories. Not that he felt the need to confine himself to one name, or even to use a name at all: as an editor for *Woman* magazine from 1894-1900, Bennett wrote under pen names like Gwendolyn, Barbara,

forces behind the project of *The Truth about an Author* as a whole, Bennett wrote that “I have described the composition of my first book in detail as realistic as I can make it, partly because a few years ago the leading novelists of the day seemed to enter into a conspiracy to sentimentalize the first-book episode in their brilliant careers” (72).<sup>59</sup>

Part of what Bennett details in his anti-sentimental account is how little his novel aspired toward the novel. Revealing how clearly he saw the acquisition of distinction as a relative process, he provides a perhaps too candid – though this move is clearly itself a strategic one – tale of composition:

So I sat down to write my first novel, under the sweet influences of the de Goncourts, Turgenev, Flaubert, and de Maupassant. It was to be entirely unlike all English novels except those of one author [...] I clearly remember that the purpose uppermost in my mind was to imitate what I may call the physical characteristic of French novels. There were to be no poetical quotations in my novel, no titles to the chapters; the narrative was to be divided irregularly into

---

and Sal Volatile, while his wildly successful “Books and Persons” column in the *New Age* (1908-1911) featured the pseudonym “Jacob Tonson.” He almost published his first sensational serial, written immediately after *A Man from the North*, under the name “Samson Death,” but ultimately decided to own his commercial works as fully as his self-consciously artistic ones.

<sup>59</sup> “Realistic” at this moment, of course, carries a weight since lost. Replacing it with “naturalistic” would give a sense closer to the one Bennett intended. The “conspiracy” he refers to is Jerome K. Jerome’s (of *Three Men in a Boat* fame) *My First Book* (1894), a lavishly illustrated coffee table tome that could be said to be naturalist in a very different sense. Essentially a field guide to authors in their “native” environments (read: the well-appointed studies and libraries that a successful book could engender), Jerome’s book takes the reader into the homes and offices of such prominent late-nineteenth century authors as Walter Besant, Marie Corelli, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

sections by Roman numerals only; and it was indispensable that a certain proportion of these should begin or end abruptly [...] O succession of dots, charged with significance vague but tremendous, there were to be hundreds of you in my novel, because you play so important a part in the literature of the country of Victor Hugo and M. Loubet!” (63-4)

Even imitation, however, poses its own problems. The aspirant author began to suffer a crisis of confidence, with every page he wrote “the illusion grew thinner,” his sentences persisted in being “damnably Mudiesque,” and even “the successions of dots looked merely fatuous” (66). Upon rereading his first draft, he finds text nothing but “a series of little systems of words joined by conjunctions and so forth, something like this – subject, predicate, object, *but*, subject, predicate, object. Pronoun, *however*, predicate, negative, infinitive, verb. *Nevertheless*, participle, accusative, subject, predicate, etc., etc., etc., for evermore” (67). This initial failure exposes what will turn out to be the most interesting omission of the novel, what ultimately lies in the gap between a “man” and an “author,” namely the secret of the latter’s success.

In *The Truth about an Author*, Bennett tells how he decided on the form of his novel before he chose the characters. In essence, the shape of the “series of little systems of words” preceded the choice of subject. In the end, it does not take him particularly long to settle on the mode of autobiography, but “in obedience to my philosophy, I make myself a failure.” Bennett “decided that [his hero] should go through most of my own experiences, but that instead of fame and a thousand a year he should arrive at disillusion and a desolating suburban domesticity” (65). The most defining experience they share is, of course, the struggle to write, but the ultimate failure of Richard Larch to write a novel is precisely what allows Bennett to compose his.



Part of what is at work here is simply the inherent formal problem of the artist novel. In a recent article in the *London Review of Books*, Frederic Jameson notes the increasingly difficulty of the late-nineteenth century literary *bildungsroman* to narrate any form of success at all. Confronted with the emergence of mass culture “all successes grow to be alike, they lose their specificity and indeed their interest ... only the failures offer genuine literary raw material, both in their variety and in the quality of their experience.” Turning specifically to the novel of the artist and paraphrasing Ernst Bloch, Jameson argues that the central form problem of this genre lies in the fact that “it is not enough to tell the reader that your protagonist is a genius, you must prove it somehow.” The problem is intensified if the artist in question is a novelist, since the proof of genius needs to be submitted in the identical medium, forcing author to compete with character, and requiring that the latter be better than, or at least very different from, the former. One way to skirt the problem is to present the artist in embryo, to give, that is, a portrait of the artist as a young man, serving up immature productions, say, a not very good poem and an emotionally overcharged journal. The other is to simply make the artist a failure. Bennett does both, but the most interesting acts of creation don’t actually concern writing at all. What *A Man from the North* is ultimately concerned with isn’t the art of writing, but rather the art of becoming a writer. The most central form problem of the novel of the novelist then is not, as Jameson suggests, a question of sampling the product, but of charting the processes by which the character makes himself into an artist, tracing the actions, thoughts, observations, and, of course, accidents that make him into what he is.

It is perhaps most instructive to begin with the success rather than the failure, for, ironically enough, literary achievement fairly bursts with the accidental, the improbable and the unexpected while, as Bennett admits, the decision to make his fictional alter-ego a failure was

both calculated and conscious. In his anonymous autobiography, Bennett begins with the admission that he had “lived for a quarter of a century without guessing” that he possessed a “literary temperament.” During that unconscious interval: “I grew into a good man of business; and my knowledge of affairs, my faculty for the nice conduct of negotiations, my skill in suggesting an escape from a dilemma, were often employed to serve the many artists among whom, by a sheer and highly improbable accident, I was thrown” (6). Such an unlikely close quartering never led Bennett to reflect upon his own literary bent. Rather he felt proud of his “hard cold head” and “used to twit” his acquaintances “upon the disadvantages of possessing an artistic temperament.” At last, one of them retorted ““You’ve got it as badly as any of us, if only you knew it,” and this chance remark was “like a thunderclap in my ears, a sudden and disconcerting revelation. Was I, too, an artist? I lay awake at night asking myself this question. Something hitherto dormant stirred mysteriously in me; something apparently foreign awoke in my hard, cool head” and “[f]rom that moment I tacitly assumed a quite new set of possibilities, and deliberately ordered the old ruse self to exploit the self just born. And so [...] I gradually become the thing I am” (6-7). While Bennett here suggests that he embarked upon a “deliberate” program of self-making from this point forward, a chance remark dropped by an accidental acquaintance proves to be only the first of several fortunate contingencies.

Indeed, for “about a year” Bennett didn’t “move a step,” while laboring as a clerk. He “made no effort,” wrote nothing, and would have, he supposed, become one of those “grey-haired men who for twenty years have been about to become ... authors” but for a “fortunate incident” that caused him to take up “quarters in the abode of some artists at Chelsea” (38-9). His new friends encourage him to write and eventually convince him to enter a prize story contest offered by *Tit-Bits*. While all literary success no doubt involves a hazarding of fortune, founding

a career on a story contest renders the element of chance especially legible. His own astonishment at winning the prize, and the even greater surprise that accompanies the publication of his first novel, brings into high relief the fact that Bennett's apprenticeship, as he narrates it, was anything but the deliberate fostering of a new self. In a further succession of happy accidents, Bennett stumbles into the editorship of a weekly paper, becomes a successful playwright, and publishes a pair of smash hit serials. Even the book in which his narrative of unremitting good fortune appears owes its existence to a chance encounter. Meeting Lewis Hind, the editor of *The Academy*, at the theatre one evening, Bennett attempted to sell him on the idea of a sensational serial. Hind instead insisted that Bennett should write his literary autobiography for the journal and "In this singular manner was the notion of the following book first presented to me. It was not in the least my own notion" (ii).

As if to make up for the sheer contingency of his success, Bennett penned *How to Become an Author* in 1903, the same year as *The Truth about an Author*. Being, as the subtitle has it, a "practical guide," this advice manual seems to give a very different view of what a literary apprenticeship should look like, and has somewhat less to say about good luck. The "average" novelist, Bennett assures his readers, "if he minds his task, produces regularly, perseveres in one vein, judiciously compromises between his own ideals and the desires of the public, and conscientiously puts his best workmanship into all he does, [...] may safely rely on a reasonable return in coin" (27). Yet, chance lurks beneath the surface here too, as when he cautions that an author "must be careful not to commit any *small* sins against the great law of Probability." "In fiction," Bennett continues, "you may steal a horse with impunity, but you are a rash fool if you look over a gate. In its essence all fiction is wildly improbable, and its fundamental improbability is masked by an observance of probability in details." (99-100).

The imposition of solid details on a base of wild improbability appears most urgently in the realm of character. In *How to Become an Author*, Bennett urges a loosely naturalist approach to character that begins the “process of invention” with the “scene and general environment” out of which spring the characters (*HBA*, 95-6). The environment includes “the place or places where the action is to pass, the general class and sort of people involved, and the broad effect of landscape and other surroundings” (*HBA*, 135). This approach is precisely the sort of thing that Woolf mocks in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” but Bennett would add significant texture to it as he developed his own craft.<sup>60</sup> As Robert Squillace, Bennett’s most discriminating modern custodian has shown, the novels of Bennett’s maturity, “do not directly reveal the inner workings of a particular character; they create different perspectival contexts in which that character produces different impressions. Character and context react upon each other to such an extent that one indefinable except in terms of the other.”<sup>61</sup> Such perspectivalism “achieves an effect within the confines of traditional third-person omniscient narration that subverts the very idea of the privileged authorial knowledge of ‘true character’ associated with that form of narration.” Because he works within a tradition but undoes it from within, Bennett “tempts readers to repeat

---

<sup>60</sup> Woolf’s apparent demolition of *Hilda Lessways* in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” is an artful exercise in selection quotation and significantly distortion of the work. The general thrust of her criticisms might be leveled with more justification at his early work, but those criticisms are exactly ones Bennett applied, as we will see, to his own apprentice work. It’s worth remembering as well, that Bennett’s text is meant to address the beginning author, not serve as a depiction of the mature artist at work. Bennett, at the point when he wrote *How to Become an Author* was poised between his apprenticeship and his maturity. No small part of the growth he made, I would argue, consisted in making his process and practice legible so that he could progress beyond it.

<sup>61</sup> Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett*, p. 25.

the misreadings his characters themselves continually make.”<sup>62</sup> Taken individually, the various contexts through which Bennett’s characters move seem solid, or even overfull, with material details. These contexts in turn lead a seeming stability to the character, but the apparent stability is precisely what calls for close observation and, even more, for close observation of that observation.

The strength of Squillace’s argument is that it refuses to read Bennett by the lights of the modernist standards, but rather as a “revolutionary of a rival sect,” claiming that “Bennett’s fiction achieves its greatest power when read in distinction from both modernism and realism.”<sup>63</sup> As carefully as Squillace follows his own recommendations in his close-readings of the novels, he quite sharply separates Bennett’s “best fiction” from his other writings, not least his how-to works and his manuals on the art of writing (and reading). Indeed, he regards these as something of an embarrassment, suggesting in fact that holding two different genres side by side clarifies the qualities that distinguish “literature from other forms of discourse for Bennett himself, for his period and perhaps for the novelistic tradition itself.”<sup>64</sup> The key distinction is that, “unlike the self-help books, whose premise is the possibility of climbing to the author’s summit, in the novels we are offered no means by which to attain the narrator’s expertise.”<sup>65</sup> Rather, the narrator reveals in Bennett’s best fiction “his own ability to read minds, to be many selves simultaneously, as a fiction, a device by which to expose the inadequacy of any outward signs to manifest fully the self that inhabits them, if any such unitary creature exists.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, in drawing

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Squillace, “Arnold Bennett’s Other Selves,” p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 176-7.

such a sharp distinction, Squillace overlooks Bennett's books on how to become an author, which offer precisely the possibility of climbing to the author's summit. For all the care Squillace takes in reading Bennett beyond the critical constructions of canonical modernism, separating the novels so definitively from Bennett's practical philosophies keeps them under the lights of the oracular model. The work of scaling the mountain, to retain Squillace's image, becomes invisible, and it becomes unclear how Bennett attains the position he eventually does, and the skill Squillace imputes to the novelist is considerable, requiring a facility of mimetic representation of ordinary observation in all its limits as well as the more delicate revelation of what strays beyond those limits.

The observational calisthenics that Bennett offers in his fictioneering manuals sits in something of a middle spectrum between the novels and the self-help manuals. While it does not fully reconcile the different models of self-making offered at the extremes, it does bring into focus the nature of the mastery required for the novels. Indeed, distinguishing the practical art of writing from the forms of self-management offered more broadly in the self-help genre renders the very peculiar nature of the former clear. There is no promise that acquiring the skills demanded of a novelist will necessarily lead to happiness or wealth; the precise value of learning to understand human character from the point of view of a novelist, although achieved through systematic practice, exceeds such practical considerations. What they have in common is that both forms of self-making are intimately tied up with mass-mediated modes of modern transport. What distinguishes them is that for the self-help pocket philosophies, train carriage and other sites of mobile modernity offer spaces for self-cultivation. For the would-be novelist, however, these same spaces offer a space to observe and cultivate an otherness, one which is apt to lead to a fundamental shift in how one views one's own character. If indeed Bennett was a

“revolutionary of a rival sect,” he had plenty of companions in his fellow fictioneers who likewise thought spaces made available by modern infrastructure proved a most fertile training ground.

#### IV.

As the novelistic technique most directly touching social existence, character creation intrudes into the world-at-large, where, it must be admitted, the creation of character was its own thriving business. Indeed, it is precisely this dimension of the fictioneering manual that might appear to have the most in common the broader genre of self-help of which Bennett’s pocket philosophies offer one small example. If one of the dominant features of this broader genre is magical thinking – wherein simply switching on a positive attitude or focusing desire into the appropriate channel could suddenly and decisively change the course of “your” life – it might seem that the creation of character partook of a similar mysticism. In the end, character creation does turn out to involve a strange form of magical thinking but, unlike the secrets hidden in the chapters of a personality-building guide, it very much depends on a practical art and trained capacities, as a close comparison will show.

In his influential reading of the broader genre of self-help literature, the historian Warren Susman proposes the first decade of the twentieth century as a moment of radical disjuncture in the history of the self, arguing that this period saw the “cult of character” give way to the “cult of personality.” On his account, this transition marks a shift in cultural valuations that move from self-control to self-expression, from self-sacrifice in the name of higher laws to self-fulfillment in obedience to one’s unique individuality, from a producer-oriented society to a society of abundance and mass consumption. Incisive as it is, Susman’s analysis overstates the move from

a culture of production to one of consumption because it overlooks the new forms of production that begin to appear in creative work. Things unfold differently within fictioneering manuals, and not simply because “character” means something both different and more within these handbooks. If the self-help books that inform Susman’s work read as guides to navigating a culture of consumption, fictioneering manuals anticipate the later emergence of knowledge societies and the “creative class.”

Unlike the books on building a personality featured in Susman’s study, fictioneering handbooks are not content simply to demand that “to be somebody one must be oneself.”<sup>67</sup> Rather, an individual, who can’t help being herself, must labor at being, or at least impersonating, somebody else. At the same time, the creative writer must also treat herself as a stranger, as someone whose motives must be actively uncovered. Finally, the presentation of character needs to fit within established fictional models. Or, as Grenville Kleiser puts it in his 1925 *Training for Authorship*, the “three principal means” of understanding and representing character are “First, through observation of people in daily life; second, through analysis of your own motives, tastes and actions; third, through study of characters presented in the stories of standard authors.”<sup>68</sup> In Kleiser’s entirely representative account of how to improve one’s abilities of characterization, the notion that one becomes an author by transparently expressing who one already is gives way to a more complex fabric of relation – inventing character and building personality are interpersonal processes.

Personal observation, the first of Kleiser’s means, involves “Closely and habitually study[ing] people – their appearance, actions, speech, mannerisms, circumstances,

---

<sup>67</sup> Susman, *Culture as History* (New York, 1984), p. 277.

<sup>68</sup> Kleiser, *Training for Authorship* (New York, 1925), p.159; hereafter abbreviated *TA*.



idiosyncrasies” – while looking “particularly for fresh, vital, interesting phases of their lives and personalities” and making “written notes of your most important observations and deductions.” Yet it is not enough simply to record; the “raw material” of observation must pass through the smithy of the writer’s soul: “Meditate upon such impressions and endeavor to give them a new and personal interpretation in your mind. Let each [observed] individual pass through the process of your thinking, and emerge at length as a product largely of your own creative power.”

Similarly, the examination of one’s own soul is itself an exercise in developing the powers of impersonation: “Frank examination and appraisal of your own thoughts and feelings will materially help you to interpret the characteristics of other people.... The better you understand yourself – the inner springs of action, preferences, weaknesses, virtues, ambitions, ideals – the better you will be able to understand people in general” and the better you will be at observing them (*TA*, p. 159). The fictional characters of the “standard” authors are likewise not only occasions for the study of craft, but opportunities for impersonation: “As you study such character drawings read them aloud and endeavor to impersonate each of them in voice, feeling, look and gesture.” This “habit of daily reading aloud from a standard author” – enhanced by such theatrics – is, Kleiser asserts, “one of the most fruitful ways of developing literary style” (*TA*, p. 160). Emphatic impersonation turns out in this account to be the way of developing that quality – style – which the literary advice genre, quoting Buffon when needed, deems most personal and most expressive of individual personality.

When the method is successful, what results from this promiscuous mixing of persons, personages, and impersonation is “a character [that] at length stands out in your mind like a real personality” (*TA*, p. 161) with so real an existence that,

It will perhaps be difficult for you always to say whether your character is entirely imaginary, entirely a portrait, or a blend of the two. You see the thing grow on you. Your knowledge of people gives you ideas ... you lift this person out of the surroundings in which you first saw him, and put him in other circumstances; he meets other characters, and so his nature is yet again modified; and then you find that you have made a new person.

This person possesses “a character all his own, ... is independent of you and has a real and individual life into whose secrets you are privileged to look” (*TA*, p. 165). Just as this new character is modified by chance meetings with other characters, so too is the author modified by the very character she has invented, thus putting self-making and other-making in collision. To make a “new person,” “you” – to retain briefly the chummy second-person of advice literature – must make yourself anew; you must, as Dorothea Brande puts it just a few years later, “turn yourself into a stranger in your own streets;” you must, to invert the central maxim of the personality-focused self-help guides, be someone else in your own life.<sup>69</sup>

Brande recommends setting aside “half an hour each day [in which to] transport yourself back to the state of wide-eyed excitement that was yours at the age of five ... to gather stores of new material in a short time.”<sup>70</sup> Such acts of imaginative transport, it turns out, are best done when engaged in more literal forms of transport: “As you get into your streetcar,” Brande proposes, “notice and tell yourself about every single thing that your eyes rest on.” The self-conscious observer must note all the interior and exterior details of the car itself, from its color to its advertising posters. Even closer attention needs to be paid to fellow travelers:

---

<sup>69</sup> Brande, *Becoming a Writer*, p. 115.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Who is sitting opposite you? How are your neighbors dressed, how do they stand or sit, what are they reading, or are they sound asleep? .... [S]peculate on the person opposite you. What did she come from, and where is she going? What can you guess about her from her face, her attitude, her clothes? What, do you imagine, is her home like?<sup>71</sup>

Since direct, if politely inattentive, observation of the predictably shifting panoramas of mass transit, introspective self-examination, and omnivorous reading – albeit not with the animation Kleiser recommends – are, not at all incidentally, the three standard occupations of the asocial modern commuter, it is not surprising that literary how-to guidebooks recommend the railway carriage and the city omnibus as sites for gathering the raw material from which to build characters. “To see character in action,” the anonymous author of *How to Write a Novel* (1901) announces, “there is no finer vantage-point than the top of a London omnibus.” “It sounds prosaic enough,” the author continues, “to speak of studying human nature at a railway station, but such places are brimful of event.”<sup>72</sup> Once aboard one engages in what this anonymous fictioneer calls “observation with imagination” and what systems theorists would call second-order observation.<sup>73</sup> This observation of observation, this examination of the protocols of how observation takes place, begins, as we have seen with the self-made point of view of the would-be self-made writer. But while you must “begin with yourself” this is only the first step: “when you are tired of looking within – look without. Enter a tram car and listen to the people

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>72</sup> Anonymous, *How to Write a Novel*, p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> “If he wants to observe the other observers as observers, he must take into account the fact that they themselves observe, and do it in their own way. Besides the ‘what’ of the world, he must then observe the ‘how’ of observations by others. One speaks, in such cases, of second-order observation” (Elena Esposito, “Observing Interpretation: A Sociological View of Hermeneutics.” *MLN* 111, no. 3 [April 1996]: 594).

talking.”<sup>74</sup> Following the handbook author onto said the suppositious tramcar, the aspirant is given a lesson in observing others observing:

The man who sits at the far end of the car in a shabby coat, and who is regarding his boots with a fixed anxious stare – what is he thinking about? and what is his history? Then a baby begins to yell, and its mother cannot soothe it. One old man smiles benignly on the struggling infant, but the old man next to him looks ‘daggers.’ And why?”<sup>75</sup> (15-16)

The observational standpoint of the trained novelist consists in viewing one’s own viewpoint and in order to see through viewpoints of others, but also the inverse, as Basil Hogarth suggests in his *The Technique of Novel Writing* (1934):

from surveying other people you will come to taking stock of your own personal traits and characteristics, and to comparing them with those of other people. When you are able to project yourself in time and space, when you are able to get beneath the skin of different characters, you will be in a position to use materials gathered by close observation in such a way as to constitute fiction on a large scale.<sup>76</sup>

Oddly enough, the progress that Hogarth here sketches quite aptly describes journey Virginia Woolf made to her own fictions on the large scale.

## V.

Up through the beginning 1919 Woolf’s attempts at fiction remained largely conventional

---

<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, *How to Write a Novel*, p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-6.

<sup>76</sup> Basil Hogarth, *The Technique of Novel Writing*, pp. 19-20.

as she herself would later admit. Thinking back on *Night and Day* (1919), her second novel, Woolf described it as an “exercise in the conventional style.”<sup>77</sup> More painfully perhaps, Katherine Mansfield arrived at much the same judgment of the work, comparing it to the one ship on the “great ocean of literature” that is “unaware of what is happening today.” Despite its evident craftsmanship, the novel makes us, Mansfield concludes, “old and chill.”<sup>78</sup> Woolf’s engagement with fictioneering in the beginning of 1919 in her review of Hamilton’s *Methods and Materials of Fiction* and more fully in her arguments with Bennett prodded her to move her own writing in a new direction by offering her a tangible point of departure, one announced in “Modern Novels,” in her first sustained criticism of the Edwardians. Offering what’s usually taken as the first articulation of Woolf’s experimental aesthetic program, key passages from the essay undergird the dominant reading of Woolf’s artistic evolution. This familiar narrative contends that she realizes that “life itself” did not resemble what appeared in the fiction of classical realism. She argues that the operations of realism and the various tools it employs foreclose its chance of ever capturing life, leaving Bennett building perfect brick houses that no one will ever inhabit (just as “The Anatomy of Fiction” left Hamilton puzzling over frog parts). Lacking the tools she needs, Woolf then decides to develop fictional techniques that can capture it alive, as it were. In the most renowned passage from “Modern Novels” she outlines her vision for the “proper stuff of fiction”:

The mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life, receives on its surface a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From

---

<sup>77</sup> Letter to Ethel Smyth, qtd in Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York, 1972), p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> Katherine Mansfield, “A Ship Comes into the Harbour,” *Virginia Woolf; The Critical Heritage* (London, 2003), p. 82.

all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms, composing in their sum what we might venture to call life itself; and to figure further as the semi-transparent envelope, or luminous halo, surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the chief task of the novelist to convey this incessantly varying spirit?<sup>79</sup>

The remainder of Woolf's career is often read as if it were a fulfillment of this epiphany. Having thus glimpsed the "chief task" of the novelist, Woolf would suddenly abandon convention to turn within in an attempt to represent interiority. The play of consciousness, rather than the "fabric of things," would become her abiding subject ("MB," p. 432). I argue, however, that this turn inwards is a preliminary step and not even the most important one in this moment when Woolf's craft as a writer took such a significant stride.

As with Hogarth, Kleiser, and the anonymous author of *How to Write a Novel*, Woolf will eventually "tire" of looking within and will step inside a railway compartment to begin looking without. Woolf evocation of the interior undoubtedly occupies a higher register than the one that the fictioneers take, but the lyricism can mislead us. Liesel Olson has recently argued a similar point, claiming, "Woolf's modernism is not purely concerned with recording the subjective mind or heightened experience, but is deeply invested, stylistically and ideologically, in representing the ordinary."<sup>80</sup> According to Olson, Woolf "transforms, but does not reject, materialist or realist techniques. Her most successful works render ordinary experience, and do in fact depend upon facts and fabric."<sup>81</sup> Woolf's transformative use of the machinery of

---

<sup>79</sup> Woolf, "Modern Novels," 33.

<sup>80</sup> Liesl M. Olson, "Virginia Woolf's 'cotton wool of daily life,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2002–2003): 43.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

fictioneering is perhaps most evident in her short story “An Unwritten Novel” (1920), a fiction that appropriately unfolds within a railway carriage.

Although the short story has been hailed as the modernist genre *par excellence*, Woolf’s efforts in the genre have attracted little notice. Even when they have, the stories are considered as preliminary sketches for her criticism rather than for her novels. Herta Newman suggests, for instance, that “In one form or another [Woolf’s stories] take up the cognitive problems that dominate the essays . . . . We read them most effectively then, not as stories, and certainly not as conventional stories, but as critical discussions in story form.”<sup>82</sup> While reading through the fictions to get at the “critical discussion” behind them is deeply problematic with any of her stories, it proves to be especially so with “An Unwritten Novel.” The fiction rehearses an author’s attempts to compose a novel based on her observations “of an old lady” seated “in the corner opposite” of a railway carriage. The tale begins with the unnamed first-person narrator of the story, already on board the train, rattling “through Surrey and across the border into Sussex” while reading her copy of *The Times* and stealing glances “over the paper’s rim” at the five other passengers.<sup>83</sup> Four are engaged and inscrutable – “One smokes; another reads; a third checks entries in a pocket-book; a fourth stares at the map of the line framed opposite” – but it is the fifth, who conspicuously fails to observe the protocols of the railway traveler who catches her attention: “the fifth – the terrible thing about the fifth is that she does nothing at all. She looks at life. Ah, but my poor, unfortunate woman, do play the game – do for all our sakes, conceal it!” (“UN,” p. 112). As the train calls at its stops, all the other passengers depart. Finally alone with

---

<sup>82</sup> Herta Newman, *Virginia Woolf and Mrs. Brown: Toward a Realism of Uncertainty* (New York, 1996), p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Virginia Woolf, “An Unwritten Novel,” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (New York, 1989), p. 112; hereafter abbreviated “UN.”

an apparently unhappy fellow passenger, for whom she invents the name “Minnie Marsh,” the narrator turns from reading *The Times* to reading her subject: “I read her message, deciphered her secret, reading it beneath her gaze” (“UN,” p. 114). Like the good Edwardian novelist, the narrator proceeds from the material details and observed actions of “Minnie,” building a dreary back-story of a spinster aunt from her nervous fidgets and the way she rubs her glove against the windowpane. Blending observed details with an invented plot and punctuating the mix with brief parenthetical asides – “(Let me peep across at her opposite; she’s asleep or pretending it; so what would she think about sitting at the window at three o’clock in the afternoon? Health, money, hills, her God?)” – the narrative provides a prolonged test of fiction as an instrument of truth (“UN,” p.116). Slowly but inevitably, the narrator cedes control to Minnie and begins following her movements and even her thoughts. So deeply has the narrator “gotten beneath the skin” – as Hogarth put it – of her character that she catches an itch in the same place “Minnie” had been scratching: “And then the spasm went through me: I crooked my arm and plucked the middle of my back. My skin, too, felt like the damp chicken’s skin in the poulterer’s window .... She had communicated, shared her secret, passed her poison” (“UN,” p. 114). Standing at the exact midpoint of the brief piece, however, is the narrator’s question: “Have I read you right?” The answer turns out to be an emphatic “no” – Minnie, not at all the beleaguered spinster aunt, is met by her son at the station, rendering the narrator “confounded” (“UN” pp. 117, 121). Yet, the failure results not in disappointment but in a euphoric epiphany: “it’s you, unknown figures, you I adore; if I open my arms, it’s you I embrace, you I draw to me – adorable world!” (“UN,” p. 121).



Even though the story narrates artistic failure insofar as it sketches a novel that does not get written, Woolf considered it the breakthrough that led directly to those novels that would.

Revisiting the piece in a 1930 letter, she writes,

The 'Unwritten Novel' was the great discovery, however. That – [...] in one second – showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in a shape that fitted it – not that I have ever reached that end; but anyhow I saw, branching out of the tunnel I made, when I discovered that method of approach, *Jacobs Room*, *Mrs Dalloway* etc.<sup>84</sup>

The new form that Woolf discovered in this fiction unfolds as an interconnected network of trains of thought encoding personal “experience,” and human sociality generally, as underwritten by the modern transport and information systems. Indeed, as the letter above reveals, Woolf could see in the form of this fiction about transportation networks the outline of the “branching” technical network that ramifies through her career. If the story doesn’t instance the revolutionary technical brilliance of the much lauded intersubjective narration we see in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, the anonymously conducted narrative, with its repeated revisions and self-observed corrections, presents a different experiment. This short story tests the limits of the point of view that literary self-help discourse most ardently aims to inculcate in its audience, that “reading like a writer.”

Within the discursive world of fictioneering, reading like a writer means, for one thing, consuming print actively – and thus with a more engaged manner than typically accorded to the audiences of mass media – and involves dissecting newspaper articles, novels, stories, or films with professional ends in mind, parsing them at the level of both content (looking for “plots”)

---

<sup>84</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* (London, 1981), p. 231.

and form (searching for new techniques). More fundamentally, however, it means interpreting the world as one that is crucially conditioned by fiction, a fact that considerably widens the scope of an author's reading. Because the observable world posited by writing manuals is one in which real people become illuminated through the greater, more intense "reality" of fictional characters, the most perceptive account of human beings reads them as characters who both devour and produce, or at least hope to produce, fiction.

*Jacob's Room*, one of the lines branching directly out of "An Unwritten Novel" and Woolf's acknowledged breakout novel, introduces precisely this wrinkle when she has the old lady in the seat opposite – a Mrs. Norman in this case – take on the role of the observer. Once again sitting in the carriage, the woman, whose brief appearance amounts to little more than a cameo turns her eyes to Jacob, the novel's slippery center. Jacob, on his way up to Cambridge bursts into the carriage, much to the initial alarm of Mrs. Norman. Startled at first by the sudden appearance of the "powerfully built young man" who so blatantly disregards the official rules of the non-smoking carriage, Mrs. Norman retreats behind the unofficial rules of the railway:

She read half a column of her newspaper; then stealthily looked over the edge to decide the question of safety by the infallible test of appearance .... She would like to offer him her paper. But do young men read the *Morning Post*? She looked to see what he was reading – the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>85</sup>

As Jacob turns to his paper, Mrs. Norman begins a closer study of her "fellow-traveller," interspersing her attempted reading of Jacob with her reading of "three pages of one of Mr. Norris's novels": "Taking note of socks (loose), of tie (shabby), she once more reached his face." (*JR*, p. 25). Mrs. Norman turns out to be no more successful than the anonymous narrator of "An

---

<sup>85</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (London, 1990), p. 24.

Unwritten Novel” in the penetrating to the center of Jacob’s character, and the encounter gives rise to perhaps the most celebrated passage of the novel (a portion of which is repeated much later): “Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole – they see all sorts of things – they see themselves . . . . It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done” (*JR*, p. 25). If this takes up Woolf prototypical theme of the instability of character and difficulty of ever coming to know others, it does so by taking up the techniques of her predecessors and rivals and experimenting with them. The failures of the experiments rather than leading her to abandon a set of tools encourages her to work with them in new ways.

Woolf further works through the intricacies of reading someone who reads like a writer in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the very novel she was at work on during her debate with Bennett. Much critical work has been done to connect the titular Mrs. Dalloway with the Mrs. Brown and Woolf’s theories of character creation and presentation, but much less has been done with the stranger trains of Septimus Smith’s thoughts, the novel’s one personage who reads most like a writer. It is worth recalling that Septimus was, after all, an aspiring author, one very much on the model of Bennett, and just the sort of person who would read a manual on the art of fiction. He was “one of those half-educated, self-educated men whose education is all learnt from books borrowed from public libraries, read in the evening after the day’s work, on the advice of well-known authors consulted by letter.”<sup>86</sup> He is “anxious to improve himself,” always “writing,” “tearing up his writing,” “finishing a masterpiece at three o’clock in the morning and running out to pace the streets” (*MD*, p. 85). While the proximate cause of his madness is undoubtedly the war, the England he fought for “consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole

---

<sup>86</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London, 1925), p. 84; hereafter abbreviated *MD*.

[his literary patron]" (*MD*, p. 86). So we find him, in the novel's most iconic scene of represented interpretation, reading the skywriting a writer (and writing down "revelations on the backs of envelopes") – as opposed to everyone else who sees only ads for Glaxo, Kreemo and Toffee – and "possessed" with the character of Evans, pursuing that shadowy presence in terms remarkably similar to the ones Woolf uses in "An Unwritten Novel" and "Character in Fiction." Indeed Clarissa's "transcendental theory" of character, or in her terms, "apparitions," tellingly concocted atop an omnibus, suggests Septimus's mode of reading is not simply patent insanity (*MD*, p. 152-3).

Strangely then, the curious mingling of transportation and observation recommended by Grenville Kleiser's *Training for Authorship* – a manual exactly contemporary with *Mrs. Dalloway* – and other such handbooks is not only the key to inventing believable, living characters, it is a feature of the characters themselves. Becoming a modern author, or perhaps even more fundamentally becoming a modern person, means accumulating the requisite amounts of personal experience by literally propelling oneself out into the world on the networks of trains and omnibuses in search of little old ladies seated in the corner opposite, old ladies which, as *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* remind us, are all potential novelists likewise engaged in observation. If the novel was for Stendhal a mirror on the highway, for the modern observer and would-be writer every railway compartment on the line and every omnibus on the road is a hall of mirrors. Woolf had formulated this basic idea earlier, expressing its outlines in "A Mark on the Wall" (1917):

As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realise more and more the importance of

these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted...<sup>87</sup>

While Woolf herself does indeed “realise more and more the importance” of the interior depths, I would argue that in terms of her writing practice she takes the knowledge of the material world less and less for granted.

If Woolf’s material interests during her turn to modernism are submerged, they become more and more explicit as she herself takes on the role of writing adviser. To be sure, she never did anything so vulgar as to write a practical guide on the art of fiction but some of her later writings border on the genre. In her 1931 “A Letter to a Young Poet,” Woolf chastises the poets of the generation following hers for their solipsism and excessive inwardness. The self that they are “engaged in describing” is a “self that sits alone in the room at night with the blinds drawn” elaborating a private language.<sup>88</sup> The poet is too much interested in what “he has apart,” to bother with what “we have in common” and so refuses to see things “as they are seen, more or less, by the twenty-six passengers on the outside of an omnibus.”<sup>89</sup> She sounds an even firmer note near the end of *A Room of One’s Own*, where she looks “back through these notes and criticize[s]” her “own train of thought.”<sup>90</sup> She worries that her audience may

---

<sup>87</sup> Virginia Woolf, “A Mark on the Wall,” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (New York, 1989): 106.

<sup>88</sup> Virginia Woolf, “A Letter to a Young Poet,” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London, 1988), IV: 313.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>90</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, p. 109.

object that in this I have made too much importance of material things. Even allowing for a generous margin of symbolism, that five hundred a year stands for the power to contemplate, that a lock on the door means the power to think for oneself, still you may say that the mind should rise above things.<sup>91</sup>

Allowing for certain differences in delivery and tone, Woolf's advice circles back to what Walter Besant had offered so many years ago in the pages of *Atalanta*. If anything, hers is the more starkly material with its explicit naming of five hundred a year (though, to be sure, Besant would have been the first to second its wisdom). The room of one's own that she recommended as an indispensable aid to the writer has, over the years, come to be read with a more generous margin of symbolism than Woolf could have imagined, and the writer, at least when it comes to her training and practical knowledge, has very much been treated as if they worked entirely behind a locked door, and none more so than Woolf, "usually considered," as Michael North observes, "the most inward of all British writers."<sup>92</sup> To the image of the writer alone in her study, sitting behind a locked door and gazing within, we might oppose the novelist in the compartment of the train. The reality that such a writer will encounter is, to be sure, "erratic, and very undependable," but still one to be pursued.

Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it, and communicate it to the rest of us.... So that when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>92</sup> Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford, 1999), p. 81.

you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not.<sup>93</sup>

Once placed on such a railway carriage, Woolf is apt to be placed across from someone very much like Arnold Bennett. The two novelists boarded at very different points. Bennett started from a point that privileged pure externality and Woolf from one that sought pure interiority. As they worked at developing their own craft, however, their paths happened to cross because they both brought their work out into the world. Their proximity did not make for a peaceful journey, but it did force them both to radically reconsider the materials and methods of fiction. Phrasing this sentiment in her own fashion, Woolf would record in her diary on the night after Bennett's death that "he abused me; and yet I rather wished him to go on abusing me; and me abusing him."<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 110.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett* (London, 1974), p. 350.

## Bibliography

- Abrams, M.H. "Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics." *Doing Things with Texts*. Edited by Michael Fischer, 135-158. New York: Norton, 1991.
- . "From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and Exemplary Art." *Doing Things with Texts*. Edited by Michael Fischer, 135-158. New York: Norton, 1991. 159-187.
- . "Kant and the Theology of Art." *Notre Dame English Journal* 13 (1981): 75-106.
- Allen, Grant. "The Art of Authorship." *The Author* 1, no. 2 (June 16, 1890): 45.
- Anesko, Michael. "Friction with the Market": *Henry James and the Profession of Authorship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Anonymous. *How to Write for the Magazines*. London: Grant Richards, 1900.
- Anonymous. *How to Write a Novel: A Practical Guide*. London: Grant Richards, 1901.
- "Atalanta." *Church Quarterly Review* 27 (1889): 500-501.
- Auerbach, Jonathan. *Male Call: Becoming Jack London*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-places: Towards an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by John Howe. New York: Verso, 1995.
- B.T., "Helpful Hints and Suggestions." *The Writer* 2, no. 3 (March 1888): 71.
- Bainton, George. *The Art of Authorship: Literary Reminiscences, Methods of Work, and Advice to Young Beginners. Personally Contributed by Leading Authors of the Day*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891.
- Baldick, Chris. *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1983.
- Baldwin, Dean. *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story, 1880-1950*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013.
- Barrett, Charles Raymond. *Short Story Writing: A Practical Treatise on the Art of the Short Story*. New York: Baker and Taylor Company, 1898.
- Bateman, Benjamin. "Train(ing) Modernism: Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster and the Moving Locations of Queerness." In *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement 1840-1940*. Edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries, 185-198. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.



- Battistella, Edwin L. *Do You Make These Mistakes in English? The Story of Sherwin Cody's Famous Language School*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Bell, Clive. *Art*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914.
- Bell, Quentin. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*. New York: Harcourt, 1972.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Some Motifs on Baudelaire." In *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. Edited by Hannah Arendt, 155-200. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- . "The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*. Translated Harry Zohn., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Bennett, Arnold. *Accident*. Garden City: Doubleday Doran & Company Inc., 1928.
- . *The Author's Craft and Other Critical Writings of Arnold Bennett*. Edited by Samuel Lynn Hynes. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968.
- . *How to Become an Author: a Practical Guide*. Plainview: Books for Libraries Press, 1975.
- . *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*. In *How to Live*. Garden City: Garden City Publishing Co., 1925.
- . *The Human Machine*. In *How to Live*. Garden City: Garden City Publishing Co., 1925.
- . "James Joyce's *Ulysses*." In *The Author's Craft and Other Critical Writings of Arnold Bennett*. Edited by Samuel Lynn Hynes, 242-244. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968.
- . *A Man from the North*. New York: George H. Doran, 1911.
- . "The Progress of the Novel." In *The Author's Craft and Other Critical Writings of Arnold Bennett*. Edited by Samuel Lynn Hynes, 242-244. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968.
- . "The Queen of the Highbrows." In *Arnold Bennett: The Evening Standard Years, 'Books and Persons' 1926-1931*. Edited by Andrew Mylett, 326-328. Hamden: Archon Books, 1974.
- . "The Rising Storm of Life." In *Sketches for Autobiography*. Edited by James Hepburn, 106-111. London: Allen & Unwin, 1979.
- . *Self and Self-Management*. In *How to Live*. Garden City: Garden City Publishing Co., 1925.
- . *The Truth About an Author*. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1911.
- . "A Woman's High-Brow Lark," in *Arnold Bennett: The Evening Standard Years, 'Books and*

- Persons' 1926-1931. Edited by Andrew Mylett, 210-212. Hamden: Archon Books, 1974.
- Bennett, Arnold, and John Chipman Farrar. *Literary Taste: How to Form It, with Detailed Instructions for Collecting a Complete Library of English Literature*. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927.
- Besant, Walter. *The Art of Fiction*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1902
- . *The Autobiography of Sir Walter Besant*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1902.
- . *Essays and Historiettes*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1903.
- . *The Pen and the Book*. London: T. Burleigh, 1899.
- . "The Science of Fiction." *The New Review* IV (1891): 310-315.
- . "On the Writing of Novels: Part One." *Atalanta* I (1887-8): 163-7.
- . "On the Writing of Novels: Part Two." *Atalanta* I (1887-8): 370-5.
- Blackiston, Elliott. *Short Story Writing for Profit*. Boston: The Writer, 1937.
- Blackmur, R.P. "For a Second Look." *The Kenyon Review* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1949): 7-10.
- Boege, Fred W. "Sir Walter Besant: Novelist: Part One." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 4 (March 1956): 249-280.
- . "Sir Walter Besant: Novelist: Part Two." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 11, no. 1 (June 1956): 32-60
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984. .
- . *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977
- . *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.
- Brake, Laurel. *Print Culture in Transition, 1850-1910*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Brandt, Dorothea. *Becoming a Writer*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1981.
- Brooks, Cleanth. "The Formalist Critics." *The Kenyon Review* 13, No. 1 (Winter, 1951): 72-81.

- . "The Place of Creative Writing in the Study of Literature." *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* 34 (May 1948): 225-233.
- . "I.A. Richards and *Practical Criticism*." *The Sewanee Review* 89, No. 4 (1981): 586-595.
- Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Fiction*. New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1943.
- Brown, William Perry. "My Struggle with the Short Story." *The Writer* 2, no. 4 (October 1888): 247-9.
- Burroway, Janet with Elizabeth Stuckey-French. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Longman, 2007.
- Carey, John. *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Chan, Winnie. *The Economy of the Short Story in British Periodicals of the 1890s*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Chapman, Sara S. *Henry James's Portrait of the Writer as Hero*. London: Macmillan, 1990.
- Chester, George Randolph. *The Art of Short Story Writing*. Cincinnati: The Publisher's Syndicate, 1910.
- Chesterton, G.K. "How Not to Do It." *The Speaker* III: 77 (23 March 1901): 685-7.
- Cody, Sherwin. *How to write fiction: especially the art of short story writing. A practical course of instruction after the French method of Maupassant*. Charles T. Dillingham and Company, 1894.
- . *Literary Composition: A Practicable Method of Learning to Write Effectively*. Chicago: The English School, 1903.
- Colby, Robert A. "Harnessing Pegasus: Walter Besant, *The Author* and the Profession of Authorship." *Victorian Periodicals Review* XXIII, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 111-119.
- . "Quill and Olive Branch: Walter Besant Corresponds with Brander Matthews." *Columbia Library Columns* XLI, no. 1 (November 1991): 13-22.
- Collier, "Literary prestige is the eminence of nobodies': Henry James, Literary Work, and Celebrity in the *Illustrated London News*." *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 2, No. 1 (2011): 1-32.

- Cross, Ethan Allen. *The Short Story: A Technical and Literary Study*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1928.
- Cross, Nigel. *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Dames, Nicholas. "The Disease of Temporality; or, Forgetful Reading in James and Lubbock." *The Henry James Review* 25, no. 3 (2004): 246-253.
- . *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . "Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories." *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 206-216.
- Daughtery, Beth Rigel. "Reading, Taking Notes, and Writing: Virginia Stephen's Reviewing Practice." In *Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace*. Edited by Jeanne Dubino, 27-41. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Davidson, Rob. *The Master and the Dean: The Literary Criticism of Henry James and William Dean Howells*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005.
- Dawson, Janis. "'Not for girls alone, but for anyone who can relish really good literature': L. T. Meade, Atalanta, and the Family Literary Magazine." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 475-498.
- Dawson, Paul. *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Delaney, Paul. *Literature, Money, and the Market from Trollope to Amis*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Dennett, Daniel. *The Intentional Stance*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987.
- Dillingham William B. *Rudyard Kipling: Hell and Heroism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Drabble, Margaret. *Arnold Bennett; a Biography*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. London: Blackwell, 1996.
- Edel, Leon. *Henry James*. 5 vols. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1953-72.
- . *The Modern Psychological Novel*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1955.
- Ellard, Virginia G. "How to Write a Story." *The Writer* 2, no. 10 (October 1888): 239-241.

- Ellsworth, William Webster. *Creative Writing: A Guide for Those Who Aspire to Authorship*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1929.
- English, James. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Esenwein, J. Berg. *Writing the Short-Story : A Practical Handbook on the Rise, Structure, Writing, and Sale of the Modern Short-Story*. New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1909.
- Esenwein, J. Berg and Mary Eleanor Roberts. *The Art of Versification*. New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1920.
- Esposito, Elena. "Observing Interpretation: A Sociological View of Hermeneutics." *MLN* 111, no. 3 (April 1996): 593-619.
- Fagin, N. Bryllion. *Short Story-Writing: An Art of a Trade*. New York: Thomas Seltzer, Inc., 1923.
- Feltes, Norman N. *Literary Capital in the Late Victorian Novel*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.
- Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Harcourt, Inc. 1927.
- Friedman, Norman. "Point of View In Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept." *PMLA* 70, no. 5 (Dec., 1955): 1160-1184.
- Frye, Northrup. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Gallagher, Catherine. "The History of Literary Criticism." *Daedalus* 126, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 133-153.
- Gang, Joshua. "Behaviorism and the Beginnings of Close Reading." *English Literary History* 78, no. 1 (2011): 1-25.
- Gannett, A.M. "How to Write Short Stories." *The Writer* 2, no. 10 (October, 1888): 239-41.
- Gilder, Jeannette L. *Authors at home; personal and biographical sketches of well-known American writers*. New York: Cassell, 1888.
- Gissing, George. *New Grub Street*. New York: The Modern Library, 2002.
- Glicksohn, Joseph and Chanita Goodblatt. "Reclaiming I.A. Richards." *Poetics Today* 35, nos. 1-2 (Spring – Summer 2014): 173-189.
- Goode, John. "The art of fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James." *Tradition and tolerance in*

- nineteenth-century fiction: Critical essays on some English and American novels*. Edited by David Howard, John Lucas, and John Goode. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1966.
- Grabo, Carl Henry. *The Art of the Short Story*. New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1913.
- . *The Technique of the Novel*. New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1928.
- Graff, Gerald, and Michael Warner. *The Origins of Literary Studies in America : A Documentary Anthology*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Graff, Gerald. *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Gross, John. *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: A Study of the Idiosyncratic and Humane in Modern Literature*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.
- Gross, Neil. *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Grossman, Jonathan. *Charles Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Gutman, Hank. *How Others Read Us: International Perspectives on American Literature*. Edited by Hank Gutman. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.
- Hanscom, A.L. "Method Needed in Literary Work." *The Writer* 2, no. 4 (April 1888): 247-9.
- Hale, Dorothy. *Social Formalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Halliwell, Stephen. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Hamilton, Clayton Meeker. *A Manual of the Art of Fiction*. Garden City: Doubleday Page & company, 1918.
- . *Materials and Methods of Fiction*. New York: Baker and Taylor Company, 1908.
- Hamilton, Sharon. "The PMLA and the Backstory of Making Poetry New." *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011): 53-85.
- Head, Dominic. *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Heisch, C.E. *The Art and Craft of the Author: Practical Hints Upon Literary Work*. London: Elliot Stock, 1905.

- Hills, William H. "The Art of Short-Story Writing." *The Writer* 8, no. 4 (1895): 48-51.
- . "Helpful Hints and Suggestions." *The Writer* 3, no. 10 (October, 1889): 233.
- Hirsh, E.D. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.
- Hoffman, Arthur Sullivant. *Fundamentals of Fiction Writing*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1922.
- . *Fiction Writers on Fiction Writing; Advice, Opinions and a Statement of Their Own Working Methods by More Than One Hundred Authors*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923.
- . *The Writing of Fiction*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company inc., 1934.
- Hoffman, Michael and Patrick Murphy. *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Hogarth, Basil. *The Technique of Novel Writing; a Practical Guide for New Authors*. London: J. Lane, 1934.
- Holliday, Robert Cortes and Alexander Van Rensselaer. *The Business of Writing: A Practical Guide for Authors*. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922.
- Horace. *Ars Poetica. The Epistles of Horace*. Translated David Ferry. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2001.
- Houghton, Samuel G., et al. *The Writer's Handbook*. Boston: Writer Inc., 1936.
- Hunter, Adrian. *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Hynes, Samuel. "Introduction." In *The Author's Craft and Other Critical Writings of Arnold Bennett*. Edited by Samuel Lynn Hynes. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968.
- . "The Whole Contention Between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf." *Novel* 1 (Fall 1967): 35-44.
- Jacobson, Marcia Ann. *Henry James and the Mass Market*. University: University of Alabama Press, 1983.
- James, Henry. "The Art of Fiction." *Longman's Magazine* IV (1884): 502-521.
- . "The Art of Fiction," *Partial Portraits* 1888.

- . *The Art of the Novel: The Critical Prefaces*. Edited by R.P. Blackmur. New York, London C. Scribner's Sons, 1934.
- . *Complete Stories: 1892-1898*. New York: Library of America, 1996.
- . *Literary Criticism: Volume I*. New York: Library of America, 1984.
- . *Stories of Writers and Artists*. Edited by F.O. Matthiessen. New York: New Directions Books, 1944.
- . "The Story-Teller at Large." *Fortnightly Review* 69 (April 1898), p. 652.
- James, Henry and H.G. Wells. *Henry James & H.G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship, their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and their Quarrel*. Edited by Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958.
- James, William. *The Correspondence of William James: William and Henry, 1897-1910*. Volume 3. Edited by Ignas Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Berkeley. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Cosmic Neutrality." *London Review of Books*, October 20, 2011.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The Lives of the English Poets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905.
- Joseph, Michael. *Short Story Writing for Profit*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1924.
- Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2011.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Trans. James Meredith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Kardos, Michael. *The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer's Guide*. New York: Bedford/ St Martin's, 2013.
- Keating, Peter. *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1989.
- Kenner, Hugh. "The Pedagogue as Critic." In *The New Criticism and After*. Edited by Thomas Daniel Young, 36-46. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1976.
- . *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers*. New York: Knopf, 1988.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.



- Kershaw, Alex. *Jack London, A Life*. New York: St. Martin's, 1998.
- Kenney, Edwin J. "The Moment, 1910: Virginia Woolf, Arnold Bennett, and Turn of the Century Consciousness." *Colby Library Quarterly* 13 (1977): 42-66.
- Knorr-Cetina, Karin. *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Kristeller, Paul Oskar. "The Modern System of the Arts." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496-527; 13 (1952): 17-46.
- King, Anthony. "Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus." *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 3 (November 2000): 417-433.
- King, James. *Virginia Woolf, A Life*. London: Norton, 1995.
- Kleiser, Grenville. *Training for Authorship: A Complete Course in the Writer's Art*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1925.
- Labor, Earle. *Jack London: An American Life*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2014.
- Lahire, Bernard. "The Double Life of Writers." Trans. Gwendolyn Wells. *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 443-465.
- Latham, Sean. *Am I a Snob?: Modernism and the Novel*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Levy, Andrew. *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story: America's Workshop*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Lewes, George Henry. *The Principles of Success in Literature*. Edited by William Dallam Armes. Berkeley: University of California Students' Co-Operative Association, 1901.
- Lewis, Pericles. "Preface." *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Lodge, David. "Creative Writing: Can it/ Should it be Taught?" In *The Practice of Writing*. 170-8. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- London, Jack. *Martin Eden*. 1909. New York: Penguin Classics, 1993.
- . *John Barleycorn. Selected Novels*. Edited Donald Pizer, 933-1112. New York: Library Classics, 1982.
- . *No Mentor but Myself: A Collection of Articles, Essays, Reviews, and Letters on Writing and Writers*. Edited by Dale L. Walker. Port Washington: Kennikat, 1979.

---. *Novels and Social Writings*. Edited by Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1982.

London, Joan. *Jack London and His Times: An Unconventional Biography*. New York: Book League of America, 1939.

Lubbock, Percy. *The Craft of Fiction*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921.

Mansfield, Katherine. "A Ship Comes into the Harbour." In *Virginia Woolf; The Critical Heritage*. Edited by Robin Majumdar and Alan Mclaurin, 82-3. London: Routledge, 2003.

Matthews, Brander. "The Philosophy of the Short-Story." *Lippincott's, a Popular Journal of General Literature*. 36 (October 1885): 366-374.

---. *The Philosophy of the Short-Story*. New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1901.

McClure, George. "Writing as Personal Creation." *Writer* 49, no. 1 (January 1936): 18-20.

McDonald, Peter D. *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

McGurl, Mark. *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

---. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Meade, W.T. "From the Editor's Standpoint." *Atalanta* VI (1892-3): 839-42.

Miller, James E. *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972.

Mitchell, Edwin Valentine. *The Art of Authorship*. New York: Loring & Massey, 1935.

Mitchell, Sally. *The New Girls' Culture in England*. Columbia: Columbia University Press 1995.

Myers, D.G. *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996.

Newman, Herta. *Virginia Woolf and Mrs. Brown: Toward a Realism of Uncertainty*. New York: Garland, 1996.

Ngai, Sianne. "Merely Interesting." *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 777-817.

- Noël-Thomas, Francis. *The Writer Writing: Philosophic Acts in Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- North, Joseph. "What's 'New Critical' about 'Close Reading'?" I. A. Richards and His New Critical Reception." *New Literary History* 44, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 141-157.
- North, Michael. *Novelty: A History of the New*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- . *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Norris, Frank. *Novels and Essays*. Edited by Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1986.
- Norris, W.E. "Style in Fiction." *Atalanta* VI (1892-3): 59-63.
- "A Novel Education." *Punch* 30 (November 1895): 255.
- O'Brien, Edward Joseph Harrington. *The Dance of the Machines; the American Short Story and the Industrial Age*. New York: The Macaulay Company, 1929.
- Olson, Liesl M. "Virginia Woolf's 'cotton wool of daily life.'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2002-2003): 42-65.
- Orgeron, Marsha. "Rethinking Authorship: Jack London and the Motion Picture Industry." *American Literature* 75, no. 1 (March 2003): 91-117.
- Orel, Harold. *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Pattee, Fred Lewis. *The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey*. New York: Harper and Bros, 1923.
- Phelps, William Lyon. *Autobiography with Letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939.
- Pitkin, Walter B. *The Art and Business of Story Writing*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912.
- . *How to Write Stories*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1923.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Philosophy of Composition." *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*. Edited by G.R. Thompson. 675-684. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Plato. *Apology*. Translated B. Jowett. New York: Oxford University Press, 1892.
- Quiller-Couch, Arthur Thomas. *On the Art of Writing*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916.

- Quirk, Leslie. *How to Write a Short Story*. Franklin: John Knapp Reeve, 1924.
- Rahv, Philip. "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction." *Kenyon Review* 18, no. 2 (Spring, 1956): 276-299.
- Rainey, Lawrence. *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Rando, David. *Modernist Fiction and News: Representing Experience in the Early Twentieth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Ransom, John Crowe. "Criticism, INC." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 13, no. 4 (Fall 1937): 586-602.
- . "The Understanding of Fiction." *Kenyon Review* 12, no. 2 (Spring, 1950): 189-218.
- I.A. Richards. *Practical Criticism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950.
- . *The Principles of Literary Criticism*. 4th ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1930.
- Ringler, William. "Poeta Nascitur Non Fit: Some Notes on the History of an Aphorism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, No. 4 (Oct., 1941): pp. 497-504.
- Russell, Percy. *Authors' Manual: A Complete and Practical Guide to All Branches of Literary Work*. London: 1891.
- . *The Literary Manual: Or, A Complete Guide to Authorship*. London: 1886.
- Russo, John Paul. *I. A. Richards: His Life and Work*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Ryle, Gilbert. "Knowing How and Knowing That: The Presidential Address." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 46 (1945-6), 1-16.
- Saunders, David and Ian Hunter. "Lesson from the Literatory: How to Historicise Authorship." *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 479-509.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, 1986.
- Schorer, Mark. "Fiction and the 'Analogical Matrix.'" In *The World We Imagine*, 24-45. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1968.
- . "Foreward." In *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, 1920-1951*. Ed. John Aldridge, xi-xx. New York: Ronald Press, 1952.

- . "Technique as Discovery." In *The World We Imagine*, 3-23. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1968.
- "Scholarship Competition Questions." *Atalanta* I (1887-8): 54.
- "Scholarship Competition." *Atalanta* VI (1892-3): 842.
- Scholes, Robert and Clifford Wulfmann, eds. *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Seltzer, Mark. *Bodies and Machines*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- . *Henry James and the Art of Power*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Simon, Linda. *The Critical Reception of Henry James: Creating a Master*. Rochester: Camden House, 2007.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. *The Art of Wisdom*. Trans. Karen Margolis. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- . *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*. Trans. Wieland Hoban. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.
- Smith, C. Alphonso. *The American Short Story*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1912.
- Smith, Janet Adam. *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948.
- Speller, John R. W. *Bourdieu and Literature*. Cambridge: Open Book, 2011.
- Spencer, Herbert. *The Philosophy of Style: An Essay*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1872.
- Spilka, Mark. "Henry James and Walter Besant: 'The Art of Fiction' Controversy." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1973): 101-119.
- Spiropoulou, Angeliki . "'In or about 1922': Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Modern Fiction." In *1922: Literature, Culture, Politics*. Edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté, 74-90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Squillace, Robert. "Arnold Bennett's Other Selves." In *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*. Edited by Marysa Demoor, 156-183. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- . *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997.

- Stanley, Jason. "Knowledge, Habit, Practice, Skill."  
[https://www.academia.edu/15605934/Knowledge\\_Habit\\_Practice\\_Skill](https://www.academia.edu/15605934/Knowledge_Habit_Practice_Skill)
- Stanley, Jason and John W. Krakauer. "Motor Skill Depends on Knowledge of Facts." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (August 2013): 1-11.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. "A Humble Remonstrance." *Longman's Magazine* V (Dec 1884): 146-7.
- "Studies in Composition." *Atalanta* VI (1892-3): 135.
- "Studies in Style." *Atalanta* VI (1892-3): 63.
- Sullivan, Hannah. *The Work of Revision*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Susman, Warren I. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Szalay, Michael. *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Tate, Allen. "Techniques of Fiction." *On The Limits of Poetry*. New York: The Swallow Press, 1948. 129-145.
- Thurschwell, Pamela. "Henry James and Theodora Bosanquet: On the typewriter, In the Cage, at the Ouija board." *Textual Practice* 13, no.1 (1999): 5-23.
- Tilford, John E. "James the Old Intruder." *Modern Fiction Studies* IV (Summer 1958): 157-164.
- Tillyard, E.M.W. *The Muse Unchained*. London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958.
- Uzzell, Thomas H. *Narrative Technique; a Practical Course in Literary Psychology*. 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt, 1934.
- Wandor, Michelene. *The Author is Not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else: Creative Writing Reconceived*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Wedmore, Frederick. "The Short Story." *The Nineteenth Century* 43, no. 253 (1898), 406-16.
- Wells, H. G. *Boon: The Mind of the Race, the Wild Asses of the Devil, and the Last Trump*. London: Unwin, 1915.
- Weeks, Edward. *This Trade of Writing*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1936.
- Wilhelm, Donald George. *Writing for Profit*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1930.

Williams, Blanche Colton. *A Handbook on Short Story Writing*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1920.

Wimsatt, William K. "Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited."

Wimsatt, William K. and M.C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468-488.

Wolfe, Tom. "Stalking the Billion Footed Beast: A Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel." *Harper's Magazine* (November 1989): 45-56.

Woolf, Virginia. "The Anatomy of Fiction." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Andrew McNeillie, 43-47. Vol. 3. London: The Hogarth Press, 1988.

---. "Character in Fiction." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Andrew McNeillie, 420-438. Vol. 3. London: The Hogarth Press, 1988.

---. *Jacob's Room*. London: Hogarth, 1990.

---. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1981.

---. "A Letter to a Young Poet." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Andrew McNeillie, 420-438. Vol. 5. London: The Hogarth Press.

---. "A Mark on the Wall." In *Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Susan Dick, 83-89. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1989.

---. "Modern Novels." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Andrew McNeillie, 30-37. Vol. 3. London: The Hogarth Press, 1988.

---. *Mrs Dalloway*. London: Harcourt, Inc., 1925.

---. "An Unwritten Novel." In *Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Susan Dick, 112-121. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1989.