Open to the Public: The Modernist Country House Novel

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Abstract

My dissertation begins with a literary and cultural history of the country house and country house touring, and the chapters that follow the introduction are arranged as a tour: we move first to view (1) portraits in the portrait gallery, next (2) books in the library, and finally, (3) theatricals in the drawing room. Throughout my project, I "read" the country house alongside the country house novel, incorporating observations and photographs that I gathered from over forty site visits to illustrate and interpret the texts. When modernists and late modernists were writing, economic strains and wartime requisitioning imperiled hundreds of country houses. In the 1940s, the National Trust began to save many of these buildings by opening them to the public. In doing so, they claimed the power structures of the elite as heritage sites for everyone; at the same time, the late modernist period produced country house novels that were especially attuned to the material conditions of their setting. Thus, I use the material-cultural and architectural histories of the portrait gallery, the library, and the drawing room to analyze the literature that represents these settings. Each of my chapters converges on a different late modernist author—Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, and Elizabeth Bowen—as I explain how these writers engage the rooms and objects of the country house and Big House both to interrogate social history and position their works in literary history.

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To my parents, Steve and Patty Trout,
because I owe you one.

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Introduction:

This House is Open to the Public

> He was rather glad that they were all out; it was amusing to wander through the house as though one were exploring a dead, deserted Pompeii. What sort of life would the excavator reconstruct from these remains; how would he people these empty chambers? There was the long gallery, with its rows of respectable and (though, of course, one couldn't publicly admit it) rather boring Italian primitives, its Chinese sculptures, its unobtrusive, dateless furniture. There was the panelled drawing-room, where the huge chintz-covered arm-chairs stood, oases of comfort among the austere flesh-mortifying antiques. There was the morning-room, with its pale lemon walls, its painted Venetian chairs and rococo tables, its mirrors, its modern pictures. There was the library, cool, spacious, and dark, book-lined from floor to ceiling, rich in portentous folios. There was the dining-room, solidly, portwinily English, with its great mahogany table, its eighteenth-century chairs and sideboard, its eighteenth-century pictures—family portraits, meticulous animal paintings. What could one reconstruct from such data?[1]
>
> Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow*

In the passage above, Denis Stone, who has published one book of poetry and aspires to write a novel, has come to a country house, Crome, to pursue his friend, Anne, as a love interest. Anne lives at Crome with her family, who are fond—as many twentieth-century country society families were—of hosting literary and artistic figures in their capacious homes. But Denis has not yet seen the family, and the parallelism of the "family portraits" and "meticulous animal paintings" invites us to think of those categories synonymously—to let go of our preconceptions of the country house family and observe them with the objectivity of an anthropological archaeologist. Denis arrives by bicycle and walks through the rooms of Crome like someone who has discovered a ruined city. Since many country houses were already abandoned after the Great War and others were facing financial ruination, Denis's pseudo-archaeological survey is attuned to the institution's imminent obsolescence. We might say that Huxley's mind is already in the future of the *Brave New*

[1] Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 4.

World (1932)—but the action of the book, as far as we can tell, takes place close to its publication in 1921, at modernism's zenith.

In the passage above, the country house collapses time and space. We are looking, with Denis, at art objects from Europe and Asia, from antiquity to the eighteenth century to the modernist period. Denis does not see the country house as a stable, unchanging symbol of England, but as a global database from which, as a futuristic social scientist, he might draw some conclusions about the creatures that lived there. The country house itself might be fixed and stable, as buildings generally are, but is it really—upon inspection—a paragon of fixity and stability, or is it a paradox of fixity and mobility? The country house curates traditions of mobility: art objects bought on the Grand Tours of successive heirs furnish the house, and these very objects draw visitors to the house to tour the collections. Denis's wandering through the house also accesses a much older tradition of touring—that of *theoria* in the original sense of the word.[2] *Theoroi* like Socrates were sent to other cities as envoys to observe their theater and games, consult their oracles, and report back to their home cities. Therefore, mobility, observation, and description are at the root of the philosophical tradition. Denis is a *theoros*, too. His bicycle ride, careful observations, and the novel that he will produce—based on Huxley's own experiences at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor—perform the basic functions of *theoria*.

Centuries of philosophical thought in the Platonic tradition have detached *theoria* from practical observations. We cannot just unwind the clock and coolly observe, like foreign philosophers, the habitat that this "meticulous animal," the country squire, has fashioned for himself. History has piled up, countless classically-educated quasi-*theoroi*—in the form of young

[2] See Andrew Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

grand tourists—have piled up art history in their homes, have stocked their libraries with books on history, have lived in and memorialized themselves within their homes. Despite Denis's best efforts to see a house filled with raw "data," history-rich signification is sunk into the house and its objects. We know too much. We know that we know too much because we can picture what Denis sees. We've already been on the house tour—but perhaps we didn't take it seriously enough. Perhaps we didn't approach it with the careful observation of a *theoros*, of an anthropologist, or of an archaeologist. But we should.

Country [House] Matters

Put a pin in all the places you've visited on this literary map: Darlington Hall, Brideshead, Manderley, Hautcouture, Wragby Hall, Bourton, Styles Court, Baldry Court, Branshaw Teleragh, Howards End, Gardencourt, Wellbridge House, Lowick Manor, Satis House, Queen's Crawley, Thrushcross Grange, Thornfield Hall, Pemberley, Castle Rackrent, Howard Grove, Paradise Hall. We haven't moved across geography, but backward through the history of the British novel. We could go even further back if we changed our genre to drama, poetry, or travelogue. Traveling from great house to great house is by no means a comprehensive way to tour British literary history, but it does cover a surprising amount of ground. We're on another house tour in this dissertation. In the chapters that follow, we'll meet Ivy Compton-Burnett in the portrait gallery, Elizabeth Taylor in the library, and Elizabeth Bowen in the drawing room. But just as you have to exit through the gift shop, you're going to be forced to confront the commercial realities of the country house. You might even feel extorted by the outrageous price of the fudge—but, of course, that extortion is strictly voluntary these days. You can walk out of the power house without purchasing a thing.

Country houses still demand large amounts of money to remain in operation and many of us *choose* to support them. Over 5 million people are members of the National Trust and 61,000 people

volunteer for the National Trust.[3] These numbers do not include the numerous houses, open to the public, that are managed by private trusts, such as Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, the ducal palace and ancestral home of the dukes of Devonshire. The country house continues to hold narrative value, too, as is evident in television series such as *Downton Abbey*, movies such as *Gosford Park* and *Melancholia*,[4] new novels by Alan Hollinghurst and Sarah Waters, and the University of Sheffield's popular MOOC, "The Literature of the English Country House."

What accounts for the continued public support, and the omnipresence in literature and popular culture, of the country house? On the one hand, there are a lot of country houses in Britain, so it makes sense that there are a lot of country houses in British literature. On the other hand, only a tiny percentage of the population inhabit those houses, so the omnipresence of the country house makes no sense at all—and makes less sense when we see these domestic power structures lingering in works of modernism. In this introduction, I'll offer some explanations for its staying power:

(1) The country house matters because it almost went extinct in the modernist period, taking with it the architectural and material-cultural traditions that it had curated for centuries and displayed to middle-class tourists. It matters because the old cliché is true: you don't know how much something matters to you until you (almost) lose it.

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[3] National Trust, "Annual Report 2017/18," accessed May 9, 2019, https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/annual-report-201718.pdf, 2; 14. There are about 300 country houses in the care of the National Trust, though it is difficult to determine how many of them are country houses, given the fungible criteria. By the stingiest account, only half of the National Trust's 330 houses count as a "real" country house.

[4] This reference may be cheating—*Melancholia* appears to be an American estate, populated by characters with British and American accents, and filmed at a Swedish castle. I would also feel remiss if I left out of this dissertation references to *Clue* (the popular board game and movie), *The Addams Family*, and Celine Dion's music video for "It's All Coming Back to Me Now." The song was inspired by *Wuthering Heights* and Dion's video was filmed at Chateau Ploskovice in the Czech Republic. Notably, the ghost of Dion's deceased lover rides his motorcycle through the halls of the mansion and down the grand staircase.

(2) The country house matters because it is one of the primary settings in the British novel—authors who write country house novels engage in a literary-architectural tradition stretching back to Henry James, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Henry Fielding, Frances Burney, Samuel Richardson, and many more. It structures and cements the inheritance plot and the marriage plot—plots that preoccupy the English novel.

(3) The country house matters because it's at the center of a powerful, harmful myth of the English countryside—because it obscures the labor that it exploits to sustain itself. It matters because country house literature perpetuates these myths and finds them narratively useful.

(4) The country house matters because it matters to the women's literary tradition in particular. The country house hosts highbrow domesticity, situating the "everyday" at the intersection of public and private spheres in a socially, financially, and culturally empowered household.

(5) The country house matters because it spatially structures class into highbrow/upstairs and lowbrow/downstairs, offering authors the opportunity to navigate the slippery literary terrain of the highbrow/middlebrow/lowbrow literary marketplace exemplified by the twentieth-century Battle of the Brows.[5]

(6) Most importantly, country houses matter because, in a country house, we don't have to think of "inheritance" and "tradition" as abstract notions: paintings are inherited, they belong to a specific painterly tradition that authors can access to conceptualize literary genealogies. Library collections are, ideally, inherited and built over generations, reflecting the good taste and elite education of the country house owner. Country houses are not only thought of as metaphorical "stages" for social performance, but they also contain doorways, fireplace surrounds, and cabinets

[5] See Melba Cuddy-Keane, "Democratic Highbrows: Woolf and the Classless Intellectual," in *Virginia Woolf, The Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13-58.

that look like the prosceniums of a stage. Certain rooms, like the drawing room, have deep theatrical roots in their architectural and histories of performance. By focusing closely on these objects and spaces in the chapters that follow, I will address the extratextual histories that are at work in modernist novels and at stake in the country house.

All told, country houses matter because they *are* matter, they contain matter—and here (and in my lewd section title) I am paying homage to a long history of feminist studies that focus on materialism, on women's bodies, on physical things beyond words—like needlepoint, fashion, interior decoration—which offered women expression.[6] More specifically, country houses offer extratextual traditions like painting, book collecting, and theatrical performance; an author can engage with these elevated domestic traditions while exploring the aesthetic inheritance of the country house. I hope my list sufficiently suggests the complexities of this literary-material canon—complexities too large for any one project to fully address, but complexities that are delimited and interrogated in the material-spatial frameworks of these novels. Considering the intricacies of the literary-material traditions of the country house, I've triple-focused my critical lens on three late modernist authors (Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, and Elizabeth Bowen), three rooms (the gallery, the library, and the drawing room), and three forms of aesthetic inheritance (portraits, books, and performativity). This dissertation is a work of radical contextualization, digging into art and architectural history to explain how modernists are building on and subverting, celebrating and censuring, the country house canon by engaging objects and spaces imbued with cultural history.[7]

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[6] See E.A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Theories of Representation and Difference (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): "Women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men" (14). But I'm also going well beyond the body in this dissertation (though the corporeality of the body is crucial in my first chapter). Country matters also recalls the puns that drive male-authored puns on women's genitalia, as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Wycherley's *The Country Wife* both do.

[7] For an excellent model of object-based literary analysis, see Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Although these literary-material archaeologies are hyper-specific, they *are* worth digging for—and the treasures I have found are on display in the chapters that follow. So, for the rest of this introduction, I'm going to try to convince you to come on these chapter tours with me by addressing more carefully the broader country house matters outlined above.

What is a Country House Novel?

Architectural historians have not reached a consensus on what qualifies as a "country house" but, generally, a country house is a large home at the center of a landed estate. The term "country house" may be interchangeable with "stately home" or "ducal palace," though many country houses, such as manor houses, are smaller than these loftier (and more famous) counterparts. Country houses are traditionally owned by members of the aristocracy and gentry, but one did not need a coat of arms or family ties to the peerage to build or buy a country house. Because of these loose criteria, it is difficult to say how many country houses are in Britain. We know that well over 1,600 country houses were destroyed throughout the United Kingdom in the twentieth century. A Wikipedia page lists over 3,500 country houses that are still standing today.[8] That's a lot of grand, conspicuous buildings, making the country house an exceptional local structure that is pervasive throughout Britain.[9] Sitting at the center of the country estate, the house was the center of many local worlds. Of course, the country house/manor house/castle centers the estate in a very obvious manner in a feudal society, but it is worth noting that the country house remains "centered" in the post-feudal, agrarian capitalist England of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. Before the

[8] Wikipedia, "List of country houses in the United Kingdom," last modified May 15, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_country_houses_in_the_United_Kingdom. There is a separate list for manor houses, though there is some overlap between the two.

[9] This is yet another example of the paradoxical nature of the country house, which I pointed out at the beginning of this introduction. This paradox is an undercurrent of this dissertation.

industrial revolution, the ruling class owned half of all cultivated land and derived their wealth primarily from agricultural production and rents.[10] Whether landowners were benevolent or exploitative was a matter of morality, not law. In fact, landowners were also *the* law, acting as lieutenants and magistrates for their community. These roles lingered past the industrial revolution and well into the nineteenth century. Even after the financial and legal domination of landowners waned, their social dominion endured.

In my third chapter on Elizabeth Bowen, I'll talk about the English country house in relation to the Anglo-Irish Big House. Of course, the Big House has its own architectural history from to the eleventh century onward, and it has sparked its own literary tradition—notable examples are the eighteenth-century novelist Maria Edgeworth, the nineteenth-century novelists George Moore and Somerville and Ross, and the twentieth-century novelists Molly Keane and John Banville.[11] Although the Big House has its own traditions, it is not an entirely separate tradition from the country house—one of the hallmarks of the Anglo-Irish house is its seclusion from the landscape around it in an attempt to preserve the English way of life inside.[12] Bowen herself frequently traveled between London, the continent, and Ireland; within *The Heat of the Day* especially, English country houses and Anglo-Irish big houses speak to one another in the metafictional logic of the novel.

Now that I have provisionally defined the country house, I must now attempt to define the country house novel. Not every country house listed in my itinerary above is the main setting of the

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[10] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 39; 60.

[11] See Jacqueline Genet, ed., *The Big House in Ireland: Reality and Representation*, *Etudes Irlandaises* 17, no. 2 (1992); Terence Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland: A Study of Irish Landed Families, 1860–1960* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2001); Vera Kreilkamp, *The Anglo-Irish Big House and the Novel* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

[12] It was secluded for safety—Anglo-Irish big houses were fortified to protect them from the wrath of the people they had colonized, and with good reason.

novel in which we visit it—for example, Bourton represents a prelapsarian, prewar world in Clarissa's flashbacks in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and Satis House structures Pip's "great expectations" in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), but both novels take place mostly in London. Even as an auxiliary setting, the country house can affect the dynamics of the whole book—though its social, emotional, or aesthetic pull will differ under different authors' pens. When the country house *is* the primary setting of a novel, it is a "country house novel"—a subgenre that was first perfected in the nineteenth century by Jane Austen and transformed in the twentieth century by Virginia Woolf in *Orlando* (1928) and *Between the Acts* (1941). With such a rich and varied literary history behind the country house novel, it is frustrating that some of its most profound authors—Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, and Elizabeth Bowen—have been all but forgotten by literary critics and the reading public.

I have chosen to focus on Compton-Burnett, Taylor, and Bowen because they wrote during the material crisis of the country house—when country houses were lost by the hundreds due to tax hikes, wartime requisitioning, and the economic and social shifts that displaced wealth and labor from country estates. In partial response to this architectural and material-cultural loss, these authors' works are engaged with the country house as a physical presence in the cultural and literal landscape of Britain and Ireland. Each author's relationship to the country house was distinct—Compton-Burnett's (as an upper-middle class suburbanite) was aspirational, Taylor's (as a lower-middle class communist housewife) was willfully distant, and Bowen's (as an Anglo-Irish big house heiress) was intimately familiar. Despite these differences, each complexified the material and literary legacies of the country house in their explorations of canonicity and aesthetic tradition. With so many country houses falling into ruin after the Great War and Second World War, these stately mansions seemed to be architectural dodo birds—cumbersome prey destined for extinction. In the first half of the twentieth century, the National Trust was still focused on saving landscapes and

natural beauties, and the public's interest in funding the preservation of the country house was not yet established. Compton-Burnett's, Taylor's, and Bowen's country house novels depict the physical decline of these homes as these novelists address the existential crisis facing the country house novel.

A Very Short Tour

In order to research the material features of the country house novel, I visited quite a few country houses during the summers of 2016 and 2018. On-site studies were essential to this project, furnishing my chapters with useful examples and influencing the scope of the project. After looking and reading broadly, I came to three authors and three rooms that offered a cohesive interpretation of canonicity in the modernist country house novel. Of course, it helps that Compton-Burnett, Taylor, and Bowen knew each other and wrote to each other—that they *were* a group. Moreover, while they were publishing, literary reviewers compared each of these authors to Jane Austen, and each had to deal with the towering legacy of Virginia Woolf. Both Austen's and Woolf's works are important literary touchstones in each chapter of this project.

The trope of the house tour structures my dissertation because tours are the other institution (in the days before television and film) that connected the middle class to the country house.[13] There is a long history of country house tourism that predates the National Trust's stewardship of country houses. In additional to their exceptional architecture, the houses often displayed collections of art, sculpture, furniture, books, and other objects of value or curiosity. Since public museums only gained traction in the mid-nineteenth century, some country house owners published guidebooks to

[13] See Carole Fabricant's "The Literature of Domestic Tourism and the Public Consumption of Private Property" in *The New Eighteenth Century: theory, politics, English literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987).

their collections to publicize the marvels one might see if he stopped by. Adrian Tinniswood's *The Polite Tourist: Four Centuries of Country House Visiting* (1998) features stories from the diaries and letters of tourists throughout the sixteenth through twentieth centuries that detail the collections of, and interactions between, curiosity seekers and country house owners (or, more commonly, between visitors and housekeepers). House touring was an upper- and middle-class activity—entrance to these "open" houses was usually gained by a fee arbitrarily established by the housekeeper.

Even outside novels, the country house has great narrative power. Who doesn't, at some point, imagine herself as the inhabitant of these grand houses when she steps inside them? Who doesn't rearrange the furniture? Austen plays up the fantasies engendered by country house tours when Elizabeth Bennet and the Gardiners visit Pemberley. Despite a few external obstacles, Darcy's and Elizabeth's emotions clarify from this point forward—in other words, as soon as Lizzy imagines herself as mistress of Pemberley, she is on her way to embodying that fantasy. The effect on the English novel of Jane Austen, of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and of this tour scene cannot be overstated: the novel and the embodied fantasy of country homeownership are realized in *Pride and Prejudice*. A wellspring develops. Allusions to the tour make their way into subsequent novels for the next two centuries; references to the tour pepper material-cultural studies of the country house; the inevitable reference to the scene crops up in the sixth season of the television series *Downton Abbey* when the Granthams open to their house to the public for the first time. Family matriarch, Violet Crawley, played by Maggie Smith, squabbles over the decision with her verbal sparring-partner, the more egalitarian-minded Isobel, played by Penelope Wilton:

> VIOLET: But why should anybody pay? To see a perfectly ordinary house?
> ISOBEL: Not everyone lives in a house like Downton Abbey!
> VIOLET: Oh, roll up! Roll up! Visit an actual dining room! Complete with a real-life table and chairs!
> ISOBEL: People have always tipped the butler to look round a house. Even Elizabeth Bennet wanted to see what Pemberley was like inside.

> VIOLET: A decision which caused her a great deal of embarrassment, if I remember the novel correctly.[14]

Downton Abbey takes place between 1916 and 1926, more than one hundred years after Austen published *Pride and Prejudice*. It is the same period that the modernists were writing. And, like Isobel and Violet, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Taylor, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Elizabeth Bowen were still having fun with the touring tradition that Austen tapped into and with the novelistic tradition that she elevated.

Country House and Novel

The books in this study—by Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, and Elizabeth Bowen—are often looking backward to the novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly those of Richardson, Austen, and the Brontës. Those earlier novels established and cemented the dominance of the English marriage and inheritance plots because the setting itself is at stake in these plots. The opportunity to inhabit a country house or acquire the funds to maintain a crumbling mansion are often achieved either through marriage or the revelation of true parentage. Put another way, country houses endure in the novelistic tradition because they make certain generic conventions durable. The country house is a manifestation of two narrative structures that fascinate us: the search for origins (expressed in inheritance plots) and for love (expressed in marriage plots). These plotlines are the past and future tenses of sex, with a fortune and social authority at stake, so it's no surprise that this is a winning formula: sex always sells. But even if we are not aware of the driving force behind the polite facade, we are probably aware of how a country house structures our generic expectations and solidifies their outcomes. We know, when we see a country house, that

[14] Julian Fellowes, *Downton Abbey*, Season 6, Episode 6, dir. by Michael Engler, PBS Distribution, Original UK Version, iTunes 2016, 3:10-3:36.

someone will win the house either by discovering the truth about his genealogy or by marrying well. The established prize comes with established rules: country house life features a strict code of manners, a complex dress code, and clearly drawn class distinctions. Although the standards of morality are violated in the (reality and the fiction of the) country house repeatedly, these violations never shake off the generic, social, and moral standards of the country house—they just deepen the country house novel's fund of irony.[15]

The country house and the novel do not always go hand-in-hand, but they came of age together. Richard L. Wilson and Alan Mackley describe the period between 1660-1880 as the "golden age" of the country house because of the expansion of the British economy based on agricultural and industrial progress. Philippa Tristram notes in *Living Space in Fact and Fiction* (1989) that the golden age of the country house leaves an indelible impression on the emerging genre of the novel: "From the beginning the house and the novel are interconnected, for the eighteenth century, which saw the rise of the novel, was also the great age of the English house."[16] When the novel emerged, the vast majority of British society was rural—even if the novel's readers didn't live in the country house, they lived in an agricultural society that was largely structured by estates. Built as show houses, country houses exemplify the heightened visibility of the gentry in society.[17] That visibility extends to their representation in literature. Philippa Tristram explains, "Until the time of Dickens, novelists likewise rarely entered houses below the 'architectural' levels of society; only

[15] This irony erupts on the comedic stages of Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward.

[16] Philippa Tristram, *Living Space in Fact and Fiction* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.

[17] The country house's "visibility' is complicated by eighteenth-century emparkment, or, buying up a lot land and sometimes relocating entire villages to achieve an unbroken vista from the house.

misfortune, compassion or the pursuit of vice could take their characters into humbler buildings."

She elaborates:

> In 1817 England was still, as it had been for centuries, an agricultural nation, only 20 per cent of the population living in towns. In the world of fiction from the time of Richardson 'home' is, in consequence, almost invariably located in the countryside, where the great house of the locality is the model for the lesser houses of other gentlefolk. Even an apparently new fortune like Sir Lewis de Bourgh's, displayed by his dictatorial widow Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice*, corresponding to the actual shift in population, enables Rosings to set the standard for Hunsford. 'Home' in Victorian fiction, corresponding to the actual shift in population, is mainly in the city or its suburbs, where there are no great houses to set the standard; and even when characters do live in the country, great houses no longer dominate rural communities in the same way. Too many new ones, based on fresh industrial fortunes, had no connection with the land around them; too many old ones, succumbing to the profit motive, had abandoned responsibility and thus forfeited respect.[18]

In the Victorian era, characters and their authors tended to venture away from the estate. But even as other interiors came into focus, the country house continued to fascinate throughout the nineteenth century—perhaps because it was there from the beginning of the genre. As the novel becomes more prestigious, its literary ancestors are also exalted. So, imagine the sense of crisis that authors felt when hundreds of country houses were destroyed in the interwar and postwar years. On the one hand, the fall of the gentry's houses signaled a triumphant progress toward a more egalitarian society and a more equal distribution of wealth. On the other hand, their material destruction resulted in the loss of an architectural and cultural tradition. Collections of paintings, furniture, and books were also dispersed. The performance traditions and community-based festal traditions vanished with their country-house stages. Most importantly to my project, the disappearance of physical country houses threatened to unmoor the literary tradition of the country house novel—to reduce to obsolescence a subgenre that was particularly important for women writers from Frances Burney to the Brontë sisters to George Eliot to Agatha Christie, and for female

[18] Ibid., 21.

characters that "deserve" to inhabit the country house, from Samuel Richardson's Pamela to Henry James's Fleda Vetch to E.M. Forster's Schlegel sisters.

The Country House and Modernism

When I began this project, I thought of the modernist country house novel as an anachronism: as a subgenre that was sticking around by the sheer force of its influence on the history of the novel. To me, city streets, airplanes, and resort towns were the spaces of modernism. Country houses, when they appeared in early modernism, signified the past; if they weren't left behind, they fell down or were burnt down. They were emblems of a discarded or dismantled tradition. But it is for precisely this reason that they are so relevant to modernism. The most influential modernists remained engaged with the past—you need *stuff* to dismantle in order to *Blast!* culture apart and "Make it New!" according to Wyndham Lewis's and Ezra Pound's demands. But after early modernists came in with their excavators, what foundations did they leave in place? Joyce reduced history and God to a "A shout in the street," Woolf showed us only "A thing there was that mattered," and, in response to this radical vacuity, some late modernists must have felt like Wile E. Coyote spinning their feet in air having run off a cliff chasing the roadrunner of Modernism. I like the country house best when modernist characters stop torturing it and start occupying it again—facing ever so bravely British literature's preoccupation with the space. To do so is to commit to the mood and style of late modernist writing as a whole. Tyrus Miller's description of late modernism seems particularly applicable to the subgenre of the country house novel:

> The cultural products of this period both are and are not "of the moment." Precisely in their untimeliness, their lack of symmetry and formal balance, they retain the power to transport their readers and critics "out of bounds"—to an "elsewhere" of writing from which the period can be surveyed, from which its legitimacy as a whole might be called into question.[19]

[19] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 13.

The country house novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, and Elizabeth Bowen offer a pitch-perfect late modernist setting. Country houses were definitely not "of the moment" (unless we define their moment as one of absolute crisis). They took their characters (and readers) to places that were "out of bounds" since even fewer people lived in country houses than ever before. These authors also question the "legitimacy" of the country house's legacy in twentieth-century literature. Although the tradition they engage is rich and meaningful, these novelists recognize the irrelevance of the country house and face the (likely but false) probability that the country house has no narrative future. Of course, everyone loves a swan song, and other authors attempted to write the definitive farewell to the country houses. Bowen wrote several novel-length goodbyes. Of all these goodbyes, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) is probably the most recognizable. Beautifully written, drippingly nostalgic, *Brideshead* was a huge success—and Waugh's least favorite novel. It's indulgent and comforting, but not as intellectually engaged in the legacy of the country house as *A Handful of Dust* (1934).

A seeming increase in country house novels in the interwar years reflects British literature's broader turn inwards from a more cosmopolitan, international modernism, which Jed Esty outlines in *The Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*. As the island shrinks, the country house expands. What could be more insular than a country house? It is commonly referred to as a microcosm of the "world" which British culture, at its worst, takes to be synonymous with "England." The insularity that Esty maps is, after all, a decline of the British Empire—a return to the cultural "wholeness" that it lost by stretching itself so thin across so many colonies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That the turn inwards manifests in country houses is especially apt, then, since fictions of the self-sustaining estate had long been undermined. Country houses were funded by the exploited labor from the colonies and by the revenue of capitalism, not by the defunct exchange economy of feudalism that it affected. When late modernists turn to

country houses, they don't show the house through rose-colored glasses, but rather as an institution that is financially struggling under the seismic shifts of both the Welfare State and decolonization. Some country house novels might support Esty's claim that during the interwar years "certain English intellectuals interpreted contraction [of Empire] as an opportunity for cultural repair"—but the novels that I survey are not interested in repairing the country house. They're interested in interrogating the country house—in using its walls and objects to examine the aesthetic traditions of British culture that reinforce class and gender norms.

In its examination of walls and objects, my projects also is invested in studying the trend toward particularization in late modernism that Alexandra Harris traces in *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists, and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (2010). Addressing the prevailing notion that modernism deals with abstraction, internationalism, and universality, Harris argues that there is a strain of modernism that is very specific, English, and individual. These particularities are often located in the countryside, so she explores tourism, churches, villages, and the great house, and explains:

> When war threatened, and when it finally came, the imaginative claiming of England took on more urgency. This was the period of Virginia Woolf's cumulative, collaging novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), T. S. Eliot's return to 'significant soil' in his poem sequence *Four Quartets* (1943), Evelyn Waugh's grand memorial *Bridgehead Revisited* (1945), and Osbert Sitwell's expansively nostalgic autobiography *Left Hand, Right Hand!* (1945-50). Writers and painters were drawn to the crowded, detailed, old-fashioned and whimsical, gathering souvenirs from an old country that might not survive the fighting. There is a story to be told about this passionate, exuberant return to tradition.[20]

Harris primarily follows John Piper, John Betjeman, and various Bloomsbury Group members as she examines this strain of romanticism prevalent during the thirties and forties. In doing so, she pits one thing against the other: abstraction versus the particularity of location, clean lines versus messy

[20] Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010) 10.

nature, the city versus the country. Harris's readings of these dichotomies are more complex than my summary of *Romantic Moderns* suggests—but this last one, the country and the city, refers us to a work of literary criticism that is behind both Esty's and Harris's work. It is time to address the "myth functioning as memory" of the country/city divide that Raymond Williams unpacks in *The Country and the City* (1973).

Myths in Reality

The economic and political realities of the estate were enormously complex and responsive to the economic and political revolutions of England over centuries of development. Yet, as Raymond Williams shows, in each iteration (feudal, agrarian capitalist, capitalist), the estate symbolizes a traditional, unbroken order hearkening back to a pastoral Golden Age. Correspondingly, in every literary period the country represents something "against which contemporary change can be measured."[21] In reality, feudalism was an exploitative and brutal political and economic system, but in the myth-functioning-as-memory of feudalism, we might think of it as a total and knowable system based on personal relationships. This is contrasted (falsely) with the anonymous, cruel capitalism of the city, whose population is too large to foster notions of social responsibility toward one another. One of the ways that Williams debunks the pseudo-feudalism of the country estate is by showing that the country and the city are economically and politically entwined. Reality has no effect on the myth, though—in fact, Williams argues that centuries of literature both reflect and perpetuate myths of the innocent "golden age" of the country and the moral corruptions of the city. *The Country and the City* shows us that, when we study the country house, then, we cannot do it purely in historical terms, but must consider the "structure of feeling

[21] Williams, *The Country and the City*, 35.

within which the backward reference is to be understood" which is "not primarily a matter of historical explanation and analysis."[22] My project lingers with the "structure of feeling" in the country house—and with the feeling that country houses *had* structured England and English literature.

H.G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1909), for example, demonstrates how the idea of the country house has structured all of England—including London. In the novel, the smallness of the country house helps Well's narrator, George, to make sense of the bigger world he enters as a student in London. George explains that he is "glad [he] saw so much as [he] did of Bladesover [the country house]" as the son of Bladesover's housekeeper since it enabled him to analyze and "understand much that would be absolutely incomprehensible in the structure of English society." As he travels to the suburbs, to the city, and abroad, he continues to refer to the country house to make sense of the chaos of the modern world:

> Bladesover is, I am convinced, the clue to almost all that is distinctively British and perplexing to the foreign inquirer in England and the English-speaking peoples. Grasp firmly that England was all Bladesover two hundred years ago; that it has had Reform Acts indeed, and suchlike changes of formula, but no essential revolution since then; that all that is modern and different has come in as a thing intruded or as a gloss upon this predominant formula, either impertinently or apologetically; and you will perceive at once the reasonableness, the necessity, of that snobbishness which is the distinctive quality of English thought. Everybody who is not actually in the shadow of Bladesover is as it were perpetually seeking after lost orientations. We have never broken with our tradition, never even symbolically hewed it to pieces, as the French did in quivering fact in the Terror. But all the organizing ideas have slackened, the old habitual bonds have relaxed or altogether come undone.[23]

Estates linger vexingly in the passage above: clearly, George would have preferred a total revolution. But later in the novel, when Wells resituates the discussion of country houses to the countryside, he depicts the poignancy of their partial loss. George runs into a vicar who explains that the villagers

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[22] Ibid.

[23] H.G. Wells., *Tono-Bungay*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, Penguin Classics (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 20.

are "put . . . out"[1] to see the landscape around Lady Grove, the ancient country house purchased by George's uncle, changing so completely as he constructs his modern great house on the land. "It shifts our centre of gravity," the vicar explains sadly. The villagers have no stake in the estate but are profoundly disturbed by these substantial alterations to its grounds because Lady Grove anchors them as a community with a shared past.

Maurice Halbwachs wrote in *The Collective Memory* (1950) that "every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework. Now space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings."[24] *Tono-Bungay* is, in part, a long meditation on the "spatial framework" of the country house and the dominance of physical surroundings. Although George tells the vicar, "Things will readjust themselves," he confesses to the reader: "I lied."[25] The price of social mobility is the alteration of our spatial framework in which traditions, including the traditions that uphold the old social hierarchy, endure. As country houses linger—inhabited by middle-class owners, rebuilt in new architectural styles, tucked into cities, transformed into museums and public offices—they keep a partial memory alive and keep England's citizens "perpetually seeking after lost orientations." Wells, like Williams, is a socialist; he does not believe *in* the myths of the country, but he believes in the power of the country house—the power house—to structure society and affect literature.

Bowen, Taylor, and Compton-Burnett harness the mythic force of the country house and, like Wells and Williams, are critical of its manifold hypocrisies and problematic history. This is an

[24] Maurice Halbwachs, "Chapter 4: Space and the Collective Memory," from *The Collective Memory* (1950), available from http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/hawlbachsspace.pdf, accessed 8 May 2019, 6-7.

[25] Wells, 20.

important point: an author does not endorse the conservative ideology of a country house by setting a novel in one. Rather, these authors take on some of the social injustices and cultural failings of the literary country seat that Williams touches upon throughout *The Country and the City*. Like Esty's and Harris's criticism, my dissertation owes a lot to Williams's work on the political, cultural, historical, and ideological forces that have shaped our world, but it is not another work of "cultural materialism"—though you could reasonably think of it as "material-cultural materialism." When I refer to "materialism," I am referring to physical things as opposed to the literary or ideological: physical things like walls and facades and objects. I read the ideological forces of the literary canon, of history, and of culture through these rooms and objects found in the country house canon: portraits in the gallery, books in the library, performances in the drawing room.

We can think of this kind of hyper-constricted lens as a concretization of Williams's "knowable communities" in country literature. Although he criticizes Austen for restricting her own knowable communities to people in her own class, he admits that her novels are more unified than George Eliot's socially inclusive novels: "Speech and narrative and analysis, in Jane Austen, are connected by a *literary* convention" while the disparate classes in George Eliot's work "makes a unity of idiom impossible."[26] The majority of Williams's chapter is spent on Eliot; let's back up and consider Austen. Not only does Austen exclude other classes from her novels, but it "is also most of the country [which has disappeared], which becomes real only as it relates to the houses which are the real nodes; for the rest of the country is weather or a place for a walk."[27] I am interested in the "real nodes" and the "unity of idiom" that Williams glosses over. If verbal uniformity and knowability are the gold standard for a novel's literary aesthetic, as Williams suggests, then we

[26] Williams, 169.

[27] Ibid.

should pay attention to any node that demarcates social chaos, be it an island, a ship, a train, or a country house.

Henry Green's *Loving* (1945) is executed in an exquisitely unified idiom: set in an Anglo-Irish big house during the Second World War, the novel is experienced through the eyes and language of English servants. The overall effect is one of profound displacement: news of the war is difficult to come by in neutral Ireland; they cannot understand the language of their Irish groundskeeper, Paddy; the war wife's adulterous affair with a neighbor is a distant and vague plot point rather than the whole story. What's really fascinating, though, is our distance from the familiar objects of the country house that are made strange and new through the servants' cockney. Their language fund affects the whole novel. James Woods explains that there is in *Loving* "an extension of free indirect style whereby the third-person narrative is so heavily inflected by the characters it is describing that the very images themselves seem to have been produced by those characters."[28] For Woods, this is part of the "plausible magic" of the novel—something that sounds similar to Williams's "unity of idiom." A baroque side table is seen anew as Madam pushes an "ashtray with one long lacquered oyster nail across the black slab of polished marble supported by a dolphin layered in gold."[29] Later in the novel, the children decide to play in the "Skull-pier Gallery"[30]—the gallery filled with classical statues. Here the statues are not named but described; one is "a half-dressed lady that held a wreath at the end of her two long arms"[31] rather than "Nike." Green is not just writing within the knowable

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[28] James Wood, "A Plausible Magic: Henry Green, the Last English Modernist," *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 Jan. 2006, 13.

[29] Green, *Loving*, 23; for an example, visit http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/514502.1 to view the gilt and marble tables at Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire; see also the rococo drawing room furniture of John Linnell at Kedleston Hall and the baroque furniture of William Kent.

[30] Green, *Loving*, 107.

[31] Ibid., 108.

community of a country house, but within the *known* community of a country house; his experiments work precisely because we gain pleasure by seeing side tables and classical statues (and paintings and pastoral figurines) through fresh eyes and new (because lower-class) words. To put it differently, Green owes the success of his best-loved novel to the familiar literary and material traditions that allowed him to make the Big House strange. And a lot of the groundwork for that tradition was laid by women novelists who do equally impressive things with the country house novel.

The Country House and Women's Traditions

By emphasizing the centrality of the country house in the women's tradition, I am not suggesting that the country house is unimportant for modernist male writers and characters—Aldous Huxley, Ford Madox Ford, Evelyn Waugh, and Phillip Larkin, among others, comment and innovate upon the country house setting in their works. The country house is an important setting in the male-authored canon, but they had many more settings: all of earth, heaven and hell had been in their imaginative tradition since the time the Homeric poets were singing—and male poets have never hesitated to extend the earth even further, taking us to Camelot with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (14th C), Lilliput and Brobdingnag on *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), or 800,000 years into the future in *The Time Machine* (1895). When knowledge has never been denied to you—when you have never doubted that knowledge belongs to you—the epistemology of your imagination is unlimited. Meanwhile, on Lesbos, the greatest lyric poet of classical Greece did not stretch her imagination up to heaven but instead called the gods down to her weddings: a ritual that establishes a domestic contract. The home and the marriage plot dominate women's fiction, even if the women writers we are thinking of wrote about subjects beyond the home and marriage. We might think of the wife in Marie de France's twelfth-century lay, "Laüstic," shut up in her husband's home, communicating

with her lover over the wall. We might think of Aemelia Lanyer's best known work, the first country house poem, "A Description of Cooke-ham" (1611). Even when Margaret Cavendish writes "A World Made by Atoms" (1653), the global metaphor of the title quickly contracts to consider "when we build a house of brick or stone,"[32] and a domestic structure guides the rest of the poem.[33] *Villette* (1853) is a perfectly wonderful novel, but how many people think of Charlotte Brontë's governess abroad before they think of *Jane Eyre* (1847) at Thornfield Hall? Even Sarah Scott's eighteenth-century woman-populated utopian novel, *A Description of Millennium Hall and the Country Adjacent* (1762), is set in a country house. The novel engages what is meaningful in everyday life. And, for centuries, women lived meaningful lives primarily within the domestic sphere. As I will discuss shortly, this explains the appeal of country house novels: they elevate the domestic sphere above the drudgery of the lower- and middle-class home while still engaging the plot points and emotions driven by domestic life that are believable for women characters and meaningful to women readers.

But what is a house for a male character? Something that he settles down to (perhaps unexpectedly) once his entertaining youth has passed, as *Tom Jones* (1749) and Tom in *Mansfield Park* (1814) do. Something he strives to maintain through wisdom and hard work, as Mr. Darcy's housekeeper claims he does in *Pride and Prejudice* and as a reformed Mr. B— in *Pamela* (1740) does. Something he loses through profligacy, as Ashburnham does in *The Good Soldier* (1915) and Willoughby (nearly) does in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). A country house is somewhere that they visit and admire, as Charles Ryder admires *Brideshead*, or criticize, as Denis criticizes *Crome*. In all of these instances, men have full lives outside these houses; their relation to the house is just one criterion

[32] Margaret Cavenish, "A World Made by Atoms," Poems and Fancies Research Assistant, accessed May 15, 2019, https://poemsandfancies.rblake.net/2017/06/09/a-world-made-by-atoms-2/, 2017, l. 5.

[33] Aphra Behn's expansion of the literary landscape is the exception that proves the rule—she actually traveled the world and subsequent literature doesn't really pick up what she sets down.

that contributes to their character. By contrast, Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and Raunce in *Loving* are butlers—wholly dependent on their house. As the most glorified of servants, they are similar to the mistresses of the houses. The poignancy of Ishiguro's novel depends on Stevens's utter relation to, and dependence on, the house; the entwining of his character with the functionality of the household. Green's Raunce is (humorously) characterized by his failure to live up to the ideals of the butler. Ishiguro's and Green's servants are exceptions to the male-authored tradition; for the most part, in the country house tradition, the stakes are lower for men than they are for women. So, for male authors in the twentieth century, nostalgia and disdain for the country house mingle in a neat cocktail of relinquished property and literary rights that are poignant but uncomplicated by the legacy of domestic constraint that women authors and characters labored within for centuries. In other words, it's relatively easy to allow the world to move past the country house when the house was never your whole world.

Highbrow Domesticity

What if a woman wrote *Atonement* (2001)? It's a historical novel about an aspiring young novelist coming of age in a country house in the 1930s through the Second World War. She eventually becomes a famous author but is haunted for the rest of her life by a naïve, but grave, error committed at a house party. In a woman's hands, it sounds like fodder for a soft-focus cover and a place on the "Chick Lit" summer reading list. In Ian McEwan's hands, it was an award-winning book.[34] *Atonement* is full of literary allusions—including, significantly, a cameo by Elizabeth Bowen, with echoes of women authors from Austen to Christie. Under the banner of male

[34] See Meg Wolitzer, "The Second Shelf: On the Rules of Literary Fiction for Men and Women," *New York Times*, March 30, 2012, accessed May 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/books/review/on-the-rules-of-literary-fiction-for-men-and-women.html.

authorship, it was received as a work of genius situated within a literary tradition. Had it been penned by a woman, I would venture that those allusions might have been perceived as an example of "autocanonization."

Jonathan Freedman coined the term "autocanonization" to describe the process by which lowbrow or popular artists, like Barry Manilow and Sting, engage with the highbrow literary works they were taught in school—works within "the canon." According to Freedman, those artists are falling into the same trap as nineteenth-century Romantics who viewed the author as a transcendent genius—a fallacy "we" in academia have grown skeptical of since the late twentieth century. Autocanonization refers to "those moments in which popular or mass culture adopts the canonizing strategies of high or official culture in order to legitimate itself."[35] Throughout his essay, Freedman frequently, self-consciously, and abashedly aligns himself with the side of high culture—within the academy—while simultaneously disavowing the inherent power of the canon. Popular culture, he claims, is stuck on high or elite culture—legitimizing it as well as seeking legitimization from it—while academics like Freedman are beyond it: a bold statement from a scholar who never reveals which authors are on his syllabuses. What Freedman never seems to consider is that categories of High and Low/Popular don't really exist—they are written into existence by scholars like him and repackaged into a form of mass education that reaffirms the canon, or, the set of texts prevalently located on high school and college curricula.

I am ungenerously pointing out weaknesses in Freedman's essay, but in fact it's a very easy essay to nod along to—precisely because he uses the examples from poetry and popular music. These are the least and most accessible kinds of verbal art, respectively. His arguments would become murkier if he included novels (any novels) among his examples. But we must talk about

[35] Jonathan Freedman "Autocanonization: Tropes of Self-Legitimation in 'Popular Culture,'" *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 1, no. 1 (1987): 213.

novels, not only because this dissertation is about them, but because novels are the most vulnerable to the biases of public intellectuals, editors, and academics—biases all the more dangerous because this group believes that "high" and "low" are real categories and they are objective judges of those categories. In reality, highbrow literature is a category designated first by the literary agents who accept or reject a novel and next by the publishing houses that market a novel as an intellectual or entertaining read. This opinion is supported by the authors hassled for a dust-jacket blurb, and by panels of judges (comprised mostly of men) who confer literary prizes on new novels. After the prize circuit, academics pick up on prized novels and either add or do not add them to their syllabuses. From there, college students and future high school teachers learn which books are important and translate that information to the next generation of students. This is the way the world works: Amy Sherman-Palladino goes to college and Rory Gilmore reads Kerouac on the Stars Hollow village green. This is textbook autocanonization, according to Jonathan Freedman.

When Taylor, Bowen, and Compton-Burnett allude to works of literary significance, they are not autocanonizing their works. Or, they are only autocanonizing their works insofar as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) autocanonizes itself. Taylor, Bowen, and Compton-Burnett are engaging in a literary tradition that they belong to even if they know that the college of bishops (the publishers, editors, judges, and academics) will never canonize them for their miracles. To put it another way, we can see twentieth-century women authors as not waving at the canon from a distance but drowning in the same sea that buoys their male peers. Bowen and Taylor frequently portray ordinary settings—middle-class homes, hotels, and public transportation. When they join Ivy Compton-Burnett in the country house, though, I think they are keenly aware of the class-based typology of highbrow and lowbrow literature; they are playing very deliberately with a setting that both literalizes the inherent high/low structures of a literary marketplace and refuses to give place to the gendered and dismissible "middlebrow."

The terms "highbrow," "middlebrow," and "lowbrow" did not enter public discourse until the twentieth century. At first, the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" were used in a snobbish but relatively straightforward way to describe something or someone as intellectual and cultured (highbrow) or not (lowbrow). But it wasn't until *Punch* coined the term "middlebrow" that a fire was lit under these terms: on December 23, 1925 they wrote, "The B.B.C. claim to have discovered a new type, the 'middlebrow'. It consists of people hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like."[36] The Battle of the Brows raged from the 1920s through the 1960s, involving input from figures such as Woolf, Q.D. Leavis, Graham Greene, and Dwight Macdonald. The general consensus seemed to be that there was a kind of purity to both highbrow and lowbrow art forms but that the middlebrow—which was "betwixt and between,"[37] marked by shallow affectations of the highbrow—was a damning term. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "middlebrow" artistic work as "demanding or involving only a moderate degree of intellectual application, typically as a result of not deviating from convention."[38] Elizabeth Bowen, Elizabeth Taylor, and Ivy Compton-Burnett have all been described as "middlebrow" authors. Bowen's novels are too philosophically dense, and Ivy Compton-Burnett's are too abstract, for them to be easy reads. Taylor's prose is easier to navigate but her references are complicated. In other words, their novels do not match the criteria of middlebrow, and I'm sure they did not view their own works as such. However, it's likely they knew their works would be perceived in that way.

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[36] *Oxford English Dictionary Online. s.v.* "middlebrow, n. and adj.," accessed April 26, 2019, http://www.oed.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/Entry/252048?redirectedFrom=middlebrow

[37] Virginia Woolf, "Middlebrow," *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* [book on-line] (South Australia: The University of Adelaide Library, accessed 5 May 2019); available from https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/complete.html.

[38] *OED*, "middlebrow."

They were right to be wary—literary critics have invoked Bowen, Taylor, and Compton-Burnett in their reclamation of the term, "middlebrow."[39] For example, Nicola Humble admits on the first page of *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel: 1920s to 1950s* (2001), "Middlebrow has always been a dirty word," but urges us to see the intellectual and cultural value of books that have been designated "middlebrow." One of Humble's key points is that "middlebrow literature" from the 1920s through the 1950s has largely been ignored because it was written and consumed by women—not because it does not merit our critical attention. In invoking the "middlebrow," Humble uses a risky term but she doesn't undersell her authors; she claims that these novelists were "a powerful force in establishing and consolidating, but also in resisting, new class and gender identities" and that their works displayed a "paradoxical allegiance to both domesticity and radical sophistication that makes this literary form so ideologically flexible."[4] The country house displays both "domesticity and radical sophistication," so the subgenre of the country house novel fits Humble's empowered description of "middlebrow." But we could also say that, with its spatial division into upstairs/downstairs, the class-based implications of highbrow and lowbrow literature come into view in the country house novel—cutting out the middlebrow entirely.[40] For this reason, I think it is more productive to drop the term "middlebrow" in this dissertation whenever possible and to think of Bowen's, Taylor's, and Compton-Burnett's works in general (and their country house novels in particular) as engaged in explorations of "highbrow domesticity."

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[39] See also Janice Radway, Alison Light, Mary Joannou, Gill Plain, Erica Brown, Alice Ferrebe, Melba Cuddy-Keane, Mary Grover.

[40] But, ultimately, I think that Taylor, Bowen, and Compton-Burnett were drawn to the country house because it was a great place to either problematize or escape the "middle." With its spatial division into upstairs/downstairs, the class-based implications of highbrow and lowbrow literature came into view. By putting a middle-class character in the country house, the space alienates and interrogates the middle. But it was also an ideal place to flee from "middle" spaces like urban and suburban homes altogether.

The country house is a manifestation of highbrow domesticity—it sits at the apex of the domestic sphere, and the lady of the house was expected to be an exemplar for the community. Thus, the country house uniquely (for a house) straddles the public and private spheres. The authority and social visibility of its inhabitants imbues their actions—even their mundane actions—with importance. Thus, the country house setting offered women readers and authors a way to engage with and transcend everyday life. Rita Felski writes that the "distinctiveness of the everyday lies in its lack of distinction and differentiation; it is the air one breathes, the taken-for-granted backdrop, the commonsensical basis of all human activities."[41] Felski offers a brief survey of some of the prestigious, "intellectual" novels that have engaged the everyday, writing that:

> [L]iterature is often passionately interested in the ordinary; think of the great realist novels of the nineteenth century, the encyclopaedic scope of *Ulysses* (1922) as an 'inventory of everyday life'; the domestic details of a postmodern novel such as *White Noise.* On the other hand, it also tries to redeem the everyday by rescuing it from its opacity, de-familiarising it and making us newly attentive to its mysteries.[42]

Felski explains that such literature "transcends the very dailiness it seeks to depict"[43] by "magnifying and refracting taken-for-granted minutiae."[44] But not all modernist authors magnify and refract in order to de-familiarize the everyday—some shift everyday life onto heterotopias such as the country house.

According to Michel Foucault, a heterotopia (like a utopia) possesses "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the

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[41] Rita Felski, "The Invention of Everyday Life," *Cool Moves: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, New Formations Series 39 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, Ltd., Winter 1999-2000): 17.

[42] Ibid., 26.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."[45] A country house is a heterotopia that thinks it's a utopia. In fact, many country houses have Edenic names—a trend which is reflected in country house literature. For example, Fielding's "Paradise Hall" in *Tom Jones* is echoed by the "Paradise House" in Elizabeth Taylor's *Angel*. But while utopias exist nowhere, heterotopias are "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[46] Moreover, since ancestral homes are quasi-museums housing art, country homes are "heterochronies" according to Foucault's fourth principle: "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."[47] Country houses were certainly breaking with their traditional time in the early twentieth century—and not just because of the physical toll taken by taxes and war. They were also threated ideologically as Victorian family values were discarded: divorce laws made it easier to end marriages, changes in property law and education made women less dependent on their male family members, and rigid class distinctions softened.[48]

Country houses literalize highbrow domesticity, but not every author engages the literary and cultural legacies of the space. In fact, the country house novel's literary legacy is complicated by popular (or, stereotypically "lowbrow") authors cashing in on the relatable fantasy of country

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[45] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986), 24.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 26.

[48] But it's worth noting that the country house has always existed at a sort of absolute break with its traditional time: it's built to compensate for the loss of medieval emplacement and as a microcosm of a hierarchical society—but the great age of the country house begins with and endures after the Enlightenment. In this way, it is an essentially conservative institution against which authors from Samuel Richardson to Sarah Waters play out their era's break with traditional time.

housekeeping. Then as now, bestselling authors like Marie Corelli or Ethel M. Dell or Georgette Heyer far outsold the "highbrow" literary luminaries of their day. Their pulp romance novels often made use of the country house setting to sell historical fiction and/or love stories—novels that aimed to entertain, but not necessarily intellectually engage, the reader. By the time that modernists were writing, country house novelists had to be careful to distinguish their country houses from the country houses of popular culture. Taylor seems to have embraced (albeit with acerbic wit) the dual legacies of highbrow domesticity and lowbrow country house romances in her works. Compton-Burnett and Bowen pushed back against the degraded legacy of the country house novel by writing difficult, dense, and cerebral books. Each author engages the literary, material-cultural, and architectural histories of the country house to fashion their highbrow domestic novels. But don't be intimidated. Taking it one room at a time, let's go in.

Chapter Summaries

In my first chapter, "'strange legacies of thought and passion': The Family Portrait Gallery and Ivy Compton-Burnett," I track the gallery at Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice* to the gallery at Selby Royal in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) to the photographs of Knole House's family portraits in *Orlando*. These canonical novels form the subtext of Ivy Compton-Burnett's *A House and Its Head* (1935), an interwar novel that features a dominating portrait of the country house owner's first wife, Ellen. Although Ellen was meek in life, her portrait forcefully affects the space of the home and the dynamics of the household during her husband's second marriage. Throughout the chapter, I draw out the characteristics of portrait galleries and the history of English portraiture to highlight the discussions of inheritance that are conceptualized by portraits in the works of Austen, Wilde, Woolf, and Compton-Burnett.

Concepts of literary inheritance are carried into new texts and a new room in my next chapter, "'There are the *words*:' The Country House Library and Elizabeth Taylor." As library historian Peter Reid's work on country house libraries demonstrates, books were usually the first items on the auction block when estates ran into financial trouble. Their dispensability is attributed to the fact that libraries were relatively late additions to the country house. In the eighteenth century, the influx of new money into old houses carried with it newly created gentry who were eager to bolster their shallow pedigrees with the intellectual monuments of the western tradition. Thus, the library stages elitism but it often betrays middle-class anxieties: a paradox that haunts the space in fiction. This paradox is strengthened when we consider that country house novels—middle-class entertainment—were unlikely to be listed in the country house library catalogue. In Elizabeth Taylor's *Palladian* (1946), the country house's paperback novels are hidden (and read) in private rooms while the leather-bound books in the library are allowed to molder.[49] I argue that in *Palladian* and in her subsequent country house novel, *Angel* (1957), Taylor mobilizes the library in a sophisticated metafictional discussion of class, gender, canonicity, and the marketability of the country house library's privacy.

My third chapter, "The Drawing Room at War: Country House Theatricality and Elizabeth Bowen," focuses on the most ephemeral aspect of aesthetic inheritance in the country house, the performance traditions of the drawing room. These literal performance traditions gloss the theatricality of social interactions that constantly took place in drawing room. In this chapter, I investigate performances, such as the eighteenth-century fad for private theatricals, and I consider the performativity of the country house in general. I argue that this cultural history and the theatrical

[49] To my great alarm, Elizabeth Taylor's *Palladian* is the only book of mine that has ever sprouted mold. Was it disagreeing with my analysis or was it positioning itself as a book worthy of the library catalogue?

aspects of country house architectural history, going back to Inigo Jones, underpins Virginia Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), and Elizabeth Bowen's response to that novel, *The Heat of the Day* (1948). In this chapter, I move outside the country house and into the parkland. I argue that Woolf and Bowen contrast the contained performances of the house with the unbounded, chaotic performance of the pageant, which was a popular trend in the early twentieth century. The pageant portrayed local and national history and was often performed outside during the interwar years. These bombastic celebrations of national history frequently exhibited disturbing parallels to fascism, which unsettled some modernists, like Bowen. *The Heat of the Day* expresses her alarm toward public performativity as opposed to the strictly controlled social performativity of the drawing room.

Jane Austen is a powerful presence in late modernist literature (in part) because she was canonized during the interwar years, and she is present in each chapter of my dissertation as a literary progenitor of the country house novel.[50] In my coda, I turn to the material legacy of Jane Austen: the formation of the Jane Austen Society and the foundation of the Jane Austen's House Museum in 1947. When Dorothy Darnell discovered that the cottage in which Austen wrote most of her fiction was on the verge of dereliction, she formed the Jane Austen Society in 1941 in order to raise funds to preserve the building. I draw upon material from the Jane Austen's House Museum archive to tell the story of how the museum was purchased and transformed, with great collaborative effort, into one of the most successful house museums in the world today. The work of the Jane Austen Society takes us back to the beginning of the country house novel, but it also moves us forward—anticipating the afterlife of the country house novel in the television series and films which depict, preserve, and fund country houses today.

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[50] See Clara Tuite, "Decadent Austen Entails," in *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees*, ed. Deidre Lynch, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Maroula Joannou, "'England's Jane': The Legacy of Jane Austen in the Fiction of Barbara Pym, Dodie Smith and Elizabeth Taylor," in *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives*, ed. Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson, 37-58 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

I

"strange legacies of thought and passion":[1]

Matrilineal Inheritance and the Family Portrait Gallery

> He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. He loved to stroll through the gaunt cold picture-gallery of his country house and look at the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins.
>
> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Late modernist country house literature is fond of cringe-worthy scenes, but Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) elevates the faux pas to an art form.[2] du Maurier masterfully equates humiliation with gothic horror, à la *Northanger Abbey*, and emotional paranoia with the ghost story.[3] The numerous agonies of *Rebecca* work best when the reader knows more about the expectations of a country house wife than the latest Mrs. de Winter knows—not a tall order for a country house novel aficionado. In the most painful scene of all, the young bride stands on the grand stairwell of Manderley, her husband's country house, dressed as an ancestor from the portrait gallery. Guests stare at her in horror. Her husband, Max, turns white. The unnamed narrator has been tricked by

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[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120.

[2] "Having accepted an invitation to spend a few days in the country, the next hurdle was deciding what clothes to take. 'One's clothes were a worry,' said Lady Marjorie Stirling, daughter of the Earl of Dunmore. Even for a seven-day shooting party, a woman was expected to dress for every day of the week . . . Loelia Ponsonby suffered agonies on her first visit to the Duke of Westminster's Eaton hall, going down to meet the rest of the guests in the library that evening in a recently bought chiffon dress, 'a singularly inappropriate choice for December,' she remembered with a shiver" (Adrian Tinniswood, *The Long Weekend: Life in the English Country House, 1918-1939*, Basic Books (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2016), 5).

[3] Tellingly, *Rebecca*'s film adaptation (1940) was Hitchcock's first film, and the first and last script that dominated him instead of the other way around. See Alison Light, "Rebecca," Sight and Sound 6, no. 5 (1996): 28-31.

Manderley's housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, into wearing the same costume that her late mistress, Max's first wife, Rebecca, wore during her final fancy-dress ball before her death at sea. The fancy-dress ball is supposed to be the narrator's chance to step out of Rebecca's shadow—to come into her own as hostess at Manderley—but with Danvers's help her worst fears are realized: she is just a poor copy of the charismatic wife who came before her.[4]

The narrator's social/personal crisis couldn't take place in a better medium than portraiture-come-to-life: in marrying a country house heir, a new wife will ideally assimilate into the portrait gallery and produce more heirs/paintings for this visual genealogy. Her dismal failure portends a childless marriage and the destruction of the gallery and, in fact, Manderley famously burns to the ground at the end of the novel taking its portraits with it. Moreover, Rebecca's manipulation of the portrait gallery plays into the novel's impressive red herring: we suspect Rebecca is pregnant with her lover's child and making a mockery of the de Winter lineage in her portrait costume. Echoes of Browning's "My Last Duchess" help our suspicions along—though, distressingly, Max is closer to the Duke of Ferrara than Rebecca is to the Duchess. To understand the full weight of the scene, it is necessary to look back to the surge in English family portraiture three hundred years prior to *Rebecca*'s publication and to the reception of English portraiture in the literary history of the novel.

* * *

In the early seventeenth century, the Earl of Arundel famously accompanied Inigo Jones to Italy so that Jones might study the architectural beauties of the ancient world and Arundel might acquire some of the more mobile beauties—namely, statues. Their trip is accredited with both the rise of Palladian architecture as builders emulated Jones, and to the practice of the grand tour as

[4] Another film, *The Man in Grey* (1943) based on a novel by Lady Eleanor Smith, also deploys a key portrait/flashback trope.

gentlemen emulated Arundel's itinerary and collecting practices.[5] Having returned from the continent laden with marmoreal loot, the earl was so pleased with himself that he commissioned Daniel Mytens to paint pendent portraits of himself and his wife, Alethea Talbot, who had joined her husband in Italy—and whose wealth made possible Arundel's robust collecting (Figure 1 and Figure 2).[6]

Figure 1: On the left is a pendant portrait of Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arunde,l painted by Daniel Mytens, oil on canvas, circa 1618. With the kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery. © National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 5292).

Figure 2: On the right is the complement portrait: the earl's wife, Aletheia Talbot, Duchess of Arundel painted by Daniel Mytens, oil on canvas, circa 1618. With the kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery. © National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 5293).

[5] This is another example of the country house's "paradox of fixity and mobility" that I discuss in my introduction.

[6] See Christy Anderson, *Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

What ideals of pendant portraiture can be gleaned from Mytens's depiction of "The Collector Earl," as he came to be known, and Lady Alethea? Set in discreet (but usually matching) frames, the husband is typically hung to the left of his wife, following the left-to-right authority of the written word. The husband and wife are angled toward one another. Their backgrounds are similarly composed but depict crucially different content.[7] Behind the earl, his gallery of statues (long since gifted to the Ashmolean). Behind his wife, the family portrait gallery. While he gestures toward the cold stone statues representing the intellectual legacy of a classically educated English nobleman, she gestures toward the legacy of family members—a legacy that her own body perpetuates. While he has a more impressive haul, she ends up with a far more interesting portrait: presiding over a family portrait gallery while (presumably) hung within a gallery, Alethea's meta-portrait draws out the metafictional potentiality for the portrait gallery to express stories of matrilineal inheritance and uxorial anxiety. I emphasize the former in the first half of this chapter and the latter in the second half, but these matters are intertwined throughout the novel tradition.

My chapter investigates this close link between the family portrait gallery and the country house novel. Descriptions of galleries in novels can concretize more abstract concepts of literary inheritance, and such descriptions are also a method for authors to position their novels within a tradition of literary portraiture. When we see the portrait within the family gallery, as we do in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), the novel signals that heteronormative, *bodily* inheritance is at stake: the portrait urges the characters toward a marriage resolution that promises more sitters for that portrait gallery via reproduction. In such a tradition, Alethea's portrait carries more weight. But when the portrait becomes estranged from the family gallery, as it does at the end of the nineteenth century in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the portrait signals the novel's dissatisfaction with patrilineal inheritance

[7] See Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in England, C. 1740-90* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 21.

laws, with the literary inheritance of the heteronormative marriage plot, and with the subordination of aesthetic legacies to ancestral legacies. In such a tradition, the earl's portrait carries more weight.

As canonical novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are the famous forerunners of late modernist "portrait novels"—novels in which portraiture plays a central role, or forms a central conceit, in the narrative. I will discuss these famous forerunners in relation to Woolf's equally canonical modernist novel, *Orlando* (1928), before moving onto an exceptional late modernist country house novel: Ivy Compton-Burnett's *A House and Its Head* (1935). The novels discussed in this chapter are portrait novels that use the gallery space to conceptualize the uniquely metafictional *and* material aspects of matrilineal inheritance exemplified by Alethea's portrait. By "matrilineal inheritance," I am not referring to a matriarchal legacy that is opposed to patriarchal legacies but, rather, a thread of maternal inheritance that remains visible within patriarchal structures. A wife may take her husband's name, but in the portrait gallery her face and her body remain visually distinct—and conspicuously powerful. After all, if the latest wife fails to produce an heir and the house is purchased by an outsider, the collective value of the gallery is immediately diminished. Portraits are likely to be sold off, though they are not always—when H.G. Wells's middle-class medicine peddler, Edward Ponderevo, buys the country house, Lady Grove, in *Tono-Bungay* (1909), he keeps the family portraits despite their taunting superiority:

> We stood up to the dark, long portraits of the extinguished race—one was a Holbein—and looked them in their sidelong eyes. They looked back at us. We all, I know, felt the enigmatical quality in them. Even my uncle was momentarily embarrassed, I think, by that invincibly self-complacent expression. It was just as though, after all, he had not bought them up and replaced them altogether; as though that, secretly, they knew better and could smile at him.[8]

Ponderevo, perhaps unnerved by the portraits' gazes, tries to build a modern mansion on the parkland. The scheme bankrupts him, and his financial ruination leads him to die, alone and

[8] Wells, *Tono-Bungay*, 249.

childless, in a foreign country. The novel's protagonist—Edward's nephew, George—fares only slightly better; the novel ends in a rejected proposal when George is unable to coax his sweetheart away from the squire who keeps her as his mistress.

I begin my chapter by looking closely at two key scenes that take place in the country house galleries at Pemberley and Selby Royal, exemplifying Austen's marriage-plot novel on the one hand and Wilde's anti-marriage plot novel on the other. Next, I turn to *Orlando*, a masterful culmination of literary country house portraiture in which Woolf mobilizes both poles, the Austenian and Wildean, to "reclaim" the lost inheritance of the estate. Finally, I consider the metafictional dimensions of Compton-Burnett's portrait novel that follows in Woolf's wake and I emphasize the value of reading late modernist portrait novels within this tradition of the literary country house portrait gallery.

Wilde breaks away from the portrait gallery and Woolf takes us back with his modifications in place. Ivy Compton-Burnett writes within the tradition advanced and recovered by Wilde and Woolf. Compton-Burnett's novel shows us how the metafictional can hide in the material background of the novel and mid-century plots can register on two levels: authors like Compton-Burnett (or her contemporary, Agatha Christie) write masterpieces in pulp fiction's clothing. But to understand *A House and Its Head* on its conceptual level, we must delve into the material and literary traditions of the country house portrait gallery.

Family Portraits

Country houses hold diverse paintings—from still lives to history paintings—but the genre of portraiture plays the most prominent role in the English country house novel. One reason for the portrait's influence is simply that the family portrait gallery was usually housed in the country house rather than in town. This standard was symbolic as well as practical: on the one hand, it "was the country seat that provided the basis for the political power exercised in town," on the other hand,

the country house provided the space required to display a large collection.[9] Moreover, space in townhouses was usually reserved for the more impressive paintings acquired abroad. In fact, today country house tourists are more apt to notice the historical paintings of the old masters or the landscapes of the British school than the obscure family figures that haunt a house's walls.

Yet portraiture is the most native genre of painting to the English country house—a detailed articulation of the successional authority asserted by the power house itself. The construction of a great house is a monumental gesture that claims and institutes a dynastic palace. This claim is based both on the land ownership that established a family's wealth and on the patrilineal inheritance that established a family's power beyond the lifespan of one heir. As Shearer West succinctly puts it, "With land came breadth and influence; with children came continuity of influence; with the combination of both came power."[10] In addition to family members, political allies were often represented by painted portraits and portrait busts to signal the household's place in the ideological currents of national history. The busts of Charles James Fox and William Pitt, eighteenth-century Tory and Whig politicians, are particularly popular in country houses.[11] In "Patronage and Power: the role of the portrait in eighteenth-century England," West explains that portraiture came to dominate the English market because most patrons were country house owners and only interested in sponsoring art that honored this combination of land, genealogy and political influence. Although fine Dutch and Italian paintings demonstrated wealth, good taste, and a well-spent Grand Tour,

[9] Retford, *Art of Domestic Life*, 317.

[10] Shearer West, "Patronage and Power: the role of the portrait in eighteenth-century England," in *Culture, politics, and society in Brtain, 1660-1800*, ed. Jeremy Black and Jeremy Gregory, 131-153 (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 142.

[11] Jeremy Musson, *How to Read a Country House*, in association with *Country Life* (London: Ebury Press, 2005) 200.

such pieces of art were often acquired, not commissioned.[12] This limitation was far from ideal for Britain's artists. Although there was a diverse array of portraiture subgenres, such as the education portrait, the hunting portrait, the masquerade portrait, the pendant and double marriage portrait, and the conversation piece, artists in the eighteenth century had limited funded opportunities to flex their creativity in the artistic genres that could better express their genius (such as history painting, landscape, and still lives) until the establishment of the Royal Academy at the end of the century.[13] The timeframe is significant—developed alongside the "surge in country-house building and redesigning that took place in the eighteenth century," West argues that "it is within this context [of the country house] that the role of portraiture should be examined. The setting in which portraits were hung is an essential consideration in the evaluation of what they projected and how they were meant to be perceived."[14] Coinciding with the great age of the country house, portraits "function as props within the power houses" and never really escape the traditions and associations established in their eighteenth-century heyday. And if the British portrait cannot be understood outside its country house context, neither can the portrait novel or even a good portrait scene, like the one in *Rebecca* discussed above.

Another central portrait scene occurs in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915). On the surface, Ford's is a novel about marital unhappiness but, if we focus on the material dimensions of the narration, *The Good Soldier* reveals itself to be a story about the rich American's gradual takeover of the quintessentially English country estate. After all, the novel is as famous for its notoriously

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[12] West, 133.

[13] "From the time of the foundation of Godfrey Kneller's genteel art academy in 1711 until the Royal Academy had established its monopoly of the British art world in the 1790s, portraits dominated artistic production in Britain. No other country in Europe patronized portraits so much to the exclusion of other genres such as history painting, landscape painting and still life" (West, 131).

[14] West, 135.

unreliable narrator—John Dowell—as it is for its characters' moral failings. Dowell initially asks us, the readers, to imagine ourselves in a cozy seaside cottage with him—but near the end of the novel Dowell reveals that he narrates his story from the Ashburnham's ancestral seat, Branshaw Teleragh, which he now owns. *The Good Soldier* focuses on a set of couples—John and Florence Dowell from America, Edward and Leonora Ashburnham from England—who vacation together in Germany and whose lives and scandals become intertwined. As the novel progresses, it becomes more and more difficult to find sympathy for any character as it is revealed that Florence Dowell is conniving, John Dowell is witless, Leonora Ashburnham is cold, and Edward Ashburnham is a serial philanderer. But towards the end the novel, when Edward's string of infidelities and gambling debts finally catches up with him and his wife is forced to let and mortgage their country estate so that she can pay for his indiscretions, the consequences of his behavior finally hit home, literally. This loss is bad enough but John Dowell is careful to point out that Edward is reduced to tears specifically because of the sale of his ancestors' portraits:

> [His wife] sold two Vandykes and a little silver for eleven thousand pounds and she raised, on mortgage, twenty-nine thousand. That went to Edward's money-lending friends in Monte Carlo. So she had to get the twenty-nine thousand back, for she did not regard the Vandykes and the silver as things she would have to replace. They were just the frills to the Ashburnham vanity. *Edward cried for two days over the disappearance of his ancestors and then she wished she had not done it*, but it did not teach her anything and it lessened such esteem she had for him. She did not also understand that to let Branshaw affected him with a feeling of physical soiling—that it was almost as bad for him as if a woman belonging to him had become a prostitute. That was how it did affect him; but I dare say she felt just as bad about the Spanish dancer (emphasis mine).[15]

Ashburnham's infidelity has cost him the jewels of his family portrait collection and pushed him away from the gallery itself since he must let the estate. That his tears are focused specifically on the

[15] Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*, ed. David Bradshaw (Penguin Classics. London; New York: Penguin, 2002) 134-5.

Vandykes reveals how ancestral portraits articulate the cultural, financial, aesthetic, and above all *emotional* value of the English country house.

Portraits were influential enough to affect even the design and construction of the country houses in which they were hung—new portraits might be painted to suit a modern design scheme, but heirloom family portraits could hardly be altered to suit changing tastes.[16] Ancestral portraits might be elongated or cropped, and in extreme cases such as the Brown Gallery at Knole every ancestor might be repainted anew in the same style. However, typically decorative schemes were made to suit the family portraits and not visa versa.[17] Nor were family portraits confined to one gallery—they were found throughout the house with the more illustrious ancestors adorning the dining room, alongside the family's royal connections, where guests would be sure to observe them. Thus, newly commissioned portraits must squeeze into a decoration scheme doubly constricted by the reciprocal influence of old portraits and new walls.

Portraitists were further constrained by the demands of a genre that required the artist to produce a naturalistic likeness, flatter their patrons by smoothing out any imperfections or ugliness, and assimilate the flawed individual to a universal ideal. For example, Sir Joshua Reynolds wrote in his fourth Discourse that, "If a portrait painter is desirous to raise and improve his subject, he has

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[16] Andrew Moore, "Hanging the Family Portraits," in *Family & friends: A Regional Survey of British Portraiture*, ed. Andrew Moore with Charlotte Crawley, Norfolk Museums Service (London: Stationary Office Books, 1992): "the art of picture-hanging was as prey to fashion as any other aspect of interior decoration, the status of the family portrait was an important element in any building or remodelling scheme" (Ibid., 31).

[17] Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British art by Yale University Press, 1993): "While the containment of portraits in uniform frames (such as appear at Arundel Castle, Christ's Hospital and in many other large and long-established collections) signals a form of systematization, the framing of particular portraits in elaborate and individually designed frames calls attention to the pre-eminence in a decorative arrangement, or can rupture an existing harmonious arrangement buy its strident individuality. In the case of the former, the process not only marks a moment when attention has been paid to the need to maintain visual dynastic continuity but also allows for the accommodation of copies, replicas or portraits of an inconvenient size into the standard series. In the latter case, allegorized devices ensure a ritualistic reading of the portrait, elevating it towards the status of history" (Ibid., 34).

no other means than by approaching it to a general idea."[18] This accounts for the stunning uniformity of many portraits of the period—one Lely or Kneller looks very much like another. Difficult as it is to believe in a modern age of individuality, uniformity was desirable for patrons who would have wished to adhere to the rule of taste. Moreover, family members often were dressed in Van Dyckian or classical garb so that they might better blend in with the preexisting portraits in their gallery.[19] There was not even much leeway for artistic expression among the more dynamic subgenres of portraiture, such as the hunting picture or conversation piece. All creative energy was directed toward reinforcing the family's dynastic influence:

> The portraits, ostensibly intimate views of family and family life, were actually very much on show. Portraits therefore became a catalogue of the life, accomplishments and continuity of the family—but a selective and prejudiced catalogue, designed to establish the myths of family invincibility. The issue was further complicated in the first half of the eighteenth century by a crisis in birthrate which initiated desperate intermarriages, name-changing and searching for distant cousins, in order to keep the family seat within the family. During the period 1650-1740 male heirs were scarce, and estates were frequently passed to a female heir or distant relative.[20]

Portraiture, especially group portraiture like the conversation piece, presented small fictions and elegant arrangements of the family's everyday life (Figure 3). Depicting individuals but appealing to universal ideals, it is no wonder this medium feels at home in the novel, especially in the country house novel. Nor is the fiction of portraiture confined to the scenes they depict: sometimes the

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[18] Reynolds believes that historical painting is far nobler than portraiture since its dependence on the individual keeps it from attaining an ideal. In the nineteenth century, William Hazlitt combats this thinking and places "emphasis on individual character in preference to the civic humanist concern with the ideal (or 'general') body…For [John] Barrell, Hazlitt's stress on personal identity marks the beginnings of an ethos of competitive individualism characteristic of industrial mass society" (Paul Barlow, "The portrait's dispersal: concepts of representation and subjectivity in contemporary portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall, Critical Introduction to Art, (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 224). Hazlitt of course notes (as is often noted) that Reynolds's views are at odds with his own extraordinary portraits which assimilate the ideal with the individual very well.

[19] Retford, 160.

[20] West, 136.

portraits themselves are a kind of fiction. A house might flesh out its meager family portrait collection by discreetly mixing sixteenth-century Italian portraits among their own. When Knole repainted its ancestors for the Brown Gallery, some visages had to be fabricated for the names on the family tree that had no corresponding picture in order to create the illusion of perfect genealogical continuity as well as visual uniformity (Figure 4).[21] Chawton House, which Jane Austen's brother, Edward Austen Knight, inherited from a distant relative, is a great example of these hyper-avuncular inheritances described in the passage above. The house was built by the Knight family in the sixteenth century and rarely passed from father-to-son until Edward Austen Knight inherited it over two hundred years later. Using the portrait gallery and its stain-glass windows depicting family crests as mnemonic devices, tour guides at Chawton will deliver virtuoso narratives of the property's complicated chain of inheritance.

[21] See http://www.nationaltrustimages.org.uk/image/402000 for an image of Knole House's Brown Gallery. "However, even if no portraits of absent ancestors were available for the purpose of replication, fabricated paintings could be commissioned. Such fictitious portraits were nothing new, as revealed in Philip Lindley's study of mediaeval funeral effigies. Indeed, in the sixteenth century, John, Lord Lumley had not only erected a series of matching Gothic monuments to his ancestors in Lumley chapel at Chester-le-Street, but had also commissioned a series of no less than eighteen full-length portraits of his family from the Norman conquest onwards, each with a genealogical inscription. However, the practice became particularly popular in the eighteenth century and numerous paintings of ancestors were commissioned to complete decorative schemes in new or reconstructed family seats. On occasion, it was not only the portraits that were manufactured, but also the ancestors themselves…Sometimes patrons who did have the requisite desirable ancestors simply lacked an appropriate visual record. In the 1750s, Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester, commissioned a number of portraits from an Italian artist named Andrea Casali, one of himself, one of his wife and several of his ancestors. These were then placed on display in one of the four pavilions at Holkham, known as the stranger's wing. A guidebook of 1775 reveals that, as well as being open to the scrutiny of tourists, this section of the house was 'wholly calculated to accommodate company'" (Retford, 165-66).

Figure 3: Arthur Devis, "Robert Gwillym of Atherton with his Family, of Atherton Hall, Herefordshire," 1745-7, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.51. This conversation piece shows a scene of family life, as they are all "casually" posed before the ancestral hall.

Figure 4: The Brown Gallery at Knole House. Photograph by Charles Essenhigh Corke (1852-1922). From a large album of photographs of Knole from circa 1890. With the kind permission of the National Trust. Image No. 402000. © National Trust / Charles Thomas.

Professional portraiture and the novel are also much interested in matchmaking—like a kind of upper-class, guardian-mediated Tinder.[22] Thus, the portrait gallery is a significant space in a marriage-plot novel. Portraits traditionally played a significant role in arranging marriages, from the royal marriages of history books to the pages of Shakespeare, wherein Portia's portrait lies in a lead casket in *The Merchant of Venice*. In her introduction to *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (1993), Marcia Pointon starts off with an anecdote about Lady Wentworth writing a letter to her son in which she describes a mother who considered her daughter to be wife potential for him. The mother makes her daughter stand beneath Lady Wentworth's son's portrait and declares that "she never se twoe facis more alyke."[23] Reading an account of a marriage prospect positioned beside the portrait of her potential husband, we might think of Elizabeth Bennet in the touchstone portrait gallery scene in *Pride and Prejudice*: the one in which "she [Elizabeth] stood before the canvas on which he [Darcy] was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself."[24]

[22] This differs from the trope of amateur portraiture wherein the sitter and artist fall in love—as Emma tries unsuccessfully to orchestrate Harriet's engagement to Rev. Elton; as Dorothea wins Ladislaw's love in *Middlemarch* before he turns his mind to the more-serious pursuit of politics; as Angel forces Esmé to finally love her—at least, long enough to propose—in *Angel*; as Anne flirts shamelessly with the artist Ivor in *Crome Yellow* (though he's a pro).

[23] Pointon, *Hanging the Head,* 1. Pointon elaborates: "The very existence of the portrait of the young man licenses a series of narratives, only one of which concerns possible marriage. The portrait is the stage-set and the frame of reference, but the exchange that takes place exceeds the circumscribed bounds of the portrait as image. The link between seeing and telling, the scripted process whereby the possible marriage partner is positioned beneath the portrait of the absent young man, and the rhetorical comparisons between the painted features of the young man and the living face of the young woman connect artefact and discourse. They open onto a politics of representation in which the historical human subject is not a separate entity from the portrait depiction of him or her, but part of a process through which knowledge is claimed and the social and physical environment is shaped," (Ibid.).

[24] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 189.

Pride and Prejudice

Any modernist country house novel engaging the family portrait gallery is going to have two landmark novels looming behind it: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* on the one hand, and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* on the other. While cynical readers of *Pride and Prejudice* like to point out that Elizabeth Bennet only falls in love with Mr. Darcy after she sees his country estate, Pemberley, in fact her change of heart occurs *specifically* in the portrait gallery. Austen is at pains to set up this distinction—moving around the house's interior prior to Lizzy's visit to the portrait gallery, she thinks, "And of this place . . . I might have been mistress!"[25] But the initial splendor of the rooms and the house's situation in the landscape do not, in fact, sway Lizzy. After walking from room to room, admiring the furnishings within and the views without, she imagines a counter-reality where the sights of Pemberley would have been already familiar to her had she accepted Darcy's proposal. However, she abruptly stops these thoughts: "'But no,'—recollecting herself—'that could never be; my uncle and aunt would have been lost to me; I should have not been allowed to invite them.'"[26] Later in her tour, Elizabeth walks into the gallery where "there were many family portraits," though Austen notes, "they could have little to fix the attention of the stranger."[27] Austen places her character in front of Darcy's portrait and writes, "There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original than she had ever felt at the height of their acquaintance."[28]

[25] Ibid., 186.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 189.

[28] Ibid.

While Darcy's letter has prepared Elizabeth for this revelation mentally, Austen is careful to note that Elizabeth's heart begins to change in front of the country house portrait. It is only here that she is able to replace the out-of-context portrait she has painted of Darcy with the one she views in the family gallery at Pemberley. His positive characteristics spin out from this patrilineal context, as is evident when the passage continues:

> The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!—how much of pleasure or pain was it in his power to bestow!—how much of good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression.[29]

In viewing him as "a brother, a landlord, a master," Elizabeth views Darcy in his most idealized form: the portrait. The testimony given by the housekeeper, as well as Darcy's subsequent hospitality, reinforce the trustworthiness of this idealized country house portrait. Moreover, just as the portrait gallery re-contextualizes Darcy's character for Elizabeth, it also re-contextualizes Elizabeth's family for Darcy.

Darcy's botched proposal is not merely clumsy but rooted in the fear of adding middle-class portraits to his family's portrait gallery. These inevitable changes to the family's portrait gallery will become the visual, tangible proof that Darcy has married "beneath" him. When Darcy's new wife joins the wall beside him, her presence will cast the Darcy lineage in a new and diminished light according to the values of the estate portrait gallery. Much earlier in the novel, Caroline Bingley notices Darcy's growing admiration for Elizabeth. Caroline mentions Pemberley's family portrait gallery, triggering Darcy's fears about marrying down and incorporating the Bennet family into his own august line. Caroline mocks, "'Oh! yes. Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Phillips be

[29] Ibid.

placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your great-uncle the judge. They are in the same profession, you know, only in different lines. As for your Elizabeth's picture, you must not have it taken, for what painter could do justice to those beautiful eyes?"[30] Juxtaposing Elizabeth's professional-class relations with Darcy's uncle, whose position as judge is conferred on the gentry, drives home the class difference between the two. Hypothesizing these changes to the portrait gallery, Caroline makes visible the genealogical taint that marrying down will bring the Darcy family dynasty monumentalized within Pemberley. Marrying Elizabeth will bring new portraits to the gallery as surely as it will bring her blood into his own line. When Elizabeth shows up in the Pemberley's portrait gallery with her honorable aunt and uncle—people whom Darcy comes to respect over the course of the visit—she gives Darcy the opportunity to re-contextualize *her* in this space, as well, and to cool the anxieties that Caroline has fanned. Thus, the very portrait that Caroline warns Darcy he "must not attempt" appears in the gallery and, from this point forward, Darcy has no qualms about incorporating Lizzy and her family into the own as his wife and the mother of his future children.[31]

[30] Ibid., 39.

[31] Lizzy is not, herself, thinking in terms of genealogy—in terms of the past and the future tense. When she first enters the gallery, the narrator notes, "there were many family portraits, but they could have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Elizabeth walked in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her." She judges Darcy on how he fulfills his roles as a master, landowner, and brother—not on how distinguished his lineage is. This reflects favorably on our ever-sensible, unsnobbish heroine. However, we, the readers, must consider the context of the gallery since Austen is at pains to distinguish it from the miniatures Elizabeth views in another (unspecified) room. When Elizabeth knew Darcy out of the context (like looking at a portable miniature), she misjudged him. While looking at Pemberley's miniatures and listening to the housekeeper, Mrs. Gardiner, sing his praises, she is primed for her revelation in the gallery—but for that revelation to fully happen, it requires the spatial/material positioning of Lizzy and Darcy's portrait in the family gallery.

Portrait Novel Family Tree

Ultimately, the physical overrides Darcy's social and pictorial qualms, and he renews his quest for Lizzy's hand; the rest is literary history. It is a literary history that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* plays upon. Of course, when we think of Wilde's novel, we think of a portrait that is antithetical to the family gallery—and that's precisely Wilde's point. Unlike Lizzy, Dorian stands in front of his own portrait—not the portrait of a would-be spouse—again and again. Though he flirts with the idea of marriage, his story ends not with the perpetuation of his lineage but with suicide. But when Dorian visits the country house portrait gallery at Selby Royal, we can see that Gray's family portraits inspire the mythically static and isolated qualities of the picture of Dorian Gray in London. Although it is not the primary setting of *Dorian Gray*, the country house portrait gallery motivates the novel's central conceit.

We do not, of course, jump directly from Darcy's portrait gallery in *Pride and Prejudice* to Dorian's hidden portrait in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: the portrait gradually wanders away from the family gallery in English literature. A decade before *Dorian* is published, Isabel Archer is a portrait loose in the European market in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Her inheritance derives from an English estate, but she neither grew up in nor keeps the house and land. Adrift in the continent like a portrait dislodged from its ancestors, she falls prey to a ruthless art collector and into a doomed marriage. Looking back ten more years, we see that in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), Dorothea's grand tour honeymoon portrait (another staple of the country house's family portrait collection—see Figures 5 and 6) serves to dissever the heroine from the same estate the picture is destined for. Dorothea begins to fall in love with the artist, Will, when he is a painter, but a clause in her husband's will precludes her from retaining his estate if she marries Will. Therefore, they marry and leave both the country house and painting behind as Will enters politics to influence social progress (and, presumably, support his family). Literature, art, and society are moving away

from the traditions and heteronormative ideologies encapsulated in the house portrait gallery behind Alethea. And yet the portrait gallery remains present in the novel as the benchmark by which we measure our progress.

Figure 5: The grand tour honeymoon portrait of Sir Matthew Fethersonhaugh, 1st Bt, MP (1714-1774) with Wreaths of Fruit and Corn by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni. With the kind permission of the National Trust. ©National Trust / Andrew Fetherston.

Figure 6: The grand tour honeymoon portrait of Sarah Lethieullier, Lady Fetherstonhaugh (172201788) as Diana by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni. With the kind permission of the National Trust. ©National Trust Images.

Hand-in-hand, social and aesthetic trends diminish the value of the country house portrait gallery. As the nineteenth century leans toward the twentieth, portraits break away from the commissions and the demands for verisimilitude and away from the need to represent oneself to posterity. What portraits are produced are usually coterie portraits—the sitters are the friends, rather than the patrons, of the artist, like Dorian Gray.[32] Without a paying customer's wishes to consider, or the necessity of making the portrait fit in with the other portraits in the family gallery, the artist has complete freedom of expression and the results are starkly different from the flattering, noble, monotonous images of the British upper-class. Indeed, by the twentieth century "[c]ommissioned portraiture, long discussed as a source of artistic subservience, has become widely regarded as necessarily detrimental to creativity."[33] By contrast to the distinguished sitters in traditional portraiture, twentieth-century sitters appear tired, dejected, or full of unseemly hilarity, their bodies are disproportionate, their clothes shabby or absent. Even the upper-class patrons who were brave enough to commission portraits in the new style rarely hung them alongside their ancestral portraits. One of Knole's twentieth-century gems, a portrait of stream-of-conscious novelist Eddy Sackville-West by Graham Sutherland, hangs alone in the gatehouse tower rather than among Sackville-West's ancestors in the house. It's fair to hang the portrait in isolation, though, since such portraits do not attempt to portray an individual within a particular lineage, but instead offer a glimpse of universal emotion—more interested, like Sackville-West's novels, in the present tense of humanity rather than its aesthetic traditions.

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[32] Woodall explains that, although artists have been painting portraits of friends since at least the fifteenth century, in "the late nineteenth century 'avant-garde' portraiture was markedly confined to uncommissioned images of these categories of sitter . . . it implied a lived intimacy between painter and sitter, imaginatively reproduced in the viewer's relationship to the painting" (Woodall, 7).

[33] The passage continues: "More fundamentally, the early twentieth-century rejection of figurative imagery challenged the belief that visual resemblance to a living or once-living model is necessary or appropriate to the representation of identity (whether such identity is attributed to the sitter or the artist" (Ibid., 7).

The Picture of Dorian Gray

In his portrait novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde invokes the country house portrait gallery in order to lead us (via the portrait) away from these matters of heteronormative procreation, or "reproductive futurisms," to borrow from Lee Edelman.[34] The expectation of marriage and the mirage of country house morals are also lampooned in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), but in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the stage's humor takes a backseat to a profound metafictional critique of the novel conveyed by the medium of portraiture. At first, Dorian Gray's picture seems utterly decontextualized, a coterie portrait that exists in the vacuum of the artist's London studio. As the novel progresses, Dorian's character is corrupted by the freedom from physicality that the portrait affords as it supernaturally masks the effects of Dorian's hedonistic lifestyle. But Dorian becomes a country house heir through his mother, Margaret Devereux, from whom he inherited his beauty along with the estate, Selby Royal. The estate lends context to Dorian's portrait: halfway through the novel, in Selby Royal's portrait gallery, we learn that Dorian's family pictures were in his portrait's backstory all along, motivating his "mad wish"[35] to switch places with the portrait. Dorian's inheritance of Selby Royal serves, in part, to crucially distinguish Wilde's novel from the country house literature that has come before—by the same token, it also serves to complicate that forward motion, to reveal the contingencies of radical aesthetic progress.

In Gray's family portrait gallery, we can see that Wilde both positions his novel in the wake of the maternal inheritance exemplified by the portrait gallery and as the end-point of this lineage—as the last portrait (novel) in the country house family portrait gallery (of novels).[36] Thus, Selby's

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[34] See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[35] Wilde, 78.

[36] Naturalistic portraiture and the realist novel thrive at the same time, drawing from the same constraining cultural impulse towards accurate representation; "Portraits could either be theorised as exact, literal re-creations of someone's external appearance, or as truthful accounts of the artist's special insight into the sitter's inner or ideal

portrait gallery also raises the question: where does English portraiture go if we move beyond the country house? Dorian uses Selby's gallery as an alibi when Basil asks, at the end of the novel, what has happened to his portrait—in truth, it is locked up in the old school room in his townhouse. But Dorian claims that he sent the portrait to Selby and it was lost or stolen along the way. This is no resolution—Oscar Wilde himself does not know if the genre of portraiture will survive outside the context of the country house. Every medium, perhaps, needs a genealogy—including his own novel.

To summarize the metafictional arc of the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* begins with the creation of the picture of Dorian Gray—an uncommissioned portrait of a famous artist's muse, a beautiful and guileless youth. Painted in the artist's, Basil Hallward's, studio in London, the portrait is created neither for money nor fame—in fact, Hallward refuses to exhibit it when it is finished, claiming that he has put too much of himself in it. This reinforces Hallward's commitment to art for art's sake: although it is his best work, he will not benefit from it. His qualms are also born from a queer self-containment: Basil's same-sex desire for Dorian gestures both toward the closet and toward the kind of love that does not produce children. When Dorian changes places with his portrait, his life becomes self-contained in similar ways to Basil's despite his ostensibly heteronormative impulses as he courts and proposes marriage to the actress, Sibyl Vane.[37] In fact, a

self. Both could be assimilated to the concept of realism" (Woodall, 5). Both are also pushed to the brink in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—a work that simultaneously stretches the boundaries of the realist novel as a young man, upon seeing his completed portrait, makes a wish that the painting might age rather than his own body. Thus, the sitter switches places with his portrait—the most "exact, literal re-creation" imaginable—and the artist captures and maintains Dorian's unspoiled "inner or ideal self." Dorian's youthful and innocent visage is maintained as years pass and sins are committed; auxiliary characters in the novel are so loyal to the idea that physiognomy reflects the inner self that they cannot believe the beautiful Dorian Gray capable of committing the depravities he is rumored to have committed. When Basil creates his masterpiece, he clearly believes he has achieved a truthful representation of Dorian's inner self.

[37] Dorian's attraction to Sibyl is not entirely heteronormative; in fact, it is all facade—once her art fails, and she is the only inhabitant of her body rather than a vessel for all the heroines of Shakespeare, Dorian Gray is disgusted by her vulgarity. In portrait-gallery terms, it is as though he had been visiting Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, admiring paintings from famous dramatic scenes—but when he meets the model in person, he is disappointed she is not more like the characters she plays. Early drafts make it clear that Basil is a gay character, but I'm not

pivotal point in Dorian's character development occurs after Sibyl commits suicide and Dorian commits himself to a life of wanton hedonism. Dorian leads young men and women to their ruin but never to the altar; thus, the novel's turning point also sloughs off the nineteenth-century realist marriage plot. But no easy substitution is made for the heteronormative pairing that is rejected. Rather than return Basil's love and live a life of queer non-reproductivity (but, rather, continuing the aesthetic production begun in the studio between muse and artist), Dorian kills his portrait's creator and then himself.[38]

To summarize the backstory that relates to the portrait gallery at Selby Royal, Dorian's mother, Margaret Devereaux, married a soldier who was killed soon after their wedding in a duel provoked by her own father. Margaret leaves Dorian property and he also inherits her physical features, amplifying the materiality of maternal inheritance. His father's modest background serves to further emphasize the maternal link between Dorian and his position in the country house gallery, and the barebones details about his father leave open a space for his mentor, Sir Henry Wotton, who gives him the plotless French book that "poisons" Dorian's soul. The book comes into his life just after Dorian decides to put his fiancée's suicide behind him and monitor the effects his sins have on his portrait in secret.

Wotton gives Dorian the book at the end of Chapter X, and Chapter XI moves away from a plot-driven narrative and into a lushly descriptive chapter that chronicles the effects that the novel, with its philosophy of new hedonism, has on Dorian's life and interests. The novel itself is linked to a house: "Huysman's novel [*A rebours*] features a wealthy aesthete, Duc Jean des Esseintes, who

convinced that the text tips its hand either way re: Dorian's sexuality. However, his romance with Vane does not confirm him as a "straight" character.

[38] When Basil wants to see his painting years later, Dorian finally reveals the truth to him. Basil has been his steadfast friend, and although he has heard rumors of Dorian's corrupting behavior he cannot believe that his innocent-looking friends is capable of these depravities.

sequesters himself in his luxurious home in order to savour erotic fantasties and sensuous experiences that generate sensations that he fears he will not find in reality."[39] Dorian has taken the lesson of the novel to heart, hosting his own lavish parties in Selby Royal and collecting all manner of objects from exotic perfumes to musical instruments from places far and wide. Wilde's richly materialistic descriptions culminate in the portrait gallery at Selby Royal. Riffing on Gilbert's art theories put forth in "The Critic as Artist,"[40] the narrator notes:

> [Dorian] used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. He loved to stroll through the gaunt cold picture-gallery of his country house and look at the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins.[41]

These "strange legacies of thought and passion" are transmitted by the "blood flow[ing] in his veins"—emphasizing Gray's physical inheritance, which has taken a backseat to Wotton's and Hallward's aesthetic legacies thus far in the novel.

The description of the portrait gallery progresses chronologically, and Dorian's first ancestor is a revelation: his portrait has directly influenced Dorian's strange portrait. The ancestor looks remarkably like Dorian—beautiful, a society darling in the court of King James (their relationship is described with queer overtones, not unlike Dorian's and Basil's relationship). But his beauty had faded, and the narrator asks, "Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own? Was it some dim sense of that ruined grace that had made him so suddenly, and almost without cause, give utterance, in Basil Hallward's studio, to the mad prayer that had so

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[39] Bristow, *Dorian Gray*, note for p. 106, 211.

[40] Ibid., note for p. 121, 217.

[41] Wilde, 120.

changed his life?"[42] At the beginning of the novel, Dorian wishes to switch places with the portrait just after a "sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation."[43] But it's a revelation that, the narrator suggests in Chapter XI, might have been waiting in his DNA as a "strange legac[y] of thought." The knowledge that his ancestor's beauty, commemorated by the portrait, is eventually ruined by time inspires Dorian's inverted relationship with his own portrait. In other words, the text anchors the motivation for Dorian's wish in the first portrait in his ancestral portrait gallery and in the bodies represented throughout the gallery, from his portrayed first ancestor to the last: his mother.

The dichotomy between Dorian's maternal, material inheritance (of Selby Royal) and the paternal, intellectual inheritance (influenced by Lord Wotton and Huysman's book) is reinforced as the scene transitions from a description of Dorian's mother's portrait to an account of his literary ancestors.[44] The final sentence of the family gallery section draws out the similarity between Dorian's and Margaret's pictures: "The carnation of the painting had withered, but the eyes were still wonderful in their depth and brilliancy of colour. They seemed to follow him wherever he went."[45] The last portrait in the gallery never takes her eyes off of the son who squanders the legacy she has

[42] Ibid., 121.

[43] Ibid., 24.

[44] Nor is such a dichotomy lacking in the history of portraiture itself: "Noble and non-noble virtue differed not in *kind* but in *content*. It is this difference which explains the correspondence between the 'rise of the bourgeoisie' and the dualist distinction between identity and the body. The hereditary nobility's reliance upon blood and family genealogy rendered noble identity inseparable from the body. By contrast, that of humanist and commercial elites was necessarily detached from the body in order to justify a position of honour not dependent upon biological inheritance. Family genealogies were replaced by 'inspirational' lineages consisting of influential figures" (Woodall, 16). But I think in this instance literature is the element "detached from the body"; portraits doubling down on the "noble identity inseparable from the body." His mother is the heiress, after all.

[45] Wilde, 122.

left to him (the house and estate) and who will end the family line—whose failure to marry and produce an heir depletes the gallery at Selby Royal of its significance.

The next paragraph in the chapter stresses the link between Dorian's material and intellectual inheritances. The paragraph begins: "Yet one had ancestors in literature, as well as one's own race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious."[46] Cerebral and disembodied, literary ancestors allow us to select and acquire them by the conscious act of reading. But Wilde is not one to let his reader rest comfortably with this neat distinction between intellectual and physical inheritance. Those "strange legacies of thought and passion" from the gallery reverberate in the disembodied register of literary lineage, too: "There were times when it appeared to Dorian Gray that the whole of history was merely the record of his own life, not as he had lived it in act and circumstance, but as his imagination had created it for him, as it had been in his brain and in his passions."[47] Although ostensibly moving away from the physical to focus on the intellectual, the narrator slips back into and intensifies the language of corporeal inheritance; the abstract "thoughts and passions" of the portrait gallery become more tangible in this passage as the narrator describes the imaginative substance in "his brain and in his passions."[48]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] The paragraph leads into another description of Huysman's poisonous book—though this time the description seems to be of a fictional Chapter 7 which describes Imperial Rome to the Renaissance. It is an Italian prehistory to timeline of Selby's portrait gallery, which picks up at the court of King James. By anchoring Gray's intellectual inheritance in the heart of the classical world, Wilde demonstrates the psychology behind the classical education and participation in a Grand Tour as status markers for aristocratic young men. Moreover, it reveals another layer to the dichotomy between the portrait gallery and the book: English inheritance on the one hand, and the influence of the Continent on the other. It is also worth noting that this intellectual genealogy meets his biological genealogy at a significant moment for portraiture in art history since "the 'rebirth' of portraiture is considered a definitive feature of the Renaissance [which] saw the adoption of intensely illusionistic, closely observed facial likeness" so that "by the turn of the sixteenth century, the 'realistic portrait' was widespread" in Italy and on its way to England (Woodall, 1-2).

* * *

Gesturing to the portrait gallery, Wilde positions his novel as an ancestor to future literature. *Dorian Gray* anticipates its literary descendants; *Orlando* fulfills this anticipation brilliantly and brings us unequivocally back to the portrait. Both the "open secret" of same-sex desire is conspicuous in Wilde's and Woolf's texts;[49] their novels contain one unnatural, fantastic event—in *Dorian Gray*, his picture ages instead of his body, in *Orlando*, his sex changes from male to female halfway through the novel; both novels find a way to suspend time as Dorian does not age and Orlando ages incredibly slowly; most importantly, portraits and text are intertwined in each novel's exploration of familial and literary genealogies. The picture that is "lost" on the road to Selby makes its way home in Woolf's novel as she reinstitutes and queers the country house tradition. Thus, Woolf reclaims Knole for Vita Sackville-West and, in the same move, stakes her own claim as the heir of Wilde *and* of Austen. And Woolf's portrait-novel does not merely describe portraits, but includes eight photographs, five of which are "portraits of Orlando." Four of these photographs are of portraits held at Knole House, the real-life counterpart to Orlando's (unnamed) fictional estate. Whereas *The Picture of Dorian Gray* forecasts the demise of the painted portraiture, *Orlando* reinvigorates the discussion through photographs: a relatively new medium to re-present an old genre.

Orlando

Born a boy in Elizabethan England,[50] Orlando unexpectedly becomes a woman in

[49] Elizabeth Hirsch, "Virginia Woolf and Portraiture," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm, 160-177 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 174.

[50] See Talia Schaffer, "Posing Orlando," *Genders*, no. 19 (1994): 26. Schaffer's note that his whole world is male is interesting: "His attic is hung with a tapestry embroidered with images of male riders. His genealogy is entirely male. 'His fathers had been noble since they had been at all. They came out of the northern mists wearing coronets on their heads' (Ibid., 14). The only female figure in Orlando's childhood is his mother, whom he flees to the attic to escape; he is 'disturbed' by seeing her from the window. Even the landscape is almost entirely masculine: 'that was his father's house; that his uncle's' (Ibid., 18). He revels in his connection to a patriarchal world of hunters, noblemen, and property owners. Nothing made him male; he already is . . . But Orlando's photographs unsettle

Constantinople in the nineteenth century.[51] The subtitle of the novel, *A Biography*, is a reaction against the Victorian fascination with biographies—a craze fueled by Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, who was the editor of the monumental *Dictionary of National Biography*. The tone of Victorian biography was satirized by a friend of Woolf's, Lytton Strachey, who wrote *Eminent Victorians* (1918). *Eminent Victorians* was a combination of four biographies that (among other things) wittily exposed the hypocrisies of four famous nineteenth-century figures: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon.[52] While Woolf's subversion of Victorian biography lampoons the strict heteronormativity of the preceding century, the country house stands as a vehicle for the canon of English literature.[53] After all, in addition to Orlando's sex change another equally fantastic

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the text's guarantees. The pictures of men say what the text does not say; that maleness, far from being the normative universal condition, is produced entirely through artifice. Woolf represents men through photographs of statues or paintings. Even 'Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine,' who appears after the historical invention of photography, is represented by a painting. Even the 'Archduchess Harriet,' who is a man in drag, gets a painting. On the other hand, Woolf represents women through photographs of their living bodies. 'The Russian Princess as a Child,' who must have been a child in the late 1500s, stares directly from a photograph in a grinning, joyful anachronism. Thus, Orlando's original male body, far from being his real identity, becomes the always-already-interpreted aesthetic icon, whose original cannot be found. Meanwhile, her acquired female body, which she feels to be comparatively 'unnatural,' appears to be the unmediated visual truth of her identity . . . According to the photographs, women are real, while men are masquerading. Orlando mobilizes the binary terms natural and artificial in parodic ways, because the novel cannot escape this dichotomous reading" (Ibid., 8).

[51] Ironically, Orlando turns female during his moment of greatest masculine opportunity — just as he "marries" Rosita Pepita, sees rebellion, and becomes a duke. But his imminent sexual, military, and economic adventures are impossible for a woman to perform (Schaffer, 10).

[52] In *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Suzanne Raitt explains that, "Woolf's mistrust of that generation and their traditions urged her to try her hand at a biography that would upset all those Victorian preconceptions. Her idea was to use those preconceptions as a vehicle for 'Sapphic Fantasy': to speak a relationship for which Victorian convention had no name" (Ibid., 22).

[53] Of course, invoking biography is also a way of making a commentary on the place of women in literature: "Virginia Woolf was exploiting new biographical methods as a way of inserting women into the tradition on its own terms. The gradual acceptance of identification as an intrinsic element in the reading process for biography meant fresh opportunities for female self-expression. The 'great man', who had had an influence on national history, became, in *Orlando*, the woman whose greatness derived from the depth and intensity of her effect on her lovers" (Ibid., 25). Engagement with biography and contextualizing "Great Men" within national history is still primarily a *Victorian* preoccupation, though. An even broader literary metacommentary is present, which becomes apparent when we focus on the *house*, which works hand-in-hand with the genre of biography.

element of the novel is his/her unusually long life. Orlando is an adolescent in the sixteenth century but only thirty-six years old in the "present day"—the year the novel was published, 1928. His/her long life is also a long inhabitation of the great house that is at the heart of the novel. After Orlando becomes a woman, she is disinherited of her ancestral home because of its patrilineal entail; thus, the novel is a salient exploration of gender and property rights contextualized in English political and literary history.

These broader issues of gender and inheritance tie into the personal history of the book's addressee: Vita Sackville-West. The conventional interpretation of *Orlando* holds that the novel is a reclamation of Vita Sackville-West's lost inheritance of Knole, the country estate in west Kent that she grew up in. In the late nineteenth century, Vita's mother, Victoria, Baroness Sackville, had fought to inherit the estate in a very public court case which she won by disclosing that she and her siblings were the illegitimate children of a Spanish dancer and Baron Sackville. Although this allowed her to take possession of Knole in her own lifetime, the court's ruling did not permanently dismantle the patrilineal entail and therefore Baroness Sackville could not pass the estate to her daughter. Knole went to Vita's cousin, Eddy, and the loss of her childhood home and the injustice of her "disinheritance" haunted Vita's life and work. *Orlando* also features the illegitimate children of a Spanish dancer (who are disinherited) and a long, drawn-out court case. Knole's heirs are conflated into one lifetime, and Orlando fathers these children at a significant point in his life: just before he is mysteriously transformed into a woman. This puts gender, inheritance, and the law courts at the crux of fact and fiction.[54] Thus, Baroness Sackville's legacy plays a prominent role in the text, just as

[54] Raitt suggests that Woolf was inspired by Sackville-West's writing to blend the intimacy of real life with fiction. After reading Vita's description of her trip across Persia in *Passenger to Teheran* (1926), Woolf wrote to her, "It is odd that now, having read this, I have picked up a good many things I had missed in private life. What are they, I wonder, the very intimate things one says in print? There's a whole family of them. Its the proof, to me, of being a writer, that one expresses them in print only, and you do here. (Woolf to Sackville-West, *L*, iii. 291, 15 Sept. 1926)" (Ibid., 3).

the last picture in Selby's portrait gallery, the picture of Dorian's mother, sits in a key position in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, pivoting the discussion from Dorian's familial genealogy to his literary genealogy. *Orlando* is a text that is also invested in the interplay of these genealogies—and keenly attuned to the changing status of portraiture as it tells this story.[55]

Dorian Gray is uncannily verisimilar to his portrait—so much so that he is able to change places with his painting and murder his portraitist. His story arc glosses a trend in portraiture at the turn of the century since we could also say that verisimilitude kills the genre of painted portraiture. Woodall locates portraiture's demise specifically at the advent of photography—a medium that can copy the visible world more exactly than painting can. The result of this superior documentation of the visible world meant "exposing the conceptual hierarchy within which portraiture signified, [so that] the advent of photography implicitly challenged and problematised portraiture's claim to absolute truth."[56] Thus portraitists were restricted by their commissioners, by preexisting works in the gallery, and by a visible world that could be reproduced much more accurately through new technology. Moreover, it was a technology that made family portraiture faster, affordable, and widely accessible to a middle-class market. So, really, the portraiture business was booming in the nineteenth century—both on Daguerre's plates and on John Singer Sargent's canvases. But as country houses and their galleries began to disappear in the twentieth century, there was not much for painted portraiture to hold onto. Although the National Portrait Gallery remained a popular place to visit, painted portraiture's prime draws to a close in twentieth-century Britain after the

[55] And maybe a good place to mention the materiality of the novel—something that Raitt et al. stress. It is, after all, an unabashedly sensuous book—but sensuous in a way that calls attention to the material dimensions of body and the book itself: "His sensations—the sensations of a living body—are part of the texture of the book, 'that riot and confusion of passions and emotions which every good biographer detests'" (Ibid., 33).

[56] Woodall, 7.

Edwardian era.[57]

Orlando is a rich mixture of the text and the image, bringing into the novel the technology which kills the canvas but carries portraiture forward. Woolf uses photographed portraits and photographs of painted portraits from Knole throughout, creating an intensely cohesive portrait-novel in the wake of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[58] In fact, portraiture is invoked in the most important scene in the novel:

> We may take advantage of this pause in the narrative to make certain statements. Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same. His memory—but in the future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his,' and 'she' for 'he'—her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle . . . Many people . . . holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man. Let biologists and psychologists determine. It is enough for us to state the simple fact: Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since.[59]

This is the only point in the text where the narrator uses the third person plural pronoun to express Orlando's gender ambiguity, and it is amid this grammatical confusion—in the space in the text

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Photographs and portraits are also important in Woolf's source text from *Orlando*, Vita Sackville-West's *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922). In *Knole*, Sackville-West continuously refers to her ancestors' portraits as she describes her family's history, for example, she writes, "Such interest as the Sackvilles have lies, I think, in their being so representative. From generation to generation they might stand, fully equipped, as portraits from English history. Unless they are to be considered in this light they lose their purport; they merely share, as Byron wrote to one of their number:

> . . . with titled crowds the common lot,
> In life just gazed at, in the grave forgot. . .
> A race with armorial lists o'erspread

In records destined never to be read. But let them stand each as the prototype of his age, and at the same time as a link to carry on, not only the tradition but also the heredity of his race, and they immediately acquire a significance, a unity. You have first the grave Elizabethan . . . [etc.]" (Vita Sackville-West, *Knole and the Sackvilles*, 3rd edition (London; Tonbridge: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1973), 41). She even includes some photographs of painted portraits in her illustrated section.

[59] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, annotated ed. Mark Hussey, 1st ed. Harvest Book (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2006) 103.

where the English language fails—that the narrator asks us to turn to the wholly different medium of portraiture to confirm Orlando's identity as a man-become-woman.

Woolf celebrates the complex genealogies of portrait and novel on a national level—and on a personal level.[60] She expressed and demonstrated much more fondness for the medium of photography than for painted portraits, which adorned her childhood home.[61] Maggie Humm explains that photographs were a mechanism of intimacy for Woolf, and that she collected a great number of photographs of her friends. Additionally, her great aunt was the celebrated Victorian photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron. Woolf used Cameron's photographs as a lure to get Vita to visit her in London in 1923, "to look at my great aunt's photographs of Tennyson and other people."[62] Photographs played a role outside the text, in the pre-history of the novel, as a mechanism for intimacy between two authors.

Within *Orlando*, photographs fuse the ancestral painted portraits of Sackville-West's ancestors with the middle-class intellectual legacy of Woolf's family. After all, Cameron's photographs aimed to elevate photographed portraiture to the status of high art by emulating the pre-Raphaelites (Figure 7).[63] Photographs engage each woman's matrilineal legacy to create a queer

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[60] Of course, in addition to this maternal legacy of photography, the text also draws inspiration from her father's work on the *Dictionary of National Biography* as Woolf mimics the conventions of Victorian biography in the novel. See Raitt's chapter, "Orlando and Biography," in *Vita and Virginia*.

[61] "Woolf's first home, 22 Hyde Park Gate, was, Woolf herself noted, painted red and black like a Titian painting and her parents' portraits, by Burne Jones, G. F. Watts and William Rothenstein, hung on the walls," (Maggie Humm, "Virginia Woolf and Visual Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia* Woolf, ed. Susan Sellers, 214-230 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 215).

[62] L3, p. 4, quoted in Humm, 217.

[63] Schaffer explains that "[p]hotographs visibly encoded family history for Woolf; her great-aunt took them, her mother sat for them, her sister owned them. Woolf could position this artistic family inheritance against Sackville-West's ancestral collection of priceless portraits" (Schaffer, 11). Schaffer goes on to note that the photographs taken by members of Woolf's family outweigh the photographs taken of the Sackville-West 4-3; I would add that the fourth, a painting "of Shelmerdine," is unidentified and part of Nigel Nicholson's private collection—therefore Sackville-West's and Woolf's media of ancestral painting and photography are balanced.

novel, an art object that reclaims through aesthetics the familial inheritance unjustly denied to Vita. Four portraits in the novel are drawn from Woolf's friends and family, four from Sackville-West's—therefore their portraiture is in balance as a marriage of equals.[64] This is not unlike when Caroline Lennox married Lord Henry Fox and, in creating their new family gallery out of the old library, allocated the north wall for his family portraits and the south wall for hers as a sign of equal respect for both family's illustrious lineages.[65] And although I would disagree with Hirsh's conclusion that Woolf seeks "revenge" against Vita for taking Mary Campbell as a lover, this does not take away from her excellent observation that "*Orlando*'s deployment of the conventions of biography and portraiture actually roils the structure of the open secret, along with the property interests and heteronormative historiography it served to perpetuate."[66] Although it is certainly true that the novel pokes fun at the heteronormative historiography of the country house, and although Woolf does immortalize herself within the walls of Knole by writing *Orlando*, it is more interesting to look at the formal motivations—rather than the supposed emotional ones—behind the (photographs of painted) portraits and photographs that are evenly distributed in the novel.[67] I argue that, in

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[64] "The spume of *Orlando*'s prose celebrates marriage as an adventure with a stable base: something that at once frees Orlando from and at the same time anchors her in, the past and the traditions of her society. *Orlando* uses the conventional stresses of biography—marriage, death—to question life's and biography's terms. It is peculiarly appropriate that Woolf should have chosen to use biography, so quintessentially respectable a form, to explore new ways of writing lives and inscribing half-concealed relationships. For it was the obvious respectability of her married state that allowed her, under its protection, to explore her own sexuality as she had experience it with another woman. The material and emotional stability of her marriage allowed her the kind of adventure to which the playful prose of *Orlando* . . . bears such eloquent witness" (Raitt, 24-5).

[65] Retford, 39. Moreover, it should be remembered that Woolf received Harold's book, *Some People* (1927), which "played with the relation between fantasy and fact in a collection of stories about people he had known" (Ibid., 29). Raitt argues, "It is likely that Woolf's reading of *Some People* had influence on the final form of *Orlando*" (Ibid.). Also, the Madresfield rumors (related to Woolf via Harold).

[66] Hirsch, 174.

[67] Obviously, they are all photographs—but those of Sackville-West's family are photographs of paintings in her family's collection, while the other four are photographs of people—of Vita and Angelica Bell.

subverting the conventions of the country house portrait collection, these photographs form an important subtext about same-sex romance and the durability of aesthetic creations over the reproduction of human bodies. Vita's family history is re-written within this tradition of aesthetic durability in *Orlando*.

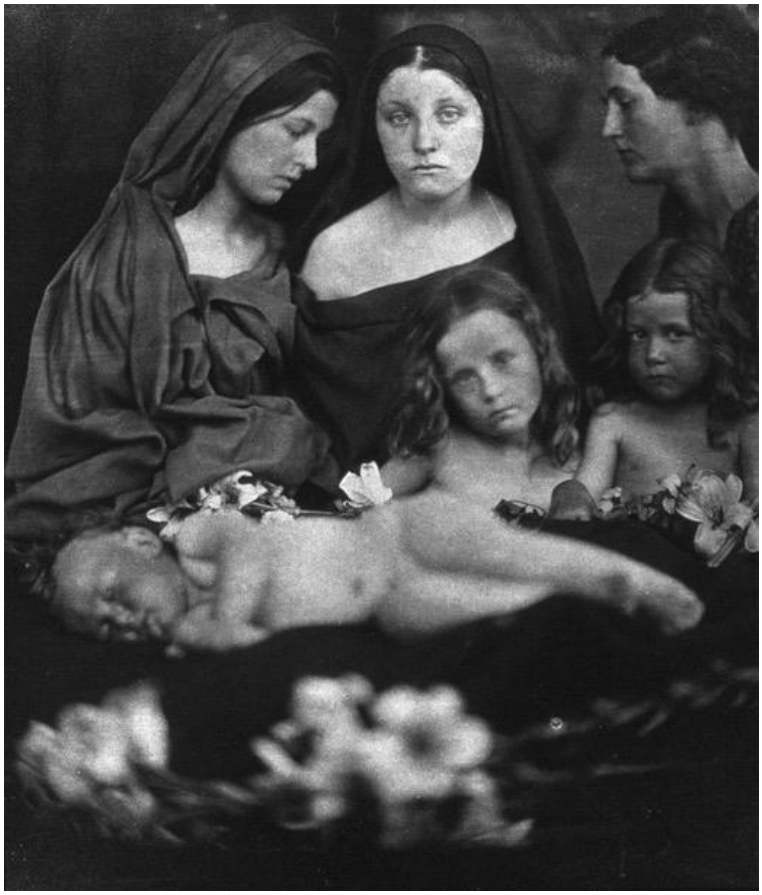

Figure 7: Julia Margaret Pattle Cameron (1815-1879, English) artist. n.d. Sister spirits, Total. photographs. Harvard Fine Arts Library, Digital Images & Slides Collection. Like Pre-Raphaelites painters, Cameron evokes the medieval iconography of Madonna and Child paintings in this photograph.

In *Orlando*, the trans-temporal durability of book and house is bound up in the character of Orlando—a figure who ties the temporally bound, mortal individual, Vita, to her immortal line of ancestors. An ancestral home like Knole is inhabited by different heirs, but they are always Sackvilles; the great house is a point of continuity that demonstrates that their wealth and power in

the present day is not fleeting but dynastic and undying. Yet Orlando doesn't represent the entirety of Vita's Sackville ancestors back to the Norman Conquest—s/he possesses a sort of immortality within the limitations of literature, and within the limitations of art history. Orlando has militant ancestors that precede him, but his life begins during the golden age of English literature in Elizabeth's reign. It is an age, moreover, that is particularly and explicitly interested in the Ovidian trope of immortality via literature—from Spenser's promise to his love, "my verse your vertues rare shall eternize" to Shakespeare's bold promises of immortalizing his love in the sonnets: "As long as men have breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee." The literary parameters of Orlando's lifespan are a nod both to *Orlando* itself—a new novel and durable work of literary art—and to the literary inheritance that precedes the novelists, Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf.[68] By writing for, to, and about Vita, her muse for *Orlando*, Woolf creates an unconventional novel within a highly conventional tradition.

Orlando's strange timeframe is as shaped by the history of portraiture as it is by literary history. After all, portraits began to take the place of tapestries in long galleries starting in the sixteenth century.[69] More importantly, in the sixteenth century "a visual repertoire was established which was emulated in naturalistic portrayal for the following three centuries and beyond. During the period, the courtly console tables, wooden chairs, curtains, columns, helmets and handkerchiefs

[68] I also can't help but think of Woolf's essay, "The Elizabethan Lumber Room," which discusses *Hakluyt's Collection of Early Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries of the English Nation* in five volumes. In it, she describes a young adventurer and "the sight upon which the first English merchant first set eyes has the brilliancy of a Roman vase dug up . . . There, all these centuries, on the outskirts of the world, the glorious of Moscow, the glories of Constantinople have flowered unseen" (Virginia Woolf, "The Elizabethan Lumberyard," in *The Common Reader, first series* [book on-line], The University of Adelaide Library, accessed 26 April 2019, https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c/complete.html).

[69] West, 135.

repeated in countless later works were introduced to the portrait repertoire."[70] Just as the sixteenth century establishes a literary repertoire that is referenced and rewritten, portraiture's innovations in the sixteenth century prove to be foundational and reiterated throughout the centuries. Such allusions are a way of maintaining artistic continuity and perpetuating a collaboratively created national legacy. In establishing a "recognisable iconographic type," artists established themselves as "pictorial 'founding fathers' of a 'visual genealogy.'"[71] Likewise, the authors I am discussing in this chapter positioned themselves as founding authors in a pictorial-novelistic tradition.[72]

Portraiture trends aside, visual homogeneity in a family portrait gallery was an important feature for a much more basic reason:[73] an heir is authorized by his resemblance to his ancestors. Between sitters' desire to emphasize their ancestral likeness and the intermarriages that preserved the

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[70] Woodall, 2.

[71] Ibid., 2-3.

[72] In a sense, *Orlando* is a "portrait" in the same way that *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *A Portrait of a Lady*, *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, or any other novel with one clear protagonist is a psychological portrait. But *Orlando* is a literary portrait that taps into the aesthetic dimensions of a literal portrait; for example, it follows the rules for a "good" portrait laid out by Jonathan Richardson in a 1719 essay: "A Portrait is a sort of General History of the Life of the Person it represents, not only to Him who is acquainted with it, but to Many others, who upon Occasion of seeing it are frequently told, of what is most Material concerning Them, or their General Character at least" (quoted in West, 147). In *Orlando*, Woolf extends this "General History" into Vita's prehistory; two portraits of Vita's ancestors, the Honorable Edward Sackville and Lionel Sackville, 7th Earl and 1st Duke of Dorset, illustrate Orlando when he is still a man. Figures who "are acquainted" with Orlando are also incorporated into *Orlando*—Mary, 4th Countess of Dorset, another ancestor of Vita's, serves as "The Archduchess Harriet." A portrait from Vita's husband's collection appropriately illustrates Orlando's husband, Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. Richardson's tall order to bring together the acquaintances and the general history of a person into one portrait is fulfilled within the generous bounds of the novel and its eight photographs.

[73] In *Historical Style: Fashion and the New Mode of History 1740-1830*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2016), Timothy Campbell describes the rise in print culture and the first historicist age and explains that "In the way fashion texts endured and accumulated, Britons confronted the novel persistence of old fashions, which produced new curiosity about the very *recent* past as well as new self consciousness about the means by which the past could be known" (2-3). Portrait reproductions in print were very much a part of the new print culture propelling both fashion and a new historical sense. This is to say that portraits participated in and promoted a much wider matrix of historicism and fashion. Moreover, Vandyke fashion actually came back into fashion when Sir Joshua Reynolds was painting. So although he initially resisted this costume, proclaiming that Vandyke dress was merely a way to lend the excellence of Van Dyck to sub par portraiture, he eventually had to yield when "real fashion turned back to the past, and anew vogue for Vandyke dress" (Campbell, 112) emerged. See Chapter 2, "Portrait Historicism and the Dress of the Times."

elitism of the aristocracy, many portrait galleries feature strikingly similar portraits of family members.[74] For *Orlando*, Sackville-West and Woolf combed through Knole looking for portraits that looked like Vita and settled on Lionel and Edward. Lionel, the second portrait in the novel and the last portrait of Orlando as a young man, is an apt choice—as the first Duke of Dorset, his elevation mirrors the title conferred on Orlando just before he transforms from male to female. But the selection of Edward for the frontispiece is especially brilliant. This portrait also appears in Sackville-West's *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922), tying Woolf's fictional homage to both her beloved's own literary work and to the literary history of Sackville-West's family. The brothers in this portrait by Cornelius de Neve were both memorialized in verse after their deaths.[75] But whereas in *Knole and the Sackvilles* the de Neve portrait illustrates Sackville-West's ancestors, in *Orlando* it subverts patrilineal inheritance laws.[76] As mentioned when I discussed Mytens's pendant portraits, we read portraiture

[74] Yelena Popova's 2012-2013 exhibitions entitled "The Portrait Gallery," which appeared at the Eastside Projects Second Gallery, the Cole Gallery in London, and the Harley Gallery at Welbeck Abbey, underscore the similarities of the family portrait gallery. Abstract forms are applied with "translucent washes of oil paint to stretched linen." At Welbeck Abbey, they were especially at home—hanging in a gallery built away from the Abbey itself to house the Portland Collection. Harley Gallery makes the collection accessible to the public while keeping them away from the family's home. If you're lucky enough to access the house on one of the 28 days it is open to the public, you will see strikingly similar family portraits (now hung in the former Print Gallery). Popova's portrait gallery might be taken out of the context, but it still has the material dimensions of the gallery in mind: "Walking past paintings, glimpses of something new are revealed as the light touches the surface differently" (www.harleygallery.co.uk/the-portrait-gallery-by-yelena-popova/). In the earlier installation, Mark Westall, editor of FAD Magazine, wrote, "An interest in the different spatial arrangements between art presented in museums—national collections, stately homes and contemporary art spaces also comes into play through the way in which Popova installs the work. How painting acts as a collectible item within these different scenarios is considered—is it able to think or reflect on history, politics, economics? Histories of representation come to the fore, in terms of both the subjects of portraiture and the subsequent display and ownership of these works" ("Yelena Popova: The Portrait Gallery at COLE Private view Thursday 31st January 2013," *FAD Magazine*, 2013, accessed May 4, 2019, https://fadmagazine.com/2013/01/31/yelena-popova-the-portrait-gallery-at-cole-art-opening-thursday-31st-january-2013/).

[75] Cornelius de Neve is a relatively unknown painter. See Edward Town, "Entry for Cornelius Neve," Biographical Entry for London Paintings, *Walpole Society*, 76 (Huddersfield: The Charlesworth Group, 2014): 70-1. According to Lionel Sackville-West's *Knole House, its state rooms, pictures and antiques* (Sevenoaks: J. Salmon, 1906) this "picture hung in the passage leading from the Inner Wicket to the Great Hall . . . known as the Parlour Passage" which "contains some interesting portraits" (100).

[76] Sackville-West, *Knole and the Sackvilles*, 106.

the way that we read English text: authority flows from the left to the right. The double portrait of the two sons follows a similar order—the heir is placed on the left and slightly forward in the picture, the second son (Edward) is pictured to the right (Figure 8).[77] But Woolf crops out the heir and Edward is placed to the left of the title page of *Orlando*, in a position of authority over the text. Before the novel even begins, Woolf subverts patrilineal law by promoting the second son. Moreover, de Neve's painting relies more than usual on the authority of the left-to-right order because the sitters are so extraordinarily alike. The visual uniformity which confirms the right of the heir underscores the injustice of patrilineal inheritance law. Woolf writes of the male and female versions of Orlando: "Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same." The faces of the two brothers in this portrait are also "practically the same." But whereas the death of the older brother would have made the younger son an heir, Orlando's similarity to herself has no such authority. Country house family portraiture in general, and this portrait in particular, reveal the double-standard of biological inheritance laws: Vita is made from the same stuff as her ancestors, and from the same stuff as the second son. She ought to have inherited Knole. And so, at the heart of this aesthetic reclamation of Vita's inheritance is a genetic argument—waged on the portrait gallery's turf. Put another way, the reclamation of Knole takes place within an aesthetic tradition that expresses corporeal continuity.[78]

[77] The actual heir, in favor of Vita, was Edward Sackville.

[78] Not *all* estate entails went to sons—Welbeck Abbey was inherited by three female heirs in a row. But this was so unusual that it is widely remarked upon. Where there is a male heir, daughters will generally be passed over in favor for male cousins. (We see this scenario occurring with great frequency in literature—particularly in Jane Austen's and Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels.)

Figure 8: Lionel and Edward Sackville. A negative glass plate in a paper sleeve labelled 91 Lord Buckland and Hon. E. Sackville. A photograph of Cornelius de Neve's painting of the two sons. With the kind permission of the Naitonal Trust. Image No. 402144. © National Trust / Charles Thomas.

It is, above all, continuity that Woolf notices when she visits Knole in 1927. She writes, "One had a sense of links fished up into the light which are usually submerged."[79] Vita is the culmination of these links, and *Orlando* is a celebration of all the chains—of lineage, of portraits, of literature—which meet us at the end of the novel with its repeated emphasis on the "present moment." When Orlando realizes that it is the present moment, she "started, pressed her hand to her heart, and turned pale,"[80] but, luckily, the revelation is fleeting—going on with her day, "she was

[79] Woolf, 23 January 1927, Diary vol.3, 125.

[80] Woolf, *Orlando*, 219.

again sunk far beneath the present moment."[81] Knole's links are revealed and submerged again in Woolf's novel—an accumulation of Sackville personalities gathered into one character and an accumulation of two family histories coming together in the novel's pseudo-Knole. The novel suggests that there is a tremendous heritage fund, sometimes physical, sometimes aesthetic, that has shaped Orlando's present moment. When the present is seen its full context—when all of its chains emerge from the depth—Orlando blanches. So, the country house, which cultivates and curates a family's personal, political, and aesthetic links to the past and future is not such a bad vehicle for conceptualizing legacies—but Woolf's novel suggests that it needs an ideological overhaul if it wants to be as fair and beautiful as her novel.

After Woolf

Vita Sackville-West's displacement from her family home by her male relations is a tale as old as time—or, at least, as old as Austen. But Woolf does not dwell on Vita's exile by transforming her into a Dashwood sister. Instead, *Orlando* is a re-inheritance of the country house and the country house novel canon, extending its Sapphic fantasies to fantasies of female inheritance. Woolf plays into the emerging interwar conservative nostalgia, particularly the nostalgia intensified by the widespread demolition of country homes, but she also infuses the traditional subgenre of the country house novel with the modernist sensibilities we usually associate with the cityscape. *Orlando* brilliantly renovates the country house novel and the portrait novel—but what novelists are ambitious enough to take up the torch? Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Elizabeth Taylor's *A Wreath of Roses* (1949) and many of Agatha Christie's novels, particularly *Five Little Pigs* or *Murder in Retrospect* (1942), engage the country house portrait-novel tradition, but one of the best responses to

[81] Ibid., 222.

the Austen-Wilde-Woolf legacy that I have traced in the previous section is written by the late modernist author, Ivy Compton-Burnett.

Although *Orlando* successfully engages the country house novel canon, it is not easy to write in Woolf's footsteps. And, Woolf aside, the late modernist country house novel is an inherently risky category to participate in. As Clara Tuite points out, Ivy Compton-Burnett's works constitute a particularly late, or decadent, phase of the country-house genre.[82] Compton-Burnett's subtext is woven from the obsolescence of both house and genre, and every fiber of *A House and Its Head* asks: Is there any room in fiction for the country-house novelist in the 1930s? How many times can we read a country-house inheritance/marriage-plot novel? Is there any life left in the genre, or is the wall too crammed with literary portraits and the vault too full of characters' bodies? Such concerns are expressed throughout Compton-Burnett's other works, as well—her 1937 novel, *Daughters and Sons*, also uses portraits to elevate the novel's plot to a metafictional discussion of the declining country-house genre:[83]

> 'I see why a portrait of a family group is called a Conversation Piece,' said Rowland, coming to escort Miss Marcon. 'They do not generally have such good names for things.'
>
> 'Not such dreadful ones. I daren't look at those pictures because of what I might read into them. It is really too morbid to paint family groups, with a father and a mother and children, and no attempt to leave out anything.'[84]

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[82] In Clara Tuite's chapter, "Breeding Heritage Culture," in *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), she writes, "Just as Austen's country-house novel genre might be said to naturalize the history of the family party in the country, then Austen's decadent successor to and 'too morbid' practitioner of this genre might be said to de-naturalize this genre and its formal and ideological underpinnings" (Tuite, "Breeding," 99).

[83] In "Breeding Heritage Culture," a chapter on *Mansfield Park* and Burke in *Romantic Austen*, Tuite sets this quote from Compton-Burnett next to one by Austen (Ibid., 98).

[84] Ivy Compton-Burnett, *Daughters and Sons*, 1937; quoted in Tuite's epigraph to her chapter (Ibid., 98).

Published only two years after *A House and Its Head*, the characters' discussion of the conversation piece makes a similar move in opening a metafictional commentary on the country house genre. Tuite explains:

> In critically foregrounding the 'no attempt to leave out anything' which characterizes the seemingly naive domestic-realist aesthetic of the conversation piece, Compton-Burnett's Miss Marcon implied that the inclusion of 'anything' and everything is the over-inclusion of the negligible and the incidental, and is thereby a covering over. Through Miss Marcon, Compton-Burnett offers an ironic summary of the realist principle of the superfluous detail and opens the 'natural' domestic-realist genre to speculation.[85]

No one would accuse Compton-Burnett of superfluously detailing her own domestic novels, which is what makes these objects so potent even while, or perhaps especially while, they remain undescribed: they are signifiers *only*. We are not meant to participate in the sentimental attachment the characters have for their mother or wife via these objects—indeed, Compton-Burnett does not give us the opportunity to do so. By keeping the reader at a distance from the inner lives of her characters, by abstaining from the florid descriptions of beautiful interiors, Compton-Burnett staves off sentimentality in her plots about marriage, and staves off nostalgia in her country-house novels.

Yet Compton-Burnett is like Christie and du Maurier and Taylor in that these authors all participate in the far-reaching tradition of country house literature and their literary engagement (and value) have been vastly underestimated. Fooled by the red herring of resolution as the murderer is caught in Christie, the artist sadly resigned in Taylor, the "full story" finally told by the doctor in du Maurier, the line of succession settled in Compton-Burnett, these works do not seem "difficult" in the way that readers of modernist literature expect.[86] But difficulty merely takes a different form. A

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[85] Ibid., 102.

[86] "In the critical lexicon of the early to mid-twentieth century, 'delightful' became one of the defining signifiers of the middlebrow. According to the *OED*, to be delightful is to be 'a cause of source of great pleasure'; the origins of the word are from the Latin *delectare*, meaning 'to charm'. Delight, pleasure and charm: all connoted a certain kind of novel in this period, one that was enjoyable, fundamentally unchallenging in style and reassuring in content. Delight has therefore connoted a 'light read'" (Erica Brown, *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth Von*

reader will certainly never have to search for "the point" as she might in other, blatantly esoteric works of modernist literature—for example, she will never be set on a wild goose chase as she is in *Orlando*. The Victorian dirty laundry is aired in Compton-Burnett and we feel that we have understood the novel. But just as Austen's novels can be read on two levels, at once appealing to the demands of popular literature and containing a subversively ironic sub-layer, so too do these novels engage the tightly controlled tradition of the portrait gallery to graft their own social and literary commentaries onto the deceptively simple forms of country house novels.

A House and Its Head

In Ivy Compton-Burnett's 1935 novel, *A House and Its Head*, the author quickly kills off the mistress of the house, thereby emphasizing the power that her portrait exerts over the inhabitants of the country house after her death. In doing so, Compton-Burnett puts her portrait in the same quasi-supernatural vein as Wilde and Woolf. But in *A House and Its Head*, the nearly-haunted portrait highlights the constrictions of life in the country house and the process of writing in the country-house genre.

Although virtually all of Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels focus on the gentry, and although most take place in a country house, *A House and Its Head* features a particularly focused spatial exploration of the country house and its effect on its inhabitants and neighbors. Indeed, the title announces this topic. In Barbara Hardy's chapter, "The Title and Its Text,"[87] Hardy explains that

Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor, Literary Texts and the Popular Marketplace; no. 3 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), 1).

[87] Barbara Hardy, *Ivy Compton-Burnett*, Midcentury Modern Writing, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

Compton-Burnett's richly suggestive titles highlight the keywords and themes that each novel explores. For example, *A Family and Its Fortune* is infused with expanded notions of fortune.[88]

In addition to highlighting certain themes and signaling Compton-Burnett's masterful wordplay, these titles indicate her engagement with the literary tradition. While both literal and metaphorical worlds are spun out in *Two Worlds and Their Ways* (1949) so, too, do we hear William Congreve's witty conversation and procedures for social conduct underpinning the novel.[89] More subtly, we can tease out echoes of *King Lear* in *A Father and His Fate* as a "tyrannical character, powerful and yet conventionally weak in identity . . . accepts his fate fatalistically."[90] Moreover, the structure of these eighteen titles points to a wider engagement with the literary tradition stretching back to Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* and Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, as well as to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Carlyle's *Past and Present*, Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. As Hardy puts it, her titles were "a familiar form which Compton-Burnett adopted and made strange."[91]

Just as Compton-Burnett makes the title's form strange, she often defamiliarizes the title's terms over the course of the novels. In *A House and Its Head*, she "refreshes and makes us scrutinise literal and metonymic senses of 'House' and 'Head'."[92] The tyrannical but simple-minded parent, the

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[88] For example, Hardy writes, "As that fortune is announced, celebrated, shared, renounced, claimed, demanded, retrieved, denied and given again, in a variety of tones, emotions and rhetoric, every turn and twist of the unfolding tragi-comic drama wonderfully intricates the weave of expectation and surprise, like that in the Greek tragedy the novelist studied for her classics degree at Royal Holloway. The words 'fortunate', 'unfortunate' and 'fortunate' are inconspicuously scattered about in conversation, their appearance seemingly casual, but the plot turns more emphatically and expansively on various kinds of fortune—a large sum of money, a stroke of luck and a stroke of ill-luck—and may remind us of the Roman goddess, Fortuna, the turning wheel, and any kind of Fate" (Ibid., 14).

[89] Ibid., 17.

[90] Ibid., 21.

[91] Ibid., 9.

[92] Ibid., 12.

clever and sarcastic children, the casual murder and unremarkable incestuous or quasi-incestuous relationships are all par for the course in Compton-Burnett's novels and make their appearance in this one, too. But with this title, as with her others, she directs us to what *is* different about her novels which, on the surface, are blatant repetitions of each other. The first surprise, then, is perhaps the negligible description of the house in question in *A House and Its Head.* Compton-Burnett is never one to paint a scene or indulge in unnecessary description, but *A House and Its Head* is particularly abstract, as Hardy notes:

> The ever-present House is stripped of specification, suspended in time and space, strange and more abstract because we know nothing about its place, site, size, appearance, furniture, grounds, architecture or period. The absence of physical particularity is important and makes itself felt. It is sometimes said that all Compton-Burnett's post-war novels are set at the end of the nineteenth century, with anachronisms—for instance, divorce law and transport—but in *A House and Its Head* the characters mention 'Victorian' mores, plainly indicating a later period, though the historical vagueness helps to isolate and conceptualise the subject announced in title and subtly responsive text.[93]

Stripped of the cozy Victorian details of the home, we can only focus on the interrelationships between the patriarch and those in and around the home. The intellectual meat of this novel is the spatial and metaphorically spatial relationships of the Edgeworths' home and the ways that it recovers or doesn't recover when this network is interrupted by the mother-and-wife's, Ellen's, death. The curiously undescribed portrait of Ellen stands as a synecdoche to the undescribed house. She is continually described as a "blank" in their lives—a buzzword throughout the Compton-Burnett canon but particularly persistent in this text. And the continued use of "blank" underlines this unusually abstracted house and portrait—which is another domineering "head" that comes to rival the tyrannical powers of the actual "head of the house," Duncan Edgeworth.[94]

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[93] Ibid., 13.

[94] Katie Trumpener has pointed out to me that these names (Duncan, Grant, Edgeworth) are suggestive of the Anglo-Irish Big House tradition.

Ellen Edgeworth leaves her grown daughters and nephew at the mercy of her tyrannical husband. While Ellen is alive, the country house patriarch, Duncan Edgeworth, is an autocrat who steamrolls his meek wife, paying her little heed. In fact, he does not even notice that she has become ill until the day that she dies, though the rest of the parish has been worried about Ellen for months. However, in death Ellen becomes much more powerful—able to change Duncan, intimidate his new wife, and influence family dynamics long after her death. ("'He hears Mother's reproaches!' murmured Nance. 'How different Mother is getting!'")[95] Perhaps Ellen's portrait stays "alive," affecting the narrative so powerfully, because she never produces an heir for the house; she has two daughters, Nance and Sibyl, but Duncan's nephew, Grant, is set to inherit the estate due to its patrilineal entail. Thus, rather than demoting familial and patrilineal inheritance, Compton-Burnett elevates it to an absurd, modernist level under the watchful eye of the mother's portrait.

The portrait "oversees" the battle of inheritance that takes place inside the walls of the ugly country house, presiding over a family that is uneasy under her gaze—except for Cassandra, the daughters' former governess and friend to Ellen. An affair between Duncan's new wife, Alison, and his nephew, Grant, produces a child Duncan believes to be his own until this belief is undone by the portraits. When Alison first arrives in the home and meets Duncan's family, she exclaims, "And your family portraits are as out of the ordinary as you are. More so, I think. Yes, I should call them more out of the ordinary. Who is the pale, dark lady, with a streak of white hair?"[96] Alison's eye is drawn to a family feature in Duncan's brother's wife—Grant's mother. Her immediate attraction to the wrong maternal line anticipates her infidelity with Grant. Ironically, Alison has been brought to the house precisely to combat this maternal line and the portrait that will undoubtedly be given pride of

[95] Compton-Burnett, *A House and Its Head*, 85.

[96] Ibid., 121.

place if Grant inherits his uncle's estate. But instead of giving birth to Duncan's child and preventing such a change to the gallery, she bears Grant a son. All is not lost for Duncan: ultimately, this is also the portrait which reveals her affair with Grant. As soon as Alison's son is born, Sibyl says, "He is not like any of us, is he?" And, when Cassie, her governess, responds that he looks like Sibyl's father, Sibyl replies, "He reminds me of one of the portraits . . . I can't say which."[97] Which portrait becomes blazingly obvious when his hair, with its white lock, comes in, proving that the infant belongs to Grant's mother's family. But in the end the deception does not matter because the child is poisoned by gas on Sibyl's orders so that her own son will inherit the estate. Unfortunately for Sibyl, she bears a daughter.

When all false heirs and false wives are resolved—killed, uncovered, or run off with a lover—Duncan marries the governess and they produce a son and rightful heir under the aegis of Ellen's portrait. Only Cassandra sits comfortably in the same room with Ellen's portrait throughout the novel, suggesting that only Cassandra's portrait will be compatible with Ellen's along the wall. When Cassandra tells her former charges, Nance and Sibyl, that she is going to marry their father, the portrait comes up again almost immediately:

> 'You are the one woman, who will enable the portrait to be left in the dining-room,' said Nance. 'Father could hardly have it moved again.'
>
> 'I see he had no choice but to marry me.'
>
> 'Mother would have liked it to be you,' said Sibyl, kneeling by Cassie's chair. 'I daresay she thought of it before she died.'
>
> 'I am sure she did not,' said Cassie, laughing. 'If the matter had come to her mind, she would not have thought your father would marry again.'
>
> 'Once I should not have thought so either,' said Nance.
>
> 'Neither should I,' said Cassie. 'And in a way we were right. He has never attempted to fill her place.'[98]

[97] Ibid., 167.

[98] Ibid., 195-6.

As in *Pride and Prejudice*, the portrait compels the characters towards a marital resolution. His deceased wife continues to mediate Duncan's needs via her portrait. The conversation moves seamlessly from portraiture to the more abstract concept of Ellen's "place." In fact, throughout the novel Ellen's death is realized by her family in spatial terms—from the actual empty space at the dinner table, to the spaces left by the portrait as it is moved hither and thither, to the metaphorical "blank space" in their family which is referred to continuously. Cassandra's ability to sit alongside the portrait comfortably—as Duncan's second wife failed to do—also signals her unwillingness to take Ellen's "place"; instead, Cassandra will coexist with the memory of her friend.

The Nearly-Haunted Portrait

Though Compton-Burnett's novel does not quite veer into supernatural territory, Ellen's portrait's beyond-the-grave interference is not wholly natural, either. It is a material presence in the characters' lives. Ellen's portrait also reminds us right away of the view toward death that every portrait takes; the family portrait gallery immortalizes its individual members precisely because they will die. Portraits are painted for contemporaries to admire but are most admirable in the context of their (ideally illustrious) predecessors and, ultimately, they are painted with an eye to posterity. The death of the sitter and the transience of the human body is implied in the physical medium of portraiture, and this is what Ivy Compton-Burnett capitalizes on in *A House and Its Head*. The author recognizes that it is precisely our bodily mortality which gives the wife her power in the family line. Thus, the complement to Ellen's portrait in the dining room is her gravestone in the cemetery—a monument which is discussed but never visited in the novel.

When the children come down to breakfast shortly after their mother's death, the narrator notes that "Duncan's silence had a new quality."[99] Given Compton-Burnett's conspicuously sparse description of setting, it only through dialogue that we learn that a portrait of Ellen now looms over the scene, lending the silence its "new quality:"

> 'Does anyone notice a difference in the room?'
> 'The portrait of Aunt Ellen is over the sideboard. I saw it when I came in.'
> 'Then why did you not speak of it?'
> 'I don't know, Uncle. No one else did,' said Grant, not acknowledging the shyness attendant on the mention of the dead.
> 'Did you take it from the landing, Father?'
> 'My dear Sibyl, from where should I take it, when it was on the landing that it hung?'
> 'It is nice to have it in here,' said Nance.
> 'Nice?' said her father, contracting his forehead. 'What an off word!'
> 'Well, what word would you use?'
> 'I shall find it a support to have her portrait before my eyes.'
> 'That is certainly expanding the phrase.'
> 'It is not a joke, Nance.'
> 'Of course it is not, Father. But it is not a change of oppressive import, either. If it is, why did you make it?'
> 'You have not improved since your mother's death,' said Duncan, looking with quiet appraisement at his daughter's face.[100]

With Compton-Burnett's expert economy, discussion of the portrait crystallizes the tense family dynamics that are at play throughout the novel. In a typical power play, Duncan forces his children to state the obvious; his nephew obliges only to be rebuked; Grant's response flirts with a sarcasm nearly too subtle for his uncle to criticize; Sibyl, playing the pet, only succeeds in annoying the father she is trying to flatter; and Nance plays the One Likeable Character who always delivers the punchline. But Nance's insistence that the portrait's new position is "not a change of oppressive import" becomes ironic after Duncan brings home a new bride who does, in fact, feel oppressed by the import of Ellen's picture in the dining room. Finally, Duncan's "quiet appraisement" of his

[99] Ibid., 80.

[100] Ibid., 80-1.

daughter's face—again, a rare stage direction in Compton-Burnett's prose—draws attention to the description of the portrait that we are missing. As in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the reader gets only a vague description of what the painting looks like—but whereas Dorian's picture is an uncannily accurate likeness, Ellen's is declared by Grant to be "not a good likeness."[101]

Portrait Placement

Despite Duncan's newfound adoration for his deceased wife, he decides to marry very shortly after her burial—a move that shocks his children and the nearby villagers. Ellen's gravestone is not even set up when he makes his decision and is newly erected when he brings his bride home. Again, place and portrait neatly elide in the discussion that follows:

> 'What shall we do about Mother's portrait?' said Sibyl.
> 'It is a more pressing problem,' said Cassie. 'The grave-stone is anyhow not in the house.'
> 'Sibyl, you are a two-faced young woman,' said Grant; 'I don't believe you are capable of a point of view.'
> 'I am, I am,' cried Sibyl, bursting into tears. 'I will go after Father, and make him listen. He shall not put another woman in Mother's place.' She ran into the hall and caught up with Duncan, who seemed to be wandering in a sort of dream.
> 'Father, Father, think while there is time! Think of the portrait, you hung yourself in its place. Do you want someone else to sit beneath it?'
> 'What are you talking of? There have to be things in a house, before someone comes to it,' said Duncan, in a sharp but somehow unaffected tone.
> 'Remember the stone you chose yourself for her grave. Think of the words we put on it. Promise to wait until you see it. How can you bring a woman to a place that is filled?'
> 'Why should I see it? What good could I do by that?'[102]

Sibyl attempts to use Ellen's portrait to dissuade her father from marriage but fails. Nevertheless, the portrait itself remains an actor in the novel. It is repositioned from the landing to the dining room and back again and represents Ellen's "place" not only at the dinner table and in the graveyard, but

[101] Ibid., 81.

[102] Ibid., 109-110.

also her primary "place" (as Duncan's first wife) in the family line as it is articulated by the family portrait gallery.

While the portrait in the dining room gets under Alison's skin, the portrait gallery itself stages Alison's anxieties before she even meets Ellen face-to-painted-face. When Alison first arrives at her new home, she claims that the members of her own family, "were not distinguished." Alison coyly continues, "We must be careful never to add a portrait of me to the gallery. It will be easy to avoid it, as all the room is taken."[103] The wife's "place" suddenly turns literal as Compton-Burnett uses the spatial parameters of the gallery to affect the family dynamics that follow. In the next scene, Alison also worries about taking the "place occupied by [her] predecessor" in the dining room, lobbying for Ellen's chair to remain "sacred and empty, with a halo round it."[104] But Duncan does not respond warmly to Alison's scruples, telling her that Ellen's chair is "the place of the mistresses of the house for generations" and insisting that she sit there. When Alison asks the identity of Ellen's portrait in the dining room, the scene grows even more uncomfortable—especially after Alison asks if the portrait has always hung there.

> 'I suppose my colleague has always hung there, looking down at you all?'
> The chance word brought silence, and Alison looked from face to face.
> 'The portrait has not been there long,' said her husband. 'It used to hang on the landing.'
> 'And when was it brought here?'
> 'Not long ago.'
> 'Oh, I see. You wanted your consorts all about you. I hope it is proving all you wished. I am glad there is no blank yet in the circle.'
> 'Alison,' said Duncan, rising to his feet, 'I had only my past to depend on. It seemed to be all I had. You must understand how it was.'
> 'Oh, you poor, dear one!' cried Alison, running round the table. 'Did I leave him to himself, so that he had no one but my predecessor? I am so glad he had her to turn to. So she ought to be glad he has me, and feel all is fair between us.'
> 'I am sure she is glad, Alison,' Duncan said, bringing a change to his young wife's face.

[103] Ibid., 121.

[104] Ibid., 123.

'So I give satisfaction to you both,' she said, returning to her seat.[105]

Alison seems to know before asking the question that Ellen's portrait has not hung on the wall for long—clued in by the unconventional hang or perhaps a conspicuously blank space, never described by the narrator or the characters, in the landing. After all, she has noticed the crowded wall, so she must have taken account of the spaces on the walls that *could* still accommodate a picture. After dinner, Duncan asks Grant to put the picture of Ellen back on the landing to make his new wife more comfortable. Grant's mission leads to his first isolated flirtation with Alison; it also does nothing to alleviate her (perhaps feigned) anxiety about Ellen's portrait. When she realizes that the portrait is gone the next day, she asks, "Cannot she bear to see me sitting here? . . . I am glad she has a family who think of her comfort. If I have a successor, I don't want to spend all my time gazing down at her. I hope you will consider me as well. That space will have to be empty, Duncan, until you come to a wife who consents to occupy it."[106] With Ellen's portrait gone, Alison can finally, albeit obliquely, admit that she was not happy under the gaze of her predecessor. Projecting her own discomfort onto Ellen's portrait, she admits she would not like to "spend all [her] time gazing down at [her successor]." She uses the opportunity to cheerfully punish her husband for his sentimentality over his first wife:

> 'It must be entertaining to have a succession of wives, and watch their relations. Your first two are getting on fairly well. I quite agree that the first of all was above the average.'
>
> Duncan seemed suddenly to shrink into himself.
>
> 'I wish we could know what she would have thought of you, Alison,' said Sibyl, softly.
>
> 'Sibyl, have you lost your sense?' said her father, in a low, harsh tone.
>
> 'When did she flit?' said Alison. 'Does she generally make her journeys at dead of night?'
>
> 'I moved the portrait in the evening,' said Grant, 'after you had gone to bed.'

[105] Ibid., 124-5.

[106] Ibid., 131.

> 'After we were together in the drawing-room? So that is why you came down. I did not assume it was to get a glimpse of your new aunt.'[107]

Alison gets the upper hand in the scene, but it can only take her so far. She is adept at reading these portraits and their positions on the walls. It seems that, after assessing the home, she decides to cut her losses: she flees with a new lover from the village shortly after her son is born.

Alison is right to worry that there is no "room" for her in the family portrait gallery, and she is wise to read more into these physical spaces and objects than what meets the eye. The physical constraints of the home bolster Compton-Burnett's depiction of the tyrannical patriarch and augment his control over the estate. There was not even any room left for her much-discussed predecessor in the family vault—with only one space left, Duncan reserves the spot for himself and puts her in the ground. Unprompted in the exchange between Sibyl and her father quoted above, Duncan says, "There have to be things in a house, before someone comes to it." But when Sibyl asks how he can bring a woman "to a place that is filled," she simultaneously refers to the jammed-packed portrait gallery and the filled-up family vault, which work hand-in-hand to enshrine the family line, the former anticipated the latter. Thus, while Compton-Burnett mobilizes the spaces and objects of dynastic memorialization in the country house to concretize the stakes of this inheritance-plot novel, the lack of *room* in these spaces gestures towards the lack of room in the country-house canon.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, Compton-Burnett is self-consciously working in a late stage of the country house canon. While popular, these narratives have gone out of high literary style as these settings are viewed as saccharine, nostalgic, and decidedly *un*modern. But in voiding the country house setting of details, we are left with the conventions of the country house, the conventions of the country-house novel, and archetypal characters; these elements work

[107] Ibid., 131-2.

together to challenge the country-house novel genre that has grown too old, that has filled its vault with too many wives to allow one (Ellen), or two (Alison), or three (Cassandra) more. Thus, when John Bowen asks Ivy Compton-Burnett during a BBC interview in 1960 if she has feels she has been "working deeper and deeper into the same ground" by writing in the country-house genre, she can reply, quite sensibly, "I think perhaps it has got a little deeper, and even widened the ground in a sense—although not widened the scene, because I don't think my work is narrow—some people say it is, although I agree the scene is narrow."[108] The country-house genre is narrow, but the metafictional discussion of the country-house genre is wide open in 1930s fiction precisely because it *is* tired, precisely because it is obsolete—and yet, it endures. It *sells*. But what elevates this country-house novelist above the slew of popular novelists writing in the same setting and whose works have *not* endured? Compton-Burnett's works are situated in the material and literary tradition of the country house. Thus, in the interview above, the curious phrase, "widens the ground," makes sense if we think about how deeply and diversely rooted this writers' writer is to the literary canon. Or, more precisely, to the dramatic canon—since Ivy Compton-Burnett widens the ground of the country-house by wedding the country-house novel to the script.

The Dramatic Canon

Every scene in *A House and Its Head* seems to pack the entire import of the novel into its deceptively ordinary dialogue and, in doing so, its compressed composition recalls the dense poetics and sparse description of Greek Tragedy. The comparison is inevitable—obvious to those who are familiar with Greek Tragedy—and has often been made. The first published comparison was perhaps in Raymond Mortimer's 1935 review in the *New Statesman*, in which he wrote, "It is like

[108] John Bowen and Ivy Compton-Burnett, "An Interview with Ivy Compton-Burnett, BBC Home Programme, September 17, 1960," *Twentieth Century Literature* 25, no. 2, Ivy Compton-Burnett Issue (Summer, 1979): 165-172.

hearing the plots of Aeschylus and Sophocles recounted in the cool detached tone of Miss Austen."[109] Compton-Burnett seems to have had some fun with these comparisons, and was notoriously deceptive about her literary influences and personal life, which seem to go hand-in-hand for her. Robert Liddell humorously recalls asking Compton-Burnett "if she owed anything to Greek tragedy." She was educated in Greek and even spent some time studying classics in college before moving back home to attend to family troubles—she took an Upper-Second in Classics at London University's Royal Halloway College reading Plato and Greek dramatists.[110] However, Compton-Burnett sidesteps the question about influence and throws a lie into her narrative, as well. Liddell writes, "I have always remembered her as saying: 'One came between brothers and shared their tutor,' as an explanation of her knowledge of Greek. I must have got it wrong, for 'one' was older than the two brothers, Guy and Noel. Greek tragedy showed one, she said, that things could happen."[111] During the BBC interview, John Bowen valiantly tries to pin down a straight answer from her on the subject:

> BOWEN: People have often compared your books to Greek Tragedy—one sees the reason—a series of dialogues between people of a family with the chorus of villagers commenting on what has happened. Was this conscious or accidental.
> COMPTON-BURNETT: Accidental, but I was classically educated—so that you see something may have come through unconsciously.[112]

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[109] Quoted in Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (Taylor and Francis, 2013) 33-34. Light elaborates that, "Their formalism, in other words, is anti-romantic and leaves no place for the self-indulgence of individual sensibility; it bespeaks a modernist aesthetic of a kind which echoes the manifestos of writers on both left and right, but one which is arguably conservative since its strictures appeal finally (as Mortimer innocently asserts), to those who like himself are wanting 'a recall to order.'"

[110] Hardy, 2.

[111] Robert Liddell, "Notes of Ivy Compton-Burnett," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 25, no. 2, Ivy Compton-Burnett Issue (Summer, 1979): 135-152.

[112] Bowen, "An Interview with Ivy Compton-Burnett," 169.

It is difficult to believe that Compton-Burnett is not consciously writing in the tradition of Greek Tragedy when Nance says, "It is true that tragedy arouses pity and terror . . . In me terror is getting the upper hand."[113] Aristotle writes that a good tragedy arouses pity and terror from the audience in the *Poetics*. And, in reading about Compton-Burnett's modern-day tyrants, her contemporary readers seemed to identify with characters like Nance and find her novels cathartic. As Alison Light explains in "The Demon in the House," Compton-Burnett portrays the universal in an exalted setting: "These were the tensions contained within the four walls of a suburban childhood and the boundaries of family life not as it was lived by the squirearchy but by the inmates of the private house. If the cult of the country house provided their stage, it was nevertheless the dramas of Hove [Compton-Burnett's childhood suburb] which were re-enacted."[114] This dramatic-novelistic formula cemented Compton-Burnett's fan base and so John Bowen does not let the matter of Greek tragedy drop. After allowing Compton-Burnett to wander away from his initial question, he revives the subject and throws Jane Austen into the mix, as well:

> BOWEN: Do you still read Greek?
> COMPTON-BURNETT: Well, I don't know. Only very little, I couldn't read the big plays now without a dictionary and a good deal of labor.
> BOWEN: Do you read them in translation?
> COMPTON-BURNETT: Well, I don't read them now—I read them you see when I was young—and of course it is possible that I might have been influenced by them without knowing. It wasn't conscious, but possibly it is of course.
> BOWEN: An influence which seems to me as strong is the influence of Jane Austen, who is also writing about the small closed world of country families. Would you recognize that?
> COMPTON-BURNETT: Well I have a great admiration for Jane Austen—I know her books very well.
> BOWEN: No more than that?
> COMPTON-BURNETT: No, no more than that. I shouldn't have thought that my books were very like Jane Austen's. They belong, I suppose, to the same sort of class of thing—but then such a lot of books do, don't they?
> BOWEN: Not many books deal with such an enclosed society.

[113] Light, 174.

[114] Ibid., 38.

Compton-Burnett is shy about her influences, only inviting comparison to Chekhov—and John Bowen is quick to point out that his country house stories are also plays. But when asked whether she was a playwright, Compton-Burnett explains that, although her writing is like drama, she needs more room for her narratives than a play would allow. Her unique style truly is a hybrid between a dramatic script and the setting (and length) of a country house novel.

But perhaps her evasiveness is due to annoyance; while Compton-Burnett's dramatic influences *begin* with the Greek tragedians, they certainly don't end in the fifth century B.C.E. Sos Eltis sets her novels alongside Noel Coward's and Harold Pinter's plays in the essay, "Bringing Out the Acid." Though Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels are included in Susan Sontag's list of random articles of camp in her seminal essay "Notes on Camp," Eltis tells us that Coward's, Pinter's, and Compton-Burnett's "camp is not, as Sontag would have it 'disengaged, depoliticised,' but is a means of evading and challenging hostile ideologies—most significantly heterosexual social conformity and the suffocating demands of the family."[115] These are problems that also plague the most famous of English tragic heroes, Hamlet, as he navigates (or, rather, fails to navigate) his engagement to Ophelia and his duty as a son in the wake of his parent's death. (Moreover, *Hamlet* is a play which is no stranger to camp.) And, although Ivy Compton-Burnett writes of a dead mother instead of a father, many of the same issues that are worked out in her novel are also worked out in Shakespeare's play.

We can trace *A House and Its Head* back to the Queen's Chamber scene in *Hamlet*. Like *A House and Its Head*, the drama unfolds around the troubling remarriage of a parent. Hamlet confronts his mother under the portraits of his late father and uncle-slash-step-father and demands that she:

[115] Sos Eltis, "Bringing out the Acid: Noël Coward, Harold Pinter, Ivy Compton-Burnett and the Uses of Camp," *Modern Drama* 51, no. 2, (2008): 229.

"Look here, upon this picture, and on this, / The counterfeit presentment of two brothers."[116]He compares his father's portrait to the gods Jove, Mars, and Mercury, and emphasizes the contrast between his attractive appearance and Claudius's:

> This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:
> Here is your husband; like a mildewed ear,
> Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?[117]

Perhaps Alison doesn't want her own picture on the wall so that it cannot be set side-by-side with Ellen's wholesome countenance, giving her predecessor the opportunity to "Blast[]" her replacement. Moreover, it is on the heels of this speech that the ghost of Hamlet's father enters the room—or does he? Is there a ghost in the room, or is Hamlet mad? The supernatural ambiguities of Shakespeare leak into this late modernist country house novel that, like *Hamlet*, dances with ghosts, incest, and the mental fragility wrought by inheritance politics culminating in poisoning one's own family members.

Both *Hamlet* and *A House* feature an investigative angle as well. Mary McCarthy and Alison Light have pointed out the similarities between Compton-Burnett's and Agatha Christie's works, citing their commercial success, formulaic styles, and mystery intrigues. These elements are also found in Shakespeare's play as Hamlet sets out to investigate his uncle's role in the death of his father. But the murder-mystery aspect of the plot is just a skeleton from which to hang the emotions of Hamlet's strained family dynamics. *A House and Its Head* works in a similar manner. Sibyl has a baby killed, yet her family allows her back into their lives, calmly explaining, "Sibyl has been through

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[116] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Folger Digital Library, accessed May 15, 2019, https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Ham.html, 3.4.63-4.

[117] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.73-5.

emotional strain, in a life in which succession had loomed too large. She never had a normal moral sense, and she was not in a normal place."[118]

Perhaps Compton-Burnett's country-house novels are, as Alison Light would have it, the dramas of Hove acted out on the stage of the squirearchy. Does it then follow that these portraits are merely the props of these Hove dramas? Although aspects of her novels can be mapped onto her childhood experiences, it is clear that Ivy Compton-Burnett uses the country house portrait gallery on its own terms, and in its own material tradition. That is—we understand her novels best when we view them within the historical context and conservative ideology of the English country house and the power dynamics of the squirearchy. It is a context which, if not personally familiar to the author or the readers, is a universally accessible realm thanks to the longstanding canon of country house literature and country house tourism. As such, the country house provides the perfect vehicle for her metafictional discussion of the literary tradition. Materially engaged in the country house via the portrait, literarily engaged in the country house canon via Austen, dramatically engaged in a genealogy of portraiture via *Hamlet*—must we really keep underselling Ivy Compton-Burnett as a novelist whose works are constricted to the trauma of her family home?[119] She may have grown up in the suburbs, as Light points out, but the mysteries of the country house are not so arcane that they cannot be cracked by the outsider; indeed, as show houses they serve no purpose if outsiders cannot interpret their traditions.

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[118] Compton-Burnett, 271.

[119] Compton-Burnett's homes may be prisons but, after all, their enclosure is a safe one, sheltering the traumatised sensibility as well as producing it" (Light, 52); "I have argued too that the work is testimony to a conservatism which was fuelled, in the first place, by a modernist rather than a traditionalist impulse between the wars. It manifested itself in a language of reticence and understatement which could provide different and new kinds of protective camouflage, and which made Compton-Burnett's representations of social life modern performances despite their backwards glances. It is this tension which needs more exploration" (Ibid., 59).

Dreaming of Menabilly

Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.

Unlike Compton-Burnett, Daphne du Maurier had a real setting in mind as she wrote her famous first line of *Rebecca*: Menabilly is an estate on the coast of Cornwall that du Maurier stumbled upon during one of her countryside rambles from her home in Fowey. Now a Grade II listed home, she leased Menabilly for twenty years following the success of *Rebecca*. She was instrumental in restoring the crumbling mansion and she raised her own children there. But when she wrote *Rebecca*, she had no idea that she would one day live there. Like the narrator, she, too, was dreaming of Menabilly from her husband's station in Egypt. Written while she was homesick, the novel is a fantasy of England, a fantasy of belonging *to* the house, of haunting its morning rooms, telephones, and raincoats even after death. Between them, the two Mmes. de Winter capture the full spectrum of becoming the mistress of such a home—a range of emotions and daydreams cultivated by the six generations of women and men reading from Pemberley's portrait gallery to Manderley's fancy ball. The narrator stands for the middle-class reader whose dreams can never be wholly fulfilled, who can marry into but never be born into such a world. Rebecca stands for the woman who is inherently worthy of possessing the estate—the former closer to du Maurier's personality, the latter closer to du Maurier's own class. Rebecca is the ultimate fantasy and boldest dream of du Maurier's novel. And it is the portrait gallery that stages the showdown between the old Mrs. de Winter and the new: the gallery reveals most clearly the differences between the readerly and disconnected narrator and Manderley's first, natural mistress.

Rebecca's unnamed narrator lives with the ghost of her charismatic predecessor, her insecurities growing every day with the pressure of living up to the former hostess of Manderley. She is paralyzed by the stories she hears of Rebecca, unable to come up with her own idea for a fancy-dress ball. She jumps at Mrs. Danvers's suggestion that she go as the portrait of Caroline de

Winter in the gallery—a portrait of Maxim's ancestor before her marriage to a London politician. When she puts on the costume, she puts on confidence and, looking into the mirror at her white dress and wig, thinks: "My own dull personality was submerged at last."[120] The fancy dress ball is her chance to step outside of her own mousy character and escape Rebecca's shadow, too. The new Mrs. de Winter keeps her fancy dress costume a strict secret. Only Mrs. Danvers and Mrs. de Winter's clueless lady's maid know about the costume copied from Max de Winter's portrait gallery.

The scene occurs a little more than midway through the novel and brings to crisis the tensions between the narrator and her husband, the narrator's preconceptions of her husband's prior marriage versus its reality, her insecurities of her bland personality, and the growing hostility of the housekeeper, Mrs Danvers.[121] The night before the fancy dress ball, the narrator sits with her husband at dinner. Lost in thought, thinking about Rebecca sitting at dinner with Maxim instead, the narrator's facial expression changes and Maxim demands to know "[w]hat the devil [she is] thinking about."[122] The narrator, flustered, does not answer and Maxim suspects her of practicing for the fancy dress ball: "He looked across at me, laughing, and I wondered what he would say if he really knew my thoughts, my heart, and my mind, and that for one second he had been the Maxim of another year, and I had been Rebecca."[123]

The dinner scene brilliantly anticipates the ball. Unwittingly, the narrator will dress up as Rebecca. Because she is keeping her costume a strict secret from her husband, he can do nothing to warn her of Danvers's mischief. Because she cannot communicate her insecurities to her husband,

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[120] Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (London: Virago Press, 2003), 236.

[121] "I felt very much the same as I did the morning I was married. The same stifled feeling that I had gone too far now to turn back" (Ibid., 230).

[122] Ibid., 224.

[123] Ibid., 225.

he can do nothing to quell her growing paranoia that she will never live up to his first wife. And Maxim's displeasure with her facial expression has everything to do with knowledge. He tells her: "I don't want you to look like you did just now. You had a twist in your mouth and a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of knowledge."[124] Maxim makes it clear in this scene that he has married her for her naiveté. A father keeps certain books "under lock and key,"[125] he explains, "A husband is not so very different from a father after all. There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have."[126] Maxim de Winter does not want a wife to bear him children, but rather a child wife to end his lineage—someone innocent, with no knowledge, no agency, no equality to him as a spouse. He does not want her to become artful, as Rebecca was, at manipulating him, at playing a scene. But he also is referring to the revelation of his own character which he will make in the scene *after* the ball: the confession that he killed Rebecca when he suspected that she was pregnant with her lover's child.

She giddily dresses for her "first and last" party at Manderley, confident in the success of her costume. She approaches the gallery where the band has set up their instruments as light shines on the picture of Caroline de Winter. She considers how perfectly she has copied the portrait's appearance in her costume and notes, "I don't think I have ever felt so excited before, so happy and so proud."[127] But her triumph is short-lived. She calls the drummer over to announce her:

> 'Miss Caroline de Winter,' shouted the drummer.
>
> I came forward to the head of the stairs and stood there, smiling, my hat in my hand, like the girl in the picture. I wait for the clapping and laughter that would follow as I walked slowly down the stairs. Nobody clapped, nobody moved.

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[124] Ibid., 226.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid., 226-7.

[127] Ibid., 238.

> They all stared at me like dumb things, Beatrice uttered a little cry and put her hand to her mouth. I went on smiling, I put one hand on the banister.
>
> "How do you do, Mr de Winter,' I said.
>
> Maxim had not moved. He stared up at me, his glass in his hand. There was no colour in his face. It was ashen white.[128]

Instead of a triumphant memory, the party is a "vast blank canvas."[129] Dressed in her costume, the narrator is Maxim's worst nightmare: the resurrection of the wife whose extramarital "pregnancy" threatened to pervert the purity of his lineage, represented by the portrait gallery in general and Caroline de Winter in particular. The narrator's phrase, "I ought to have known" echoes throughout the scene—based on one remark that the bishop's wife made about Rebecca's costume, the narrator impossibly blames herself for lacking knowledge. But knowledge is much more than the acquisition of facts: it is bound up with the body in the novel. Rebecca's false pregnancy, her secret cancer, are facts that she controls. She even controlled her murder, if we believe Max. And she continues to dominate the physical dimensions of the house after her death. But Rebecca's knowledge is also instinctual, hereditary, born out of and sunken into the landscape, the seascape, and the house that holds her memory so forcefully after her death.

The cruelness of the scene lies in the absolute perfection of the costume: in the knowledge of just what to wear borrowed unwittingly from the husband's first wife. In putting on the costume of the husband's ancestors, the wife gestures toward the future of his line. But embodying the portrait also clues the new wife into her own inadequacy—mental and physical—to mix with and perpetuate the family line. When the narrator runs away, Max's sister, Beatrice, tries to coax her to come down to the ball. The narrator thinks, desperately, "She had not understood. She belonged to another breed of men and women, another race than I. They had guts, the women of her race. They

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[128] Ibid., 239.

[129] Ibid., 250.

were not like me . . . I had not the pride, I had not the guts. I was badly bred."[130] By embodying the portrait in the gallery, the narrator is finally able to voice her insecurities about her inferiority in the blunt, physical terms of "breeding" and "guts": facts of lineage that portraits and country houses enshrine.

Conclusion

We have come a long way from Alethea's portrait gallery and nowhere at all; we must all learn to live, as du Maurier's narrator learns to live, with the house and its gallery in ruins but not forgotten, with a lineage disrupted but not out of sight. Compton-Burnett's and du Maurier's novels are prime examples of late modernist portrait novels: novels deeply engaged in the literary and material traditions of the country house gallery. Darcy's portrait in Pemberley encourages Lizzy's cross-class love, Dorian Gray's portrait disrupts the marriage plot, Sackville-West's and Woolf's portraits fuse together a queer love story of inheritance—each is a literary portrait that takes the country house portrait gallery to its limit, but not to its end. The portrait novels that follow are endless permutations of canonical texts, painting new faces onto old canvases, "widen[ing] the ground" and then burning the scene to the ground.

[130] Ibid., 245.

II

"There are the *words*":[1]

Elizabeth Taylor, Vita Sackville-West, and the Country House Library

> There is another thing to remember: that in the country-house, as elsewhere, the woman is now the great reader. Is she to limit herself to books which a father or a husband might order for his library? Not a bit of it. She reads everything, anything, and the younger she is the more bravely she reads, usually, be it said, with benefit, as well as pleasure. A staid, settled country-house library does not go with the cultivated, curious woman of this Georgian time.[2]
>
> James Milne, "Is the Country House Library Doomed?"

The passage above is from James Milne's alarmingly titled article on September 1, 1923 for *The Graphic*: "Is the Country House Library Doomed?" He adopts this title from a question that Lord Curzon put before the annual meeting of the London Library. Milne surmises that between death duties, the sheer number of books published each year, and the wider variety of publications enjoyed by women who occupy the country house, the country house library is most likely doomed. But Milne advises his reader not to mourn since it is replaced by the public library—a more useful and accessible institution. Milne stoically declares, "It is an expression of changes which have come about in our life as a people, and those changes have been winged with the motto, 'The greatest good for the greatest number.'" Meanwhile, egalitarianism within the surviving country house library has a gendered quality to it: whereas men used to be the "great reader[s]" in a country house, women have taken over and the library catalogue now reflects their tastes. The demographics of the country

[1] Elizabeth Taylor, *Angel*, New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 2011), 230.

[2] James Milne, "Is the Country House Library Doomed?" *The Graphic* 108, no. 2805 (1923): 320. A Mr. James Lees-Milne was the secretary of the National Trust and the mastermind of the Country House Scheme, which shifted the Trusts's attentions from the preservation of land to country homes. I suspect this is the same man.

house are changing, too. As families with new money move into old country houses, Milne suggests that we give them a chance to build their own collections, concluding optimistically, "some of them may even be depended on to give the ancient country-house library a fresh fame."

But as Peter H. Reid has demonstrated, the "British aristocracy have never viewed their libraries as being sacrosanct; books were expendable and could easily be sacrificed if the need arose. This was in contrast to their attitudes toward the other, more visible parts of their collections," such as family portraits and furniture that displayed their wealth and taste.[3] When faced with a financial crunch, books were among the most dispensable valuables—making convenient sale items for "self-made men [who] had long ago realized that, like their country estate, their country houses, and their acquisitions of a title, the library was a status symbol."[4] And financial punches hit hard in the interwar years when a quarter of land in England changed hands. After the horrors of the Great War, aristocrats were less squeamish about selling off their most valued possession of all: land. Reid explains that the "sale of their bedrock inevitably meant that everything was viewed as expendable. This led to a surge in library sales in the interwar years."[5] The premise of this dissertation is that country houses became potent symbols of literary inheritance when they were threatened with extinction during this period. Since libraries were in the most precarious position during these troubled times, they provided a timely (and traditional) setting for metafictional commentary in the late modernist novel. Much like the great house tradition, the novel tradition has almost always been (perceived of as) in a state of decline; the novels of this era draw attention to their own

[3] Peter H. Reid, "The Decline and Fall of the British Country House Library," *Libraries and Culture* 36, no. 2 (2001): 345.

[4] Ibid., 352; think of the "Golden Dustman" in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*.

[5] Ibid., 355.

constructedness in the service of commenting on the literary canon and their own place in a troubled, declining aesthetic genealogy.

In the first half of this chapter, I'll look at examples of "real" country house library elements that influence Vita Sackville-West's writing. As we'll see, the country house library is a fairly uninspiring wellspring of raw material because—unlike the libraries of popular culture that give us hidden wills, books serving as levers to open secret doors, and confidential confessions—libraries were commonly converted from open spaces like galleries and used as family rooms. Indeed, in the popular television series *Downton Abbey*, the main setting for casual family gatherings is in the library: books fade into the background as we focus on the ladies on the couches or the squire at his desk. The family library might also contain games, favorite pictures, or artifacts from the grand tour—beloved objects to entertain or delight the family and their friends on an everyday basis rather than as showpieces for the public.[6] This is the comfortable and quotidian country house library tradition that Sackville-West plays up in her 1922 novella, *The Heir*. Libraries, as they refer to collections of family papers, influence her nonfictional family history, published the same year, *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922). But when libraries evolved out of gentlemen's studies, the space engendered and responded to that trope of secrecy that popular culture perpetuates. However, in these cases, the library's "secrecy" was more akin to "exclusivity." At its worst, the country house library excluded women and women's novels. At its best, the country house library invoked the intimacy of lived experience or inside jokes. For example, in Chawton House's library the spines of old books have been cut off and used to hide a liquor cabinet. Sackville-West also creates an "inside joke" in *A Note of Explanation* (1924; 2017)—a tiny book she wrote exclusively for Queen Mary's dolls house's library.

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[6] Simon Jervis, "The English Country House Library: An Architectural History," *Library History* 18, no. 3 (2002): 180-4.

In the second half of this chapter, I'll consider how the country house library's literary and material legacies spawned hyperboles and generalizations about the bookish space that prove useful—if not entirely accurate—in Elizabeth Taylor's fiction. In *Palladian* (1946) and *Angel* (1957), the country house library constellates crucial discussions of the novel's genealogy. Taylor's subtexts engage the literary history, architectural history, and preconceptions of the country house library to comment on class and gender in the literary marketplace. After all, the country house library is a "highbrow" bookish space reserved for "serious" (intellectual or useful) works. Novels, especially the women-authored novels so enjoyed by the middle class, were underrepresented in these collections. We could even say that most novels were antithetical to the country house library—a sad paradox when we consider the omnipresence of the country house in the women's canon.

The country house is a particularly potent symbol for women authors since they had only a handful of hyper-canonical authors to draw on (Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot) and they all wrote country house novels.[7] On the one hand, women's access to education and publication had changed drastically in the twentieth century thanks in large part to the success of those nineteenth-century women novelists. On the other hand, not every author had Sackville-West's pedigree or her first-hand familiarity with country house life. Although richly symbolic of the women's literary canon, the country house as a setting presents challenges for women who knew them only through books—for example, upper-middle-class Ivy Compton-Burnett did not step foot in a country house until her career was well underway. It is unclear from Elizabeth Taylor's biography if she ever visited an inhabited country house (besides Bowen's Court, where she enjoyed a nice vacation writing and drinking gin with Elizabeth Bowen), but her school was converted from one. Although it seems that she wasn't personally familiar with country houses, that didn't stop her from writing about them,

[7] Obviously, they did not *exclusively* write country house novels, but they feature heavily in their most beloved works.

prompting contemporary critics to compare Taylor to Jane Austen. But if the settings of Jane Austen's country house novels were confined—paintings on a "little bit of ivory two inches wide"—Taylor's country house narratives are doubly confined by the narrowness of a canon instantiated by Austen and a genre knowable *only* through novels. This constraint may account for the mood of exhaustion with the country house canon that is evident in both *Palladian* and *Angel*.

* * *

There is one bookish aristocrat who is both fictional and real. Bertram, the earl of Ashburnham who built a spectacular collection of books at Ashburnham Place. They were sold by his son between 1883 and 1901 to the British, French, and Italian governments after some diplomatic trouble over their provenance.[8] Ford Madox Ford could not have chosen a better namesake for his impecunious character, Lord Ashburnham, in *The Good Soldier* (1915). Thanks to dealers like Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach, many books and manuscripts from famous country house libraries, from Helen's Tower Library at Clandeboye which "housed important relics from the Sheridan family"[9] to Caledon Castle and Bishop Percy's library made their way into private collections in the United States. As the American gradually takes over the country house in *The Good Soldier*, writing from Edward's study, Ashburnham's (too) bookish name reinforces the text's metafictionality and subtly gestures to the migration of English libraries to America. [10] We can imagine them sold, for example, to a rich woman in Albany, N.Y. whose granddaughter has

[8] Reid, 349-350.

[9] Ibid., 356.

[10] Ford doesn't make the exact setting easy for the reader to locate, just mentions that Nancy "is, I am aware, sitting in the hall, forty paces from where I am now writing" (*The Good Soldier*, ed. David Bradshaw, Penguin Classics (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 184), then later writes, "I am that absurd figure, an American millionaire, who has bought one of the ancient haunts of English peace. I sit here, in Edward's gun room, all day" (Ibid., 197). This relies on us to remember a passage from earlier in the novel, when Edward is still alive, that his study was "half a gunroom" (Ibid., 164).

"uncontrolled use of the library full of books with frontispieces . . . When she had found one to her taste—she was guided in the selection chiefly by the frontispiece—she carried it into a mysterious apartment which lay beyond the library and which was called, traditionally, no one knew why, the office."[11] Isabel Archer's aunt, Mrs. Touchett, finds her in the office (otherwise known as a study, or closet) reading a history of German thought and plucks her out of the transported country house library and into the reality of Gardencourt in *A Portrait of a Lady* (1881).

Ashburnham's name is a nearly inaudible, embedded allusion—so subtle that finding it is like stumbling upon a secret. And this secrecy is one of the charms of the country house library for those know them intimately—people like Vita Sackville-West, who grew up in one of the most famous country houses in Britain, Knole House in Kent. Sackville-West always had a sense of Knole's importance, and even served as the house's tour guide sometimes as a child. Of course, there is no neat dichotomy between the "real" and "fictional" country house, and many authors draw from their own experiences with country houses and from their reading of canonical texts. I focus on Taylor and Sackville-West in this chapter because their engagement with fictional and real country houses is particularly polarized—Sackville-West's country house libraries are meticulously accurate.[12] Meanwhile, Taylor is a well-informed country house outsider: as such, she is more willing to engage in the literary history, cultural myths, and preconceptions of the country house library. We might even say that Sackville-West's architectural and cultural accuracy works against the endurance of her literary appeal. The family archive is regurgitated in *Knole and the Sackvilles*, the library-cum-sitting-room is accurately depicted *The Heir*, *A Note of Explanation* tucked away from the public eye;

[11] Henry James, *Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Geoffrey Moore, Penguin Classics (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 78.

[12] In addition to her non-fictional book on her own family home, *Knole and the Sackville* (1922), Sackville-West authored another generalized book on country houses for the Writers' Britain Series in 1941, *English Country Houses*, new ed. (London: Prion Books Ltd., 1996).

Vita Sackville-West's fame lives on in her gardens at Sissinghurst Castle, not in the literature she left behind.

The Real Country House Library: The Inside Joke

Among library historians, there is no consensus on what constitutes a country house library. Both terms, "country house" and "library," are fraught with various interpretations; consequently, "country house library" lacks clarity or consistency.[13] Given the ontological uncertainties of the space, there are evident challenges in using the country house library as a setting that conveys meaning to a wide readership while authentically describing the space. In this section, I will look at a few scenes that accurately reflect country house libraries. These scenes engage the privacy of the private library, invoking either the exclusivity of lived experience or of inside jokes. In both cases, the appeal of the country house library is diminished when the public is "let in."

In defining the country house library, examples and counter-examples are particularly useful—and American libraries, like Isabel Archer's, are not the only noteworthy counterpoints to the country house library. The public library had a much earlier precursor in the circulating library—you had to pay, but the subscription was much more affordable than buying books outright.[14] While one might invest in encyclopedias, atlases, and travelogues to adorn the family library, novels were much more likely to be rented from the circulating library. In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Mr. Collins

[13] See Mark Purcell, "The Country House Library Reassess'd: Or, Did The 'Country House Library' Ever Really Exist?" *Library History* 18, no. 3 (2002): 157-74.

[14] In *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), Ian Watt touches on the centrality of novels and women readers to circulating libraries—they were from the beginning primarily women's spaces and the women's literature: "Most circulating libraries stocked all types of literature, but novels were widely regarded as their main attraction: and there can be little doubt that they led to the most notable increase in the reading public that occurred during the century…The distribution of leisure in the period supports and amplified the picture already given of the composition of the reading public, and it also supplies the best evidence available to explain the increasing part it played by women readers" (Ibid., 43).

refuses to read aloud to the Bennets from a book from the circulating library (which would have entertained the family) and chooses Fordyce's sermons from the family shelves instead (which bores them). This book, in two volumes, could be found on the library shelves at Godmersham Park, the country home of Jane Austen's brother, Edward Austen Knight. The scene reminds us that, although today Austen is a canonical author, the novel was low on the generic hierarchy of literature in the early nineteenth century.[15] The circulating library makes an even more favorable appearance in *Mansfield Park* (1814), as Fanny savors the experience of choosing her own books for herself when she joins the circulating library in Portsmouth. Is there an implication in Austen's work that her novels about the country house do not actually belong *in* the country house library?

The Director of Research at Chawton House Library, Gillian Dow, relates an interesting discovery she made in the library catalogue at Godmersham Park—an addendum to the 1853 list titled, "Books belonging to the Library Catalogue, now in the Drawing room." The catalogue and addendum were almost certainly compiled by Marianne Knight, Austen's niece, who had run the house for her father her entire life. However, after her father died and her brother inherited, he asked Marianne to leave. Among the books Marianne relocated from the library? Her own copies of Austen's works, Maria Edgeworth's *Tales of Fashionable Life* and *Patronage*, and the Book of Common Prayer. Dow writes:

> I can't now read it otherwise than to say this is a message for an elder brother, Edward, who has behaved *far* less magnanimously to his unmarried sister, Marianne, than his father, another Edward, behaved to his sisters, Jane and Cassandra. Here are Marianne's own books, her treasured copies of Maria Edgeworth, signed with her own name. But because they are listed as "belonging to the Library Catalogue"—an odd turn of phrase, indeed—they must remain at Godmersham Park, even while Marianne herself must leave. Here are *all* of dear Aunt Jane's books, in which tales of displaced and impoverished women—the Dashwoods, Miss Bates, Miss Smith, Jane Fairfax, and many, many others—are central. Here

[15] See Barbara M. Benedict's chapter, "Sensibility by the Numbers: Austen's Work as Regency Popular Fiction," in *Janeites*, 63-85.

> is Maria Edgeworth, whose *Patronage* gives progressive views of women's roles in society. Most tellingly of all, here are a Bible and a *Book of Common Prayer*. Marianne may not have *intended* a pointed moral lesson to her brother; she seems to have born her displacement with remarkable fortitude. But I certainly see one in the placing of these cornerstones of the Church of England next to novels tracing, for the large part, women's lives and fortunes.[16]

Dow analyzes the books' relocation as an admonishing message for Marianne's brother. But it is fascinating to see how quickly Austen's novels are dislocated from the library and relocated to a more feminine space, the drawing room, even in her own family's home.[17] Novels do not rest equally beside the other tomes in the august library, but are found in the more social room of the country house, as we will see in Elizabeth Taylor's *Palladian*.

Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow* (1921) is a good example of real library architecture playing a role in the book. The library is both an imaginary library—containing fictional book titles—and a false one. A false bookshelf made from spines of cut books, which are commonly found in country house libraries, leads to a small cabinet in the library filled with Grand Tour treasures. The longwinded Scogan laments the damage that was done to the books to create the false door since now of course they can no longer *read* those books. Some fictional titles on this imaginary library shelf/dummy door include a "Biographical Dictionary," a "Biography of Men who were Born Great," a "Biography of Men who Achieved Greatness," a "Biography of Men who had Greatness Thrust upon Them," and finally a "Biography of Men who were Never Great at All."[18] Scogan especially mourns the loss of the "Tales of Knockespotch." The "Tales" are a mixture of "dark and

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[16] Gillian Dow, "Reading at Godmersham Park: Edward's Library and Marianne's Books," *Persuasions*, no. 37 (2015) 161-2.

[17] Of course, Austen's novels and others by the Brontë sisters and George Eliot are more likely to find their way onto country house library shelves than any other—and to influence the authors perusing these shelves. Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy writes about one interesting (albeit Russian) example of Austen making her way onto important shelves: friends of Pushkin's kept *Pride and Prejudice* on their country house library shelves and he may have read Austen's novel before beginning *Onegin*. See Nepomnyashchy, "Jane Austen in Russia: Hidden Presence and Belated Boom," in *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, edited by Anthony Mandal and Brian Southam, 334-349, The Athlone Critical Traditions Series (London; New York: Continuum, 2007).

[18] Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004) 78.

oracular" aphorisms and "luminous" tales imagined to have "delivered us from the dreary tyranny of the realistic novel."[19] After a lengthy, praiseful, vague but complex description of Knockespotch's books, the protagonist and aspiring author, Denis, begs for a concrete example from the text, but Scogan replies that they must be read to be appreciated. This is triply impossible: because they do not exist in our world and because in the fictional world in which they exist they have been hacked at the spine and because they are impossible to describe. *Crome Yellow* is Huxley's first novel—is he, too, struggling to envision a book to deliver us from realism? It is interesting that Huxley feels compelled to begin his literary ambitions on such a traditional foundation as the country house novel, though country house satire was popular enough in the interwar period. While his feet are planted firmly on Crome's floorboards and grounds, Scogan's pontificating functions as a mouthpiece for a future more bravely envisioned in Huxley's subsequent dystopian fiction. The books in the library, cut at the spine, are another manifestation of Huxley's creative timidity, as is the jejune device of an author-protagonist. Nevertheless, the library scene in *Crome Yellow* is a chapter unto itself and brilliantly symbolic of the "value" placed on good literature in a country house library: it is more useful as an object than as reading material.

As Leah Price has argued, in Victorian realism readers are meant to value the content of the book, or the text, (as Scogan and Denis do) and despise the material dimensions of the book-object.[20] But, in Huxley's hands, Scogan and Denis are both a touch pathetic, and the library door is fun: the book-objects and their witty spines, their missing pages, have the uppermost hand in this passage as *they* contribute a commentary that is far more interesting than the characters' dialogue. In

[19] Ibid., 80. The passage continues (with Scogan speaking): "My life, Knockespotch said, is not so long that I can afford to spend precious hours writing descriptions of middle-class interiors. He said again, 'I am tired of seeing the human mind bogged in a social plenum; I prefer to paint it in a vacuum, freely and sportively bombinating'" (Ibid.).

[20] See Leah Price, *How to do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

this spirit, the bookshelf anticipates *the* great modernist country house novel, *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) by Virginia Woolf, as 'Wild Goose Chase, a Novel' by an anonymous author sits on the shelf. *Orlando* concludes with a wild goose chase, and it is tempting to think that this bookcase is partially behind the Woolfian novel published only seven years later.[21] Of course, a different book exerts much stronger influence over *Orlando*—Vita Sackville-West's nonfictional account of her family and ancestral home, *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922). Sackville-West's family history was compiled from the type of materials found behind *Crome Yellow*'s false door—letter files and old articles and artifacts.

Sackville-West's book also engages literary history—in particular, Vita's chapter "Knole in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth" situates Vita's family as much in a literary history as it does in political history. While combing through her family's archives, Vita is also combing through literary scholarship to bring her ancestor's more neglected poems to light. Apparently, this was a life-long endeavor: she describes nosing around the trunks in the attic as a child for some hidden archival clue that would solve "The Shakespeare Question:"

> I often entertained wild dreams that some light might be thrown on the Shakespearean problem by a discovery of letters or documents at Knole. What more fascinating or chimerical a speculation for a literary-minded child breathing and absorbing the atmosphere of that house? I used to tell myself stories of finding Shakespeare's manuscripts up in the attics, or perhaps hidden away under the flooring somewhere, or in the Muniment Room where quite rightly I was forbidden to go and rummage. Yet, as I have since discovered, my imaginings weren't so chimerical as all that. There really are some possible connections between Shakespeare and Knole.[22]

Vita admits that the connections are "slight." Nevertheless, the house and Shakespeare infect her imagination as she searches for manuscripts in the floorboards. The literary history she searches for

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[21] Tantalizingly, wild geese also show up as soon as Marion decides to marry Cassandra in Elizabeth Taylor's *Palladian*, Virago Modern Classics, no. 184 (London: Virago Press, 1985): "A skein of wild geese flew above the trees, with a steady commotion of wings beating, their necks stretched forward into the distance which they desired and made fore. He watched them flying over until they were gone beyond the trees, and felt that they crowned his intention [to marry], those strange and beautiful birds" (Ibid., 144).

[22] Sackville-West, *Knole and the Sackvilles*, 58.

has a material dimension for her, one deeply entwined with the mysteries of the house. One room in Knole even memorializes poets (or, their portraits) on its walls: "Edmund Waller, Matthew Prior, Thomas Flattman, John Dryden, William Congreve, William Wycherley, Thomas Otway, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Samuel Butler, Abraham Cowley, Nicholas Rowe, William Cartwright, Sir Kenelm Digby, Alexander Pope."[23] Although Knole's Poets Parlour is not a library, it serves the same function as a "repository of family memory, not in the sense that it is full of books about the family but rather as the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge colleges serve as repositories of corporate memory, with their benefactors' books and their marble busts of distinguished alumni."[24] The portraits of Knole's alumni-poets line the walls of the reception room, reminding guests of the family's longstanding patronage of the literary arts.

Libraries as *rooms* do not seem to interest Sackville-West much in her fiction, but libraries as collections of family account books and letters and diaries and (occasionally) publications are vitally important to her work in *Knole and the Sackvilles*. Vita Sackville-West might be one of the few readers who felt some sympathy for Sir Walter Elliot as he picked up the Baronetage and read his family's entry—though she probably pitied his shallow ancestry by comparison to her Norman ancestors. But libraries as rooms are of little interest because, as mentioned, they were often not added until the eighteenth century—relatively late in the chronology of country house architecture if the Elizabethan country house is considered its pinnacle as it is in Sackville-West's 1922 novella, *The Heir*.[25] If libraries were new builds, they were often added in the eighteenth century to balance out

[23] Ibid., 150.

[24] Purcell, 160.

[25] Added to that, the estate itself is described as "one of the most perfect examples of the Elizabethan manor house in England" (Sackville-West, *The Heir*, 79).

the chapel.[26] However, in many houses, libraries were not constructed anew but made from converted rooms. Galleries were especially suitable for conversion, and Blenheim, Syon, and Burton Constable are all "token examples of the conversion of long galleries into libraries."[27] In such rooms, books remain in the background, lost behind glass shelves and competing with the velvets, art, fire screens, and paneling that adorn the space (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Burton Constable Long Gallery/Library. Photo: Michael Beckwith/Pixabay [https://pixabay.com/photos/burton-constable-hall-the-long-3693732/. This room is not staged as a living room, but many galleries were also furnished with couches and side tables.

In Sackville-West's *The Heir* (1922), the heir of an Elizabethan estate is surprised to learn that the library he so enjoys is actually called "The Oak Parlour" in the sale booklet provided by his estate's agent. In the novella, an insurance salesman named Peregrine Chase inherits an estate,

[26] See Jervis, 178 & passim.

[27] Jervis, 182.

named Blackboys,[28] from his aunt. Expenses are so high that his solicitors encourage him to auction it off to break even. Chase agrees to this reasonable course of action, but over the course of the book slowly falls in love with the house, its lands, and his tenants. He keeps coming down from London to stay in the house and his doubts finally overwhelm him at the auction when a rich man from Brazil with dark skin bids against an American for his house:

> The room began to take sides, most preferring the straight-forward vulgarity of the jolly American to the outlandishness of the young man, which baffled and put them ill at their ease. (Nutley found time to think that the youth of the neighbourhood would need some time before it recovered from the influence of that young man, even if he were to pass away with the day.)[29]

To the contemporary reader, it might seem like an estate named Blackboys should rightfully fall into the hands of the Brazilian bidder, but Sackville-West's dog whistles are more likely meant to cause her reader to panic that a quintessentially English Elizabethan country house might fall into black hands. Certainly, when the American drops out of the bidding, Chase's own panic erupts into a bid. He buys his own house at auction: this is the triumphant conclusion of the novella.

As mentioned, Chase is also primed for this scene by the illustrated booklet that his agent, Nutley, provides him. Shortly before the auction, he wanders into his gallery and sadly peruses its pages.

> 'The Oak Parlour, an apartment 20 ft. by 25 ft., partially panelled in linen-fold in a state of the finest preservation.' Was that his library? It couldn't be, so accurate, so precise? Why, the room was living! Through the windows one saw up the garden, and saw the peacocks perched on the low wall, one heard their cry as they flew up into the cedars for the night; and in the evening, in that room, the fir cones crackled on the hearth, the dry wood kindled, and the room began to smell ever so slightly of the clean, acrid wood smoke that never quite left it, but remained clinging even when the next day the windows were open and the warm breeze fanned into the room. He had known all that about it, although he hadn't known it

[28] I imagine this name is probably derived from the Black Boy pub in Sevenoaks, the town in which Knole is located, which dates to 1616 and which is supposedly named for John Morockoe, a black man who features in *Knole and the Sackvilles*. This sketchy history is inscribed on a plaque on the pub's outer wall.

[29] Sackville-West, *The Heir*, 81-2.

> was twenty foot by twenty-five. He hadn't know that the panelling against which he had been accustomed to set his bowl of coral tulips was called linen-fold.[30]

On the surface, this is a sentimental passage, but it's also Sackville-West's way of asserting that *she* knows the truth about the pre-history of country house libraries (without giving away any insider secrets). When Sackville-West bought Sissinghurst Castle, she resisted the impulse to build a library as a distinct room and instead renovated the stables into a sitting room lined with books—injecting the conversion of reception rooms into libraries back into the newly built space. But Chase knows less than his author, knows his library only as the library, not as the Oak Parlour: the accuracies of architectural history presented by information booklets (and perhaps even guidebooks) take second-place to the lived experience of these houses. And Sackville-West was probably trying to counteract the boring accuracies of the guidebook (and Knole has had many guidebooks over the years) when she published the living history of the house in *Knole and the Sackvilles* in the same year that she published *The Heir*.[31]

Sackville-West was not immune to the secret charms of the library—the false doors like the one found in Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, bespoke furniture with tricky mechanisms such as folding library steps craftily incorporated into tables or chairs,[32] hidden drawers like Cathy's in which she keeps her love letters in *Wuthering Heights*, and coterie literature. In her book on Chatsworth, the Duchess of Devonshire tells the reader that her most prized book is *The Life of Ronald Knox* by Evelyn Waugh, which was inscribed by the author: "For Darling Debo, with love from Evelyn. You

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[30] Ibid., 51-2.

[31] That magical modernist year, 1922. See Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[32] Jervis, 185.

will not find a word in this to offend your Protestant sympathies."[33] The book was filled with blank pages. This inside joke between (Anglo-Catholic) Waugh and (Protestant) Cavendish is in line with the jokey characteristics of country house libraries:

> Indeed, books with blank leaves and fictitious bindings were also a feature of most . . . nineteenth century libraries . . . including Chatsworth, Eaton Hall and Woburn Abbey. Although primarily used to maintain the architectural consistency of the room it was not uncommon to have bookcases with 'book doors' filled with books bearing humorous or obscure titles. At Chatsworth, for example, one 'book door' included the titles, 'Inigo Jones on Secret Entrances', 'Beveridge on the Beer Act', 'Skye, by McCloud' and 'D. Cline on Consumption'.[34]

Manuscripts written by family members or friends might be found on these shelves, as Chawton House Library's collection of women's writing demonstrates. The most common manuscript books written by women were commonplace books or diaries, but Ellen Cox's commonplace book is interfused with her own poetry. The library also holds a hand-written novel, *The History of Theodora Constantia Harcourt*, by Anonymous, circa 1750, and another manuscript novel from 1799, *The Life of Frederick Harley a novel most humbly dedicated to Mrs. Richard Minchin*, by Lady Katherine Howard. The privacy of such unpublished literature plays into the hidden corners of the library: themes intricately brought together by Ian McEwan in *Atonement* (2001). The library is the stage of Celia's and Robbie's tryst, the place that Briony's imaginative plays are shelved when she is a child, and the place where they are re-enacted at the end of the novel.[35] Or, we might think of teenaged Jane Austen's

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[33] Quoted in Jennifer Ciro, "Country House Libraries in the Nineteenth Century," *Library History* 18 (July 2002). Passage from Deborah Cavendish's *The House: a portrait of Chatsworth* (London: Papermac, 1987) 107.

[34] Ciro, 97.

[35] Prince Pückler-Maskau wrote in 1827 that, "Whoever has anything to write does it in the library. There you also arrange rendezvous, general as well as with particular persons . . . Many a marriage, or seduction of the already married, is woven between the *corpus juris* on the one side and Bouffler's work on the other, while the novel of the moment lies between as a means of communication" (*Pückler's progress: the adventures of Price Pückler-Maskau in England, Wales and Ireland as told in letters to his former wife 1826-1829*, trans. Flora Brennan, (London: Collins, 1987) 86, quoted in Ciro, 92).

adaptation of Samuel Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) into a script for private theatricals. The script was never meant for publication, but was kept in the family library as a keepsake. And, in literary history, private libraries with their secrets and pockets are an important aspect of the gothic novel's genealogy plot.[36] If Sackville-West does not engage these aspects of the library in her own fiction, it is perhaps because she is reluctant to let the public into the privacy of the library—to give its secrets away. But one of her until-recently-unpublished works does just that.

In 2017, the Royal Collections Trust published a wonderful, strange little book: *A Note of Explanation* by Vita Sackville-West. This book, which reads with the simplicity of a children's story, tells the tale of a sprite who comes to inhabit Queen Mary's dolls house (1924). *A Note* claims that this same sprite has been in the background of all the major fairy tales from Jack in the Beanstalk to the Princess and the Pea. She is delighted with the dolls house's plumbing and with the fully stocked wine cellar—but her messes confound its caretakers and they even ask the dolls house's maker if he is playing a joke on them. He is not! The final page gives us an explanation:

> But now, of course, if anyone cares to ruin his eyesight by reading the books in the library, the matter will once and for all be made quite clear, and it is to be hoped that the authorities will cope with this slight difficulty by the simple expedient of supplying a housemaid, and the enigma will once and for all be at an
>
> END[37]

Before 2017, this tale could *only* be found in Queen Mary's dolls house's library at 1:12 the size of a regular book: thus, you might well "ruin [your] eyesight" by reading the original. The most famous

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[36] Deidre Lynch, *Loving Literature* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015): "On these occasions a character's entrance into the chamber that a household sets aside for its reading and writing signals the launch of a genealogical plot. The secret cabinets of gothic libraries house, among their books, the documentary raw material from which narratives of reproduction and succession will subsequently be pieced together: testaments left behind by dead fathers; long-lost certificates of marriage; and, of course, musty, scarcely legible manuscript memoirs and confessions . . . The library is for the gothic mode a standard launching point for that storyline whose dénouement reveals family secrets, reestablishes disrupted family lines, and restores to the orphaned protagonist the property that has been her birthright all along" (Ibid., 304).

[37] Sackville-West, *A Note of Explanation*, 42.

authors of the day were solicited for stories to adorn the bookshelves, and luminaries from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to Thomas Hardy to Rudyard Kipling obliged with tiny tomes bound by Sangorski and Sutcliffe. Thus, Sackville-West's *A Note of Explanation* was, until very recently, held in the most exclusive library in the world: after all, there are very few people who would be allowed to risk ruining their eyesight to read it.

As the book's afterword, written by her 2014 biographer, Matthew Dennison, explains, "Vita was not a humourist, nor was she much given to whimsy."[38] But Vita *was* a snob and a house enthusiast—and she would have eagerly participated in the tradition of in-house, library jokes. In her home at Sissinghurst, she and her husband, Harold Nicholson, generously annotated published works in their own collection—sometimes writing notes to one another in the margins. If there was a person who understood the value, the joy, the possibilities of a private library, it was Vita Sackville-West. Perhaps the publication of *A Note of Explanation* might even have irked Sackville-West—after all, its ending relies so much on experience and location: the *experience* of reading the tiny book that is plucked from the famous dolls house's library shelves at Windsor. On the other hand, the beginning of the story seems to anticipate that it might, one day, be published: "Once upon a time there was a doll's house that belonged to a Queen . . ."[39] it begins and describes the people who come from "far and near" to pay a shilling to look at the dolls house. Dreaming of shrinking down, like Alice, to explore the dolls house, they must instead move on "because they lived in London, and not down a rabbit-hole."[40] The book is one of those things which, "peer into the house as they might in consideration of their shilling, being greedy of every second allotted to them, there were some things

[38] Ibid., 44.

[39] Ibid., 5.

[40] Ibid., 8.

which they could never see in the house."[41] The sprite is, of course, the more obvious thing they can never see. But with the publication of the book, visitors can now pay their entrance fee and spot on the library shelf the original *Note of Explanation* which they have read in a book 12 inches tall in the comfort of their homes. After nearly 100 years, the public is finally in on the joke.

Elizabeth Taylor and the Fictional Country House Library

In *A Note of Explanation*, Sackville-West wrote an effective metafictional commentary on the country house library—almost against her will. But even if the public did not know exactly *what* inside jokes were being told in country house libraries, they picked up from literature and popular culture that country house libraries were a place to store secrets. This is one of the authentic, if often hyperbolized, qualities of the country house library that is folded into country house fiction. But fiction—even or especially realism—doesn't need to "stay true" to the source material to be good. The country house library is at its best when it's engaged in both the fictional and non-fictional, literary and material-cultural canons, as it is under the especially skilled pen of Elizabeth Taylor. In fact, Taylor's work derives a lot of energy from the interplay between the two—interplay that generates preconceptions and clichés of the country house library that, although not necessarily grounded in reality, lend mythic power to the space in fiction.

I have suggested that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the country house library's classical texts, reference books, epic poetry, etc. and the books we read for pleasure; in other words, the books gentlemen are prepared to read by public school for edification and the books that any literate member of the household might read for entertainment. The space of the library is antithetical to country house fiction. For instance, in Taylor's *Angel*, the eponymous

[41] Ibid., 10.

country house novelist's books would never be found on the shelves of a country house library. We might expect this spatial distinction to disappear in the twentieth century, replaced by the portable categories of "highbrow" literature vs. "middlebrow" and "lowbrow" books.[42] But Boots Book-lovers Libraries, with its country house library interiors and its middlebrow wares, kept the spatial dimensions of country house libraries in sight (Figure 10). Circulating libraries like Boots's were a significant site for women in the interwar years—a place for nurturing that emerging "middlebrow" market of smart-but-unpretentious novels for educated readers.[43] By contrast, Boots' lending libraries initially refused to carry Woolf's "highbrow" *Three Guineas* (though when they relented, there was a long waiting list for the book).[44] And the commercially successful conflation of the middle-class library with country house decor extended to its books, as well: country house novels like Taylor's remained as popular as ever. Elizabeth Taylor had a subscription to the Boots library as a student and worked there from 1934-6[45]—Austen's references to circulating libraries in *Mansfield Park* would not have been lost on her as a reader or a metafictional author.

[42] These last two categories were, unfairly, categorized together by many undiscerning and sexist critics.

[43] Nicola Humble, "The Feminine Middlebrow Novel," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945*, ed. Maroula Joannou (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 99. See Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). According to Humble, we would be hard-pressed to find authors who self-identified as "middlebrow," but there is certainly a self-consciousness amongst women writers of this time period that their work will be denigrated in *some* sense—as "ladies novels" or works of "romance" etc.

[44] Anna Snaith, "The Reading Public: Respondents to *Three Guineas*," in *Virginia Woolf: public and private negotiations* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 126.

[45] She had a subscription there as a school girl, too, and one of her classmates, Joanna Love, recollected: "If we cycled back from school together invariably we had to stop at Boots Library for her to browse and change her books" (Nicola Beauman, *The Other Elizabeth Taylor* (London: Persephone, 2009), 26-27).

Figure 10: The interior of a Boots circulating library. Terry Potter via Pinterest. http://www.letterpressproject.co.uk/inspiring-older-readers/2016-07-28/the-boots-circulating-library.

The fictionalization of Boots's library proved less problematic than the various fictionalizations presented by the country house novel for library historians. Mark Purcell rails against the preconceptions that haunt the country house library in his essay, "The Country House Library Reassess'd"—preconceptions that books were "bought by the yard," that libraries excluded ladies, that they were filled with highly intellectual but unread tomes, and so forth.[46] As a scion of a very literary country house family, Vita Sackville-West might have sided with Purcell, who explains that the "first major preconception is 'dust'" in the library. By contrast, although "there is little evidence to suggest that the most libraries [*sic*] were dusty or neglected in their heyday,"[47] Taylor's *Palladian* uses the dust and decay of the country house library to symbolize the staleness of the generic conventions that structure the characters' actions within the novel and the novel-reader's

[46] Of course, there is some truth to all these preconceptions. For example, German architectural historian Hermann Muthesius wrote in *The English House* that "although he has not enjoyed a specifically scholarly education, the Englishman buys quantities of books, has them expensively bound and houses them in well made bookcases. English noblemen still have some sense of responsibility for the intellectual values of the nation and feel bound to acquire certain important works for their libraries" (Hermann Mathesius, *The English House*, trans. Janet Seligman (London: Crosby, Lockwood, Staples, 1979), 219, quoted in Ciro 90).

[47] Purcell, 162.

expectations. As I will discuss, dust and decay also play up the literary traditions that Taylor is building on: the gothic and the decadent. In a similar manner, dust and decay are also integral to *Angel* and tie into the literary allusions to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) that structure the novel as the protagonist gains control of Paradise (House). While Taylor's engagement with the library is much more visible in *Palladian*—a tour scene takes place in the library, books are repaired, a first kiss is executed there—the library becomes more abstract in *Angel*. In fact, it is painfully absent until it is brutally present when Angel takes her husband's reference book off the library shelf at the end of the novel and discovers his infidelity in the very space that her own books—lowbrow country house novels—traditionally would not be welcome.[48]

Taylor does not shy away from the potential absurdities of writing about a way of life she has not experienced; rather, they become a part of the novel in *Palladian* and in *Angel*. She taps into what everyone knows, or *thinks* they know, about the library. Fiction suggests and cements preconceptions about the space that cling to it still. As mentioned, the library is a rich site upon which authors stage metafictional explorations of the novel, and it has been so since the era of the gothic novel.[49] To communicate a metafictional critique of canonicity in the midcentury—a topic at risk of becoming dangerously abstract—the discussion must depend on a solid *conceptual* foundation of country house library. Thus, literary clichés become more useful than the accuracies of architectural or material culture, especially when authors are writing for a reading public that has little personal, but much readerly, experience of country house life. For this reason, preconceptions

[48] At least, Angel's books would not be welcome in any country house's library but her own. It is unclear if Angel's books are on these shelves.

[49] See Lynch's chapter, "Canon Love in Gothic Libraries" in *Loving Literature*. The library as a site of metaphysical and, arguably, metaliterary meditation predates the novel and has done so for centuries. The library in Donne's *Anniversaries* functions in this way—see Suzanne Smith's "The Enfranchisement of the 'In-Mate Soule': Self-Knowledge and Death in Donne's *Anniversaries*," *Literature and Theology* 24, no. 4 (2010): 313-30.

are essential to *Palladian* and *Angel*, the country house novels of an atheist, communist, sometime librarian and longtime housewife, Elizabeth Taylor. She engages the tension that connects both real and fictive libraries—the tension between intellectually showing off and keeping secrets for the initiated. Overt allusions like the spines on their library shelf loudly announce the presence of other works' influence over the novel in hand; meanwhile, subtle, quiet allusions are like the secret corners, hidden drawers, and private closets of the country house library.

Taylor's parents were shopkeepers, and she won a scholarship to attend a prestigious school for girls in her home town of Reading, the Abbey School, which Jane and Cassandra Austen once attended. Taylor confessed in a 1943 letter: "I like having gone to the same school as Jane Austen and Miss Mitford. It gives me a proud feeling."[50] Taylor's school took pride in providing girls with the same education as boys—making them memorize canonical poetry and learn Latin and Greek—but, as Nicola Humble has written, society had not evolved at the same pace as schooling and their education often was not put to use as housewives or secretaries. Indeed, on her last day of school, Taylor wrote in her diary:

> I shall never forget my Greek lessons and how they excited me and it was a great grief to take my books out of my desk for the last time. Everyone else knows what they are going to do, except me. I only want to write what I want to write. This evening I tried to read some of the Alcestis but it didn't seem the same. I feel as if my life is over, and I don't know what to do. Perhaps someone will marry me.[51]

Taylor's education provided her with a solid background in English literature and Classics, but the market demanded easy reads, like country house romances. Unlike Angel's country house novels, Taylor's work does not entirely miss the mark of reality—English estates *were* crumbling around the

[50] Letter 306 to Ray Russell, quoted in Beauman, 17.

[51] 'Juvenile Diary,' op. cit. pp. 1, 4, 3, quoted in Beauman, 29.

nation in the 1940s,[52] and Taylor did not need to see them firsthand to know it, especially in a nation long devoted to reporting the goings-on in and around country houses, as Milne's article for *The Graphic* demonstrates. Some publications, like *Country Life* and *The Field* were dedicated solely to such reporting. After all, the country house owner in *Palladian* is named Marion Vanbrugh (Vanbrugh is the architect famous for designing Blenheim and Castle Howard) and the cook is named Mrs. Adams (after another renowned country house architect), indicating that commonplace architectural knowledge is also at work in her text. But the title is especially brilliant. Whereas we might expect the house's name to give the novel its title (as in *The Castle of Otranto*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Howards End*, or *Brideshead Revisisted*), *Palladian*'s title refers to a style of classical architecture that became synonymous with the 'English Country House' from the eighteenth century. We expect the particular, but we get the generalized. While the reader digs into the characters' backstories for substance, revels in the novel's treasure trove of symbolically latent objects and spaces, it is the facade that we should have been watching all along. The facade—quite literally a superficially architectural element—crumbles and kills Sophy at the climax of the novel. Superficiality, Taylor suggests, can be fatal.

Through the country house's crumbling facade and decaying books, *Palladian* ties the widespread disrepair of English estates into the decadent country house literary movement identified by Clara Tuite, which I will discuss further below. The country house library is complemented by Cassandra's and Marion's engagement in a London bookshop. But the disrepair of Marion's ancestral tomes relates to the general disrepair of the house itself, which is responsible for Sophy's death. Sophy is a story-writing child and the country house's heir; as such, her death signals that the country house is an untenable literary tradition *and* an untenable social institution.

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[52] See James Raven, "Introduction," in *Lost Mansions: Essays on the Destruction of the Country House*, ed. James Raven (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

* * *

Palladian (1946) is Elizabeth Taylor's second published novel after *At Mrs Lippincote's* (1945). It was favorably received by critics, and this country house novel is perhaps to blame for her inevitable comparison to Austen, which the text invites—for example, the protagonist Cassandra Dashwood shares a first name with Austen's beloved sister and a last with the protagonists of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). But the loudest allusions are to Charlotte Brontë: *Palladian* is a country house governess narrative set in 1946, and its characters are aware of the anachronistic nature of young Sophy Vanbrugh's education.

Palladian's first sentence flags the text's metafictionality—its refusal to let its reader sink into and be immersed by the novel—by gently teasing its own readerly protagonist: "Cassandra, with all her novel-reading, could be sure of experiencing the proper emotions, standing in her bedroom for the last time and looking from the bare windows to the unfaded oblong of wall-paper where 'The Meeting of Dante and Beatrice' in sepia had hung for thirteen years above the mantelpiece."[53] Taylor announces outright that Cassandra has been conditioned to experience the world according to the logic of novels, much like Catherine Morland in Austen's mock-gothic novel, *Northanger Abbey*.[54] As this novel progresses and Cassandra travels to an Elizabethan manor house with a Palladian facade to be Sophy's governess, Cassandra forces her emotions and the events of her life to fit the *Jane Eyre* (1847) narrative no matter the consequences.

The country house's library makes its appearance early in the novel. When Sophy takes Cassandra on a house tour, she first shows her new governess the library, then the school room where the scene ends:

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[53] Taylor, *Palladian*, 5.

[54] The difference, of course, is that Austen is Cassandra's Radcliffe in *Palladian*.

> "The library!" Sophy began, standing with her back to the opened door, displaying the rows of calf and gilt. "There is a priest's-hole in the side of the fireplace," she added, as if she had done this job before. She even led the way forward, but the smell of dampish soot repelled her. Cassandra took down a book and glanced through it, which, on account of her upbringing, she could not help doing.
>
> > "Awake therefore that gentle paſſion in every ſwain: for lo! adorned with all the charms in which Nature can array her; bedecked with beauty, youth, ſprightlineſs, innocence, modeſty, and tenderneſs, breathing ſweetneſs from her roſy lips, and darting brightneſs from her ſparkling eyes…"
>
> "Those books smell horrible," said Sophy.
> Cassandra raised it to her face. "It's a sweet, dusty smell."
> "It turns my stomach over," said Sophy. "Like going to church."
> Cassandra put the book back and followed Sophy along the corridors and up little staircases. Sometimes the child opened doors and made announcements. They came to the schoolroom, which was no cosy, shabby place with fireguard and cuckoo-clock.[55]

Although Taylor does not tell us so, the passage that Cassandra reads is not from some ancient work but from Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones: a Foundling* (1749)—yet another country house novel (or, at least, a novel with a very important estate in it). Cassandra stops reading just before Fielding names "Sophia"—just before Cassandra can tip her author's hand—interrupted as she is by Sophy's insistence on the library's physical uncomfortableness. The excerpt is from *Tom Jones*'s facetiously stylized chapter, "*A short hint of what we can do with the sublime, and a description of Miss Sophia Western*" (IV.ii). In Fielding's passage, he invokes poets Suckling, Donne, and Rochester to describe a paragon of beauty, virtue, and intellect molded by her aunt in the countryside. Fielding's description is clearly meant to be a satirical commentary on the idealized muse versus the real woman, and Sophy's interruption of the passage satirizes Fielding's implication that he has shown the difference between the two in the character of Sophia Western. These criticisms are buried deep in *Palladian*'s subtext, though; the reader needs to work hard and read widely to find them, and to not be distracted by the repeated references to Austen's and the Brontës' works. Tellingly, during the

[55] Taylor, *Palladian*, 25.

tour only the library and the schoolroom (as the scene quoted above continues) are represented by Taylor. The rest are elided into two vague sentences: "Cassandra . . . followed Sophy along the corridors and up little staircases. Sometimes the child opened doors and made announcements."[56] The truncated tour indicates a literary tradition grown narrow despite its vast setting—indicated by the corridors, little staircases, and doors leading to undescribed spaces—and despite its expansive (and gender-inclusive) canon—indicated by *Tom Jones*'s library cameo.

Meanwhile, Cassandra's employer is a loner aesthete named Marion. Their obvious lack of passion and age difference does not discourage a romance between these two novel readers—he teaches her Greek, and they bond over restoring the dusty, moldy tomes in the neglected library. The library's books *materially* structure their romance, in contrast to the novels that have inclined Cassandra and Marion toward their unpromising union. We catch a glimpse of Marion's novels when Cassandra is summoned to learn Greek and she sees that his room "was white and gilt and brilliant, untidy with coloured books, not the leathery books in the library, but the bright modern books that are all gone to-morrow, God knows where."[57] Marion confesses that he took over this room after his wife died, and that she had taken it over after their aunt died. Marion loves this feminine room, filled with novels—it is his refuge. But, as he admits when his cousin Tom accuses him of knowing everything, he "only knows things out of books."[58] His romance with Cassandra pushes him away from the comfort of this feminine room, so well suited for novel reading, and toward the more "masculine room" (per the novel): the library.[59]

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 48. Echoing Milnes's line in "Is the Country House Library Doomed:" "Some ten thousand volumes leap forth every year from our publishing houses, and where they all go goodness knows."

[58] Taylor, *Palladian*, 66.

[59] Ciro has argued that the library, in fact, transformed from a male space to a more inclusive space suitable to reception rooms as house parties dissected houses into "private" and "public" spheres, transforming what had

Private libraries have a vexed history with women, perhaps because reading rooms and university libraries excluded women for so long, but novels uphold the oftentimes misleading notion that the country house library is a masculine space.[60] Most famously, Mr. Bennet's library is his refuge from the bustle of a house filled with five daughters and a nervous wife.[61] Jane Eyre's schoolroom is relocated from the library as a matter of course when Rochester returns, and we often find him there throughout Charlotte Brontë's novel. Linton shuts himself in the library most of the day at the Grange in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Dorothea feels uneasy meeting Will Ladislaw in her deceased husband's library in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), where he worked so hard and so often on his Key to All Mythologies. In Agatha Christie's *The Body in the Library* (1942), the title itself is a red herring too obvious to be taken seriously—although it seems evident that the squire must have strangled his mistress in his library, such an action goes against his character and investigators quickly surmise that he was framed. The weight of all these novels are behind

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once been a private space (the study, or library) into a public reception room. Her argument about the privacy of these rooms opening up in the nineteenth century makes perfect sense, but her claim that "prior to nineteenth century women were not welcomed into the library, as scholarly pursuits were thought unsuitable for them" (Ciro, 96) perhaps overstates things. This might well have been the trend, but I think there is sufficient evidence that they were never exclusively male spaces in the eighteenth century (and private libraries were rare enough in the seventeenth century that it is difficult to generalize). In *Jane Eyre*, we see both: the library is clearly Rochester's domain, but he uses the space as a reception room.

[60] For example, Andrew Lang's late-nineteenth century book, *The Library*, describes an ideal library that draws a clear distinction between "bookmen" and the distinctly less serious "lady booklovers." Penny Fielding writes, "Lang is pleased to define his library space as rigorously exclusive to middle-class men and thus 'remote from the interruptions of servants, wife, and children'" (Lang, *The Library*, 34, quoted in Fielding, "Reading Rooms: M.R. James and the Library of Modernity," *Modern Fiction Studies* 46, no. 3 (2000): 759). And, when women started gaining entry into these spaces, it always caused a splash: "As Judith Walkowitz identifies in her study of gender roles played out in the late Victorian city, great national collections were no longer safe: "Advanced women not only invaded governmental bodies and assumed a commanding presence in the streets, they encroached on other male preserves as well. One prime target was the British Museum Reading Room. The Reading Room became the stomping ground of the 'bohemian set,' a place where trysts were made between heterodox men and women" (Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 69, quoted in Fielding, 758).

[61] See H. J. Jackson's "What Was Mr. Bennet Doing in his Library, and What Does it Matter?" *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, 2004, accessed May 9, 2019, https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/libraries/jackson/jackson.html.

Cassandra and Marion: although her Greek lessons begin in Marion's favorite, feminine room, the romantic tension generated by readerly expectations (theirs and ours) propel him towards the library. Like Dorothea and Casaubon, they wrestle a relationship out of dead languages and library spaces. One evening, Marion, his cousin Margaret, Margaret's mother, Cassandra, and Sophy are looking over photo albums when Margaret's mother exclaims:

> "How fusty those albums smell."
> "Everything in the library smells like that," said Sophy.
> "One day," Marion said to Cassandra, "we must really go through the library. Weed out and catalogue and do some repair work."
> She looked up from the album of Marion's aunts and uncles and smiled.
> "Perhaps to-night," he even suggested, shocked at his own decision, the sudden wish to work.[62]

In the next chapter, Cassandra asks for paste for the library books and after she carries it away, Nanny asks, "Did you notice her flushing? . . . Quiet as a mouse, but I size her up all right."[63] She evaluates Cassandra as a gold-digger rather than as a novel-reader, but the end is the same: Cassandra *is* angling for Marion's hand in marriage. But novel-reading is distinct from country house library books and Taylor is careful to emphasize that these voracious readers do not actually read the library books (except for that short excerpt from *Tom Jones* during Cassandra's tour). Rather, the library is the stage and the books are the props that bring their readerly expectations to fruition.[64] We see this when Marion leaves the library to consult with Nanny about Sophy's upcoming birthday:

> When she was alone, Cassandra sat down at the table and looked through the books, trying to read a little, but the room, with its shadows, its long windows, the light which drew grey furry moths in from outside, excited her, enchanted her. It seemed to be an evening quite separate from any other. The crumbling books on the table before her *seemed like books which had never been read*; dust encrusted what had once been gilded edges; in some were faint signatures, a pressed brown violet yellow newspaper-cuttings; a jay's feather fell out of one, a

[62] Taylor, *Palladian*, 122.

[63] Ibid., 124.

[64] See Price, *How to do Things with Books*.

> dead spider from another. Yet the books themselves seemed clenched together, *as if the pages had never been turned* (emphasis mine).[65]

When Marion returns, Cassandra (inexplicably) starts crying. Marion blames the decrepit condition of the library, as well as their outdated content, on Cassandra's mood, exclaiming, "All these dirty books have depressed you. Your eyes are tired with so many 'f's and 's's. Put your palms over them—no, not touching!—relax until there is only darkness. What do you see? Flowers, stars and suns?"[66] He replaces Cassandra's hands with his own, but Cassandra confesses that she sees nothing behind the makeshift blindfold of Marion's palms. Her lack of imagination does not deter him: he kisses her. Cassandra experiences bliss without returning the kiss as her bookish fantasies are fulfilled. The narrator notes, ending the scene, that "Marion was happy, too, without knowing or wondering why."[67] The blankness of Marion's happiness echoes the nothingness Cassandra sees behind his palms, underscoring the superficiality of their love story.

Consciously referring back: Classicism and the Canon

Their love story is superficial, but Taylor's novel is complex—and the library constellates her criticisms of the stale conventions of the comic marriage plot in the novel and the difficulty of breaking new ground in the novel tradition, especially for a woman writer. As I'll discuss in the following paragraph, the love story and the death of the child are neatly bound by the library—the symmetry of these scenes is, perhaps, a nod to the perfectly balanced proportions of Palladian architecture, which echoed the classical structures of Greece and Rome. But the "Palladian" of *Palladian* does not refer to a house built with these principles—it refers to a facade stuck, fatally,

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[65] Taylor, *Palladian*, 126.

[66] Ibid., 127.

[67] Ibid.

onto an Elizabethan house. Palladianism became fashionable in the eighteenth century, which was also when libraries became fashionable.[68] The library and the facade are temporally and ideologically linked—both signpost the intellectual legacy of the Western Tradition stretching back to Rome and Greece, and both celebrate the education in classics that was usually reserved for privileged men who could afford a tutor and college. But Taylor's contrived plot glosses the contrivance and superficiality of this architectural feature and this masculine, intellectual space.

The library's repairs accelerate Cassandra's and Marion's romance but, on the very morning when Marion decides, "We will walk up and down the terrace . . . I will ask her to marry me, and she will say 'yes,"[69] the facade's statue of Flora falls and kills Sophy. This forms a neat conclusion to the off-page foreshadowing of the *Tom Jones* allusion in the library during the tour scene—in the chapter Cassandra reads from, Fielding writes,

> Do thou, sweet Zephyrus, rising from thy fragrant bed, mount the western sky, and lead on those delicious gales, the charms of which call forth the lovely Flora from her chamber, perfumed with pearly dews, when on the 1st of June, her birth-day, the blooming maid, in loose attire, gently trips it over the verdant mead, where every flower rises to do her homage, till the whole field becomes enamelled, and colours contend with sweets which shall ravish her most.

The wind has indeed "call[ed] forth the lovely Flora," on or close to Sophy's birthday (the text is unclear), but in a disastrous way, suggesting that these literary conventions are (literally) squashing emerging female writers. It might all end there, symbolizing the decayed, decrepit, outdated tradition

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[68] Books, appropriately enough, were largely responsible for the Palladian trend in eighteenth-century England: "Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* and Leoni's *Palladio* inaugurated a great period of architectural book publishing. They came out in 1715-7. Within ten years a continuous stream of books had begun to flow from the press, so that between 1725 and Chambers's *Treatise on Civil Architecture* of 1759 nearly every year saw the appearance of one or more illustrated books on architecture. The trend of this literature was generally Palladian, but it varied greatly and was inflected by Gibb's influence after 1730. The principal works were the great folios sponsored by Burlington himself" (John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain: 1530-1830*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963) 338). Burlington's efforts to spread Palladianism throughout England have been characterized as "propaganda for a pure Palladian manner" (Ibid., 341). Christy Anderson's book gives a more detailed account of Burlington's efforts.

[69] Taylor, *Palladian*, 141.

of the country house as a cultural institution and a literary sub-genre that has overstayed its welcome and from which no new life can flourish, especially not the budding child novel-writer, Sophy.

But the novel does not end there: after Sophy's funeral, Cassandra returns to London. Marion finds her in a bookshop and there he proposes marriage to her at last. They return to the house and start their life together. Taylor's subtext is clear: the country house marriage plot might be past its heyday, but it sells. It will always sell. Taylor is not content to let us laugh at Cassandra the novel-reader, we must also laugh at ourselves as readers, and laugh at the demands of a literary marketplace that have outweighed the tenets of realism. Cassandra's Austenian name is just one of the improbably novelistic details that continually disrupt our suspension of disbelief. While Victorian novelists such as George Eliot and Henry James also worked against the reader's suspension of disbelief, occasionally fragmenting the spell of their realist narratives, Taylor's novel is a mosaic of realist fragments.[70] Sophy parallels *Jane Eyre*'s Adele right down to a not-so-stunning revelation that she is not Marion's daughter. She is Marion's cousin's daughter, Tom's, who accuses Sophy's mother of "turn[ing] [him] into a sort of glowering Heathcliff. But she *was* punished. A great deal. More than she deserved."[71] Like *Wuthering Height*'s Catherine Earnshaw, Violet dies leaving an emotional, inter-generational tangle in her wake. Marion's eccentric spinster aunt, shut in and drinking herself to death while allowing her house to fall to ruin around her, has a touch of Miss Havisham about her, *Tom Jones* sneaks in through the library, the forest surrounding the house is referred to as "most

[70] In "The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel," *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 3 (2011), John Plotz advanced the term "semi-detachment" to describe the state of the novel reader who is both absorbed in a fictional landscape and still attached to the real world. Although novels were praised by audiences in terms of their immersive quality, the "annihilation of present space and time" (Ibid., 405) achieved by a particularly riveting read, Plotz argues that some authors sought to break the spell of reading and play upon the "semi-detached state of the reader. In such works, the reader is imagined as getting lost in a book, but remaining simultaneously aware of the real world from which she or he has become *semi-detached*" (Ibid., 405-6). Plotz also wrote a book on the concept, *Semi-Detached: The Aesthetics of Virtual Experience since Dickens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[71] Taylor, *Palladian*, 166.

Radcliffean,"[72] and so forth: implicit and explicit allusions to country house novels fill the pages of *Palladian*, fragments shored against the ruin of a crumbling literary and architectural tradition. Or, rather, they are like the shards of Marion's painted bowl, broken by Tom and preserved lovingly but futilely in a different painted bowl on the mantle in Marion's/Violet's/their aunt's white and gilded room.[73]

For Erica Brown, Elizabeth Taylor's allusions to canonical women's writing are part of her comedic technique—Victorian novels form the common ground necessary for a punchline to hit.[74] Brown's study of Taylor and Elizabeth von Arnim adds to Nicola Humble's work on the "feminine middlebrow novel." Humble's study explains that feminine middlebrow novels enjoy an "unusually close relationship with their readers: not only are these novels predominantly read by middle-class women, but the texts themselves define their reader as feminine, requiring her to recognize a shared knowledge and identity."[75] *Palladian* plays up this "unusually close relationship" between the text and its Dear Reader.

> This relationship with nineteenth-century women writers is important. Both Taylor and von Arnim consciously refer back to the works of Jane Austen and the Brontës, not just in explicit references to their novels, but also in their play with generic expectations. Von Arnim's *Christopher and Columbus*, for example, mocks the generic conventions that demand a romantic comedy end in marriage in a manner highly reminiscent of Austen. However, nineteenth-century novels are not merely models to be followed, but are instead forms to be manipulated and interrogated.[76]

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[72] Ibid., 80.

[73] Ibid., 67.

[74] Erica Brown, *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth Von Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor*, Literary Texts and the Popular Marketplace; no. 3 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013). Referring to Freud's "theory of joke work, [Brown argues] that jokes require very specific knowledge and shared attitudes—what Freud terms 'physical accord'—in order to be shared. Thus a very particular, highly attuned reader is required to perceive the jokes, irony and serious subject matter, to perform the interpretive work necessary to find these novels funny, ironic and simultaneously serious" (Ibid., 3).

[75] Ibid., 2.

[76] Ibid., 3-4.

Taylor's novels "consciously refer back to" Austen, the Brontës, and other women writers as her characters frequently discuss these novels with one another. In *At Mrs Lippincote's*, Julia, her son, Oliver, and the Commanding Officer discuss the Brontës throughout the narrative. In *A Wreath of Roses* (1949), two of the main characters, Camilla and Liz, recall hosting "literary tea parties" when they were girls, inventing conversations between these familiar authors. I extensively quote their banter below not only because it is excellent comedy in line with Brown's analysis, but because it provides an overview of Taylor's literary influences and her familiarity with their personalities (real or imagined):[77]

> 'In the old days, she used to knock on the wall, to make us stop talking,' Liz said.
> 'Why did we talk so long? What was it all about?'
> 'We used to give those tea-parties for English literary ladies.'
> 'Yes, of course. And very disintegrating they were! Everything went wrong.'
> 'We planned them so far ahead, in so much detail, and then talked of them for so long afterwards.'
> 'I think it was Charlotte who wrecked them, with her inverted snobbery. The time she told Ivy how much she gave for her lace shawl in Bradford.'
> 'And said it was her best.'
> 'Anne looked down into her lap. I saw her hands tremble.'
> 'Virginia saw, too.'
> 'Charlotte came too early, anyhow. Before we had time to put a match to the parlour fire.'
> 'Emily wouldn't come in at all. She stood up the road and eyed the gate.'
> 'Jane and Ivy came on time. They arrived at the door together and waited there, looking at one another's shoes.'
> 'And Virginia was late, and little Katie never came at all.'
> 'She got lost. Who fetched her in the end? Emily, I mean.'
> 'I think we sent George Eliot out for her.'
> 'But she wouldn't co-operate. She wouldn't sit down. She ruined the party with her standing up.'
> 'I felt Virginia thinking: "They only give me such cakes as these because they are women, and I am a woman."'

[77] "The feminine middlebrow novel is highly reflexive, filled with depictions of reading and references to other writers and novels, and Humble argues that this elaborate intertextuality establishes a distinct identity for their readers. There is the assumption that the reader will pick up references to other novels (frequently those of the Brontës or Austen)" (Ibid.). Beauman also talks about her *place* in the Abbey School tradition with Austen and Mitford (Beauman, 17); Niamh Baker in *Happily Ever After? Women's Fiction in Postwar Britain 1945-1960,* 1989 and Jane Dowson (ed.) *Women's Writing, 1945-1960: After the Deluge*, (2003).

> 'And Elizabeth Barrett taking up all the room on the sofa!'
>
> 'Her hand going up all the time to her curls reminded me of Captain Hook. I was always surprised to see it *was* a hand!'
>
> 'Virginia was right to feel wounded about the food. Women are not good enough to themselves. And the indifferent food is the beginning of all the other indifferent things they take for granted,' Liz said. And the literary party was dissolved and forgotten and she was back again with her husband.[78]

Camilla's and Liz's recollection of their imaginary tea parties is one of the most carefree interactions between the old friends whose relationship is strained by Liz's recent marriage and the birth of her son. Liz's former governess, an artist, chastises the women for their novel-reading and subsequent silliness, encouraging Liz to embrace her new roles as wife and mother. Meanwhile, Camilla resents these changes and the permanent dissolution of their summertime spinster triumvirate.

The scene above from *A Wreath of Roses* is among the many "loud" allusions to women's writing in Taylor's fiction—allusions so loud that they perhaps deafen us to the less audible allusions to male writing at work in the backgrounds of her novels. The announcement that jerks Liz back into the disappointing realities of her marriage—"Women are not good enough to themselves. And the indifferent food is the beginning of all the other indifferent things they take for granted"—also functions as a commentary on the self-deprecation of literary women that leads to the deprecation of their work by the reading public.[79] That Taylor's allusions to women authors are so distractingly

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[78] Elizabeth Taylor, *A Wreath of Roses*, Virago Modern Classics (London: Virago Press, 2011), 29-30.

[79] See Lynch's "Love in Gothic Libraries": "In the episodes from gothic writing that this chapter treats we can glimpse the novelists themselves taking an interest in the literary immortality from which they were barred. Themselves sub-canonical, gothic fictions flaunted their pious canon love" (Lynch, 202-3). Taylor's quotations and allusions in her modernist gothic novel plays into a key element of foundational gothic literature. But Taylor refuses to let her characters engage with canonical male writing even if she (as author) is doing so: for example, Cassandra cannot read even one page of Shakespeare per day, and Angel pronounces him overrated. Thus, Taylor is doing the *opposite* of what her gothic foremothers did: name-dropping women's writers: "[Gothic] novels highlight their writers' acquaintance with the kind of book collection . . . in which William Howitt, name-dropping, enumerates the canonical (and all male) company that the country gentleman keeps in his library. (The writers announce this acquaintance, even though as producers of wares hired out in circulating libraries, they would surely be gate-crashers at the country gentleman's party)" (Ibid., 211-2). Or perhaps in *Palladian* we might say that Taylor literalizes the talismanic quality of poetic quotation that, Lynch points out, we find in gothic texts.

loud speaks both to her aesthetic integrity and her intense shyness: "Taylor eschewed the London literary scene; she had, as [Kingsley] Amis recalled, a 'genuine distaste for any kind of publicity—that rarest of qualities in a writer.' Although universally regarded as an extraordinarily thoughtful and polite woman, she was nearly pathologically shy."[80] She's counting on most of her readers to miss the brilliance of her writing, to assume that she is throwing a literary tea party rather than a literati soirée, critically engaging the male-authored *and* women-authored canon in her novels. In fact, Taylor once wrote in a letter that it "is easy to see who is behind [her]: Jane Austen & Chekhov & EM Forster & Virginia Woolf."[81] In Taylor's list, male and female writers are represented in equal measure, and these literary giants share one thing in common—they brilliantly engage the country house setting.

Elizabeth Taylor's characters may chat about women's novels—but *her* texts engage with a wider literary and architectural history. Loud literary ladies serve to misdirect her readers: while we are wondering how she will re-write *Jane Eyre*, we are blind to the possibility that other forces are at work. In other words, we believe we're on the metafictional playground with Lizzie Bennet or Jane Eyre, but we're really with Isabella and Conrad from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). This becomes clear when a piece of the facade's statuary falls, killing Marion's heir, Sophy, just as the statue of Alfonso's helmet falls and kills the heir in Walpole's genre-making Gothic tale. The house crumbles and the canon shifts, opens up, just as we discover that Tom fathered Sophy; the

[80] Benjamin Schwartz, "The Other Elizabeth Taylor," *The Atlantic*, Sept. 1, 2007, accessed May 9, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/09/the-other-elizabeth-taylor/306125/.

[81] Beauman, 127.

tragic climax of the novel is linked to a revelation of Sophy's hidden genealogy *and* the novel's hidden genealogy.[82]

The title, *Palladian*, also foreshadows the tragedy. Throughout the novel, Tom has been worried about the greenhouse falling and killing Sophy, but it is the Palladian facade that does her in. The facade is a hasty facelift for an old institution, like so many novels are hastily remade from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century country house novels: the eighteenth century's low budget, high impact architecture is equated with the twentieth century's paperback bestseller. Taylor's facade might also gesture toward Walpole's preface, reminding us that the gothic novel was born under a *man*'s pen. And like a Palladian facade, which makes a building look newer than it is while mimicking antique older classical architecture, *The Castle of Otranto*'s preface was pure sham:

> The following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of Christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that savours of barbarism. The style is the purest Italian.
>
> If the story was written near the time when it is supposed to have happened, it must have been between 1095, the era of the first Crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards.

Otranto's fabricated manuscript—pulled out of a fabricated library—hoodwinked the public until Walpole admitted to concocting the backstory in the preface to the second edition. Walpole's love of medieval history and romance came to fruition in his novel (1764) and in his construction of the country house, Strawberry Hill (1749-1776)—watershed moments for the literary gothic and architectural gothic revival movements.[83]

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[82] These tragic revelations gesture to the Greek literature Cassandra is learning to translate, the Greek lessons that Elizabeth Taylor treasured. Textbook Aristotle.

[83] Which is not to say that Walpole ushered in the gothic revival out of thin air: Jervis reports that the "idea of a Gothic library may go back to Merlin's Cave at Kew, designed by William Kent in 1735: in 1736 John Loveday described its doorway 'in the old Gothic taste'. The books, 'Divinity, History, Poetry all bound-in or covered in

Architectural history and literary history, the gothic novel and the decadent movement, male- and female-authored literary genealogies: these elements are at play in this deceptively simple novel.[84] These elements are revisited by Taylor when she writes *Angel*. In both novels, we also see the purity of political ideology clash with the problematically conservative nature of country house nostalgia. As Maroula Joannou points out, when Taylor wrote *Palladian*, she was still a member of the Communist party—a political party opposed to the social hierarchies and the consolidated wealth of land ownership that these estates upheld—and Taylor taps into the Austenian tradition "to highlight the dangers of being seduced by the country house myth."[85] But although Austen canonized the country house novel, she is by no means the progenitor of the sub-genre. When Taylor references Walpole and Radcliffe, she is taking us back to the gothic texts where romantic fiction first seduced a wide female readership.

Midcentury Britain was more than ready for yet another literary gothic revival, as attested by the popularity of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). Elizabeth Bowen's shadowy, unhaunted houses, especially in *The Last September* (1929) and *A World of Love* (1954),[86] and the infanticides, patricides, and incest characteristic of Ivy Compton-Burnett's country house novels with fraught inheritance plots. These works put Taylor's *Palladian* and *Angel* in good, if not cheerful, company. We might also see this trend in mid-century writing as an afterlife of the literary Decadent

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Vellum', were housed in rustic bookcases, Palladian in form with broken pediments and cornice busts" (Jervis, 179, with quotations from Markham, ed., *John Loveday of Caversham*, 250).

[84] For more examples of the interplay between architectural and literary history, we could turn our attention to the characters' names: Mrs Adams is the servant and Vanbrugh is Marion's surname in *Palladian*, gesturing to its interaction with architectural history.

[85] Maroula Joannou, "'England's Jane': The Legacy of Jane Austen in the Fiction of Barbara Pym, Dodie Smith and Elizabeth Taylor," in *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives*, ed. Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson 37-58 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 45.

[86] See Maud Ellman*, Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

movement (which overlapped with the decadent, or late, phase of Victorian Gothic literature). [87] The Decadent movement, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, is characterized by "complete opposition to Nature: hence its systematic cultivation of drugs, cosmetics, Catholic ritual, supposedly 'unnatural' sexual practices, and sterility and artificiality in all things."[88] *Palladian* features every hallmark of Decadence spelled out in the Literary Terms catalogue: Tom's drug addiction, the priest-hole in the library, Tom's illicit affairs, Marion's implied sexual orientation and failure to father an heir, and the artificiality of Cassandra's novel-conditioned behavior. Oscar Wilde is the most famous author of the English Decadent movement, and his engagement with the country house novel is discussed in depth in my portrait chapter. I would also note that his shadow falls on the first pages of *Angel* when Angel's school teachers suspect her of plagiarizing Wilde's prose.

The immediate forerunners of midcentury gothic literature united decadence with Jane Austen. Clara Tuite identifies the genealogy that links male authors Henry James, E.M. Forster, and Ronald Firbank uneasily to dear "Aunt Jane." The turn of the century was a time that coincidentally witnessed "the initiatory gestures of the canonical production of Austen, which are critically implicated in the beginnings of English heritage culture and the rise of the curricular English and the

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[87] See Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall, "Fin-de-Siècle Gothic," in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes, 217-233 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Stephan Karschay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Dryden, for example, explains, "Stevenson's own fiction was very much in the romance genre: The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886) took the Gothic themes of novels like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener' (1856) and Dostoyevsky's 'The Double' (1846) and transposed them into a late nineteenth-century scenario that was anything but realistic. A new form of romance fiction was on the rise. Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) was itself heavily influenced by Stevenson's story, containing Gothic themes within an overall narrative of late nineteenth-century romance, and in 1897 that most Gothic of late nineteenth-century horror stories, Dracula, appeared, continuing a tradition of vampire horror that endures into the twenty-first century" (Dryden, 2).

[88] "Decadence," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. Chris Baldick, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

English Decadent movement." In Forster's review of the newly published fragment, *Sanditon*, he denies Austen male-identified Decadence and reads *Sanditon* as a symptom of literal, feminine, lower-case decadence in his attempt to distance himself from his literary foremother. In Forster's reading, the decay of Austen's body as she lies dying corrupts the text, such as it is, precluding any reading of *Sanditon* that might view it as a romantic fragment—or even a precursor of the capital Decadent movement that is reserved for an exclusively homosocial network of male authors and artists.[89]

Angel

The legacies of Austen, decay, and decadence come to a head once more in the country house library of the fictional Paradise House in Elizabeth Taylor's *Angel*. By writing *Angel*, Taylor rewrote *Palladian*'s central themes with a decade of critical reception behind her. Angel's early life is tantalizingly close to Elizabeth Taylor's, but the quality of their writing is vastly different. *Angel* demands that the audience distinguish between the author of *Angel* and the author, Angel, indicating the need to distinguish between lowbrow country house (women) novelists and intellectually engaging country house novelists, like Elizabeth Taylor. Not everyone got the message. After *Angel* was published in 1957, Elizabeth Taylor wrote to her friend Patience Ross saying, "I only wish it were not so despised a book. People here treated me as if I were deformed."[1] It's apparent why her neighbors might have been wary—*Angel* is about the fictional Angelica Deverell, an egotistical popular author of lowbrow romance novels; she is monstrously selfish and makes those who love her miserable with a domineering personality that is divorced from reality. Unlike Georgette Heyer, a popular historical romance author of the interwar and postwar years, Angel does not research the

[89] Forster was one of Taylor's favorite authors, but she wasn't above criticizing him.

stately homes or high society she writes about—nor does she read other authors' fiction, so she has no way of knowing how far off her scenes are. *Angel* is certainly a departure from Taylor's usual portraits of contemporary middle-class English life. The novel has divided even her fans, perhaps because, as Erica Brown points out, these types of novels are usually condemned as "delightful"—euphemistically "unchallenging"—and *Angel* is neither.[90] *Angel* has also (arguably) yielded the most polarized reviews of all Taylor's works.[91] On the one hand, Iris Murdoch's review was titled, "This Angel is a bit of a bore,"[1] and on the other hand, it was placed among the thirteen "Best Novels of Our Time" for a Book Marketing Council promotion in 1984—a decision Claire Tomalin questioned in the *Sunday Times*, and Kingsley Amis defended in a letter to the *Spectator*. Amis was one of Taylor's most devoted champions, and after the novel was released in 1957, he wrote that her novels' superficial similarities to lending-library books, or women's novels, kept her from receiving the recognition she deserved.

I argue that *Angel* is a metafictional masterpiece that comments on the difficulties of inheriting the women's literary tradition once the decadent phase of the English country house novel has reduced to the estate to a gendered, derisory setting. This setting, Paradise House, is inextricably intertwined with the protagonist, Angel, to activate and hyperbolize the gendered anxieties that attend the country house tradition. Fittingly, Angel is "undone" after finally picking up a book in her husband's library—by seeking seemingly innocent knowledge, like Eve, and encountering her own death. *Angel* also implicitly asks how we can renovate the country house novel, or any genre for that

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[90] Brown, 1.

[91] On the one hand, Iris Murdoch's review was titled, "This Angel is a bit of a bore," and on the other hand, it was placed among thirteen "Best Novels of Our Time" for a Book Marketing Council promotion in 1984—a decision Claire Tomalin questioned in the *Sunday Times*, and Kingsley Amis defended in a letter to the *Spectator*. Amis was one of Taylor's most devoted champions, and after the novel was released in 1957, he wrote that her novels' superficial similarities to the lending-library, or women's novels, kept her from receiving the recognition she deserved. See Beauman, 293; 307 *ff.*

matter, when it has passed its decadent phase. Taylor answers this question in two ways. Firstly, by doubling down on decadence, by inhabiting decay and decline as an integral part of the literary tradition inherent in any text that invokes its literary origins. Secondly and relatedly, by using Paradise House to conflate two gendered lines of literary inheritance: the female country house genre stretching back to the Brontës and Austen and Aemelia Lanyer, and the male national epic tradition stretching back to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[92]

Nicola Beauman identifies the Miltonic echo in the first words of the book, "into the vast vacuity of the empyrean,"[93] which refers to Angel's school essay—though Angel's teachers suspect that she has plagiarized the ornate phrases from Wilde or perhaps Walter Pater, whose writings were fundamental for the decadent movement.[94] The phrase also echoes one of Sophy's more ornate pieces of prose in *Palladian*: "poor ill-fated Mary looked up yet once again into the tumultuous vacuity of the star-canopied empyrean . . . " and so forth.[95] Thus, the collapse of the Miltonic tradition into the decadent movement and Taylor's earlier novel is made on the very first page.

Before diving into Edenic intertextualities in *Angel*, it is worth discussing the genesis of the text.[96] In her essay, "Setting a Scene," Taylor describes her inspiration for *Angel*:

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[92] Milton famously saw the origins of England's national epic in the battle of good and evil before the creation of the world, taking literary lineage to an extreme that I believe Taylor would have seen as ludicrous as Angel's ignorance of the canon.

[93] Beauman, 24.

[94] Beauman also points out the nearly-autobiographical details of Angel's schooling and Elizabeth Taylor's—Taylor attended Abbey School, "the best girls' school in Reading" (14) and although Taylor was "exceedingly clever" (Ibid., 14), Beauman explains that "[s]ocially, it must have been an appalling leap: Betty could not help but notice the contrasts between her life in the Oxford Road and the life of her schoolfriends, yet might not have been novelist is she had not been removed from her milieu and sent to the Abbey—it is always the outsider who is the closest observer" (Ibid.).

[95] Ibid., 23-4.

[96] It is also worth noting that one remarkable early private library in Wressel Castle, Yorkshire, for the fifth Earl of Northumberland was called "Paradise." Situated at the top of the castle, one needed to walk through private chambers, including the lady's chambers, to access the study/library. The castle was almost completely destroyed

> [F]or my sort of writing, whatever that may be, the background is part of the characters, and I confess that once or twice this has come to me first . . . I saw a signpost pointing down a cart-track, and it had the words, 'To Paradise House only'. This for some reason gave me the strangest sensation. I didn't go down the track—now, years later, when I might venture to, I cannot remember where it was. But it became the Paradise House in *Angel*—a symbol of envy, attainment, decay.[97]

In *Angel*, this interrelationship between the background and the protagonist is taken to the extreme.[98] Moreover it is presented as a link that is both willed into being by Angel and pre-ordained by a lingering hierarchical class structure in Miltonic fashion.

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in the English Civil War further adding to the library's mystique—it is conceivable that Taylor would have read about Paradise, or even visited the castle's ruins in East Riding, but since she left very few accessible letters or diaries behind we can only guess. At the king's behest, John Leland undertook a libraries tour between 1533-6, primarily visiting the libraries of religious houses since private libraries were rare in the sixteenth century. However, he did visit Wressel, and he reported:

> One thing I likid exceedingly yn one of the towers, that was a study called Paradise, wher was a closet in the midle of 8. squares latised aboute: and at the toppe of every square was a desk ledgid to set books on cofers withyn them, and these semid as yoined hard to the toppe of the closet: and yet by pulling one or al wold cum downe, briste highte in rabettes [grooves], and serve for desks to lay bokes on.

Leland's catalogues were used shortly thereafter to relocate monastic books to the royal library following the dissolution of monasteries. Northumberland's Paradise anticipates this massive secular literary shift. In this respect, "Paradise" in Taylor's Paradise House signals a potentially deep wellspring of influence that combines not only the literary tradition of the Fall but an also architectural history influenced by the dissolution of the monasteries following the widespread corruption in the Catholic church. But lacking evidence that Taylor was familiar with the Paradise at Wressel, we must be cautious about indicating specific architectural sites as influences for Taylor's work. "Paradise" was frequently used to refer to favorite rooms in country houses—or to country houses themselves, such as Paradise Hall in *Tom Jones*. Moreover, Taylor herself cites a different country house "Paradise" as her primary influence for Angel's house.

[97] Elizabeth Taylor, "Setting a Scene," in *Elizabeth Taylor: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. N. H. Reeve (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 69.

[98] Taylor elaborates, "and I confess that once or twice this has come to me first" (Taylor, "Setting a Scene," 69). Beauman elaborates on this anecdote in *The Other Elizabeth Taylor*—mentioning that Taylor was out driving with a friend, much like in the novel. admits to have serendipitously happened upon a sign to Paradise House. Beauman explains that a man whose lorry blocks the path was real (and he is written into the subsequent scene with Esmé—the initial discovery of Paradise House in the novel having been with Theo), but, unlike Angel, Taylor and her friend do not demand that he drive up to the house and turn his truck around so that they can pass; Paradise House remains forever *unseen* in Taylor's imagination, and always in her narrative control, unlike Angel. Taylor's own account in the essay leaves out car and man with truck and she claims, "I saw a signpost pointing down a cart-track, and it had the words, 'To Paradise House only'. This for some reason gave me the strangest sensation. I didn't go down the track—now, years later, when I might venture to, I cannot remember where it was. But it became the Paradise House in *Angel*—a symbol of envy, attainment, decay" (Ibid., 69).

In *Angel*, the domestic architecture of the estate is yoked to Milton's (architectural) Paradise and more importantly to its earthly analogue, the Garden of Eden, whose decline, fittingly, is pre-ordained.[99] In Milton's work, decadence (as decline) *is* the English narrative tradition—when he set out to write the great English epic, he found himself going further and further back in history for a source of England's contemporary political problems. However, he was not satisfied until he had gone back to the Biblical fall of man in Genesis. Since the fall, mankind has always been in a state of decline and sin. Epic fate is modified to the scale of the feminine country house in *Angel* as Angel's whole life is defined by nearby Paradise House. For example, Angel's Aunt Lottie works as a lady's maid at Paradise House and when her mistress names her child Angelica, Aunt Lottie suggests the name for her sister's soon-to-be-born child, too, "in admiration of her mistress and all that she did." Taylor adds, "A boy's name was never contemplated, for Madam had no sons."[100]

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan attempts to disrupt the pre-ordained hierarchy of heaven, just as Eve attempts to rise above her place by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The righteousness of hierarchies at every level of the cosmos is maintained and encouraged in *Paradise Lost* (despite Milton's own preference for republics)[101] as evil and chaos are born out of hierarchical transgressions. Like Milton's blank verse in iambic pentameter, which follows the natural rhythms of

[99] See Elizabeth Maslen writes in "Elizabeth Taylor and the Fictions of the Feminine Mystique," in *Elizabeth Taylor: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. N. H. Reeve, 133-148 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012). There is also a very present element of fairytale present that works alongside Miltonic fate, making us feel that "Angelica is surely as trapped as her readers in a fairy story" (Maslen, 141).

[100] Taylor, *Angel*, 13.

[101] There is, perhaps, an argument to be made that the relatively liberal politics of Milton's republicanism parallel Taylor's socialism—I think there is a good chance that Taylor admired the tension in Milton's poem between his political idealism and the conservative narrative traditions he engages in order to position himself as England's great epic poet.

the English language while avoiding rhyme's "jingling sound of like endings,"[102] the universe is implicitly organized in *Paradise Lost*. But staying in order requires the cooperation of every syllable: each person looks to the man above him as an exemplum of how to behave, and by following this pattern to God, we might make an earthly paradise. Taylor lampoons the Miltonic hierarchical system through the extremism of Aunt Lottie's upper-class emulation. Lottie's salary from Paradise House also helps to pay the fees for Angel's schooling—an education that elevates her above her shop-keeper mother.[103] But beyond giving her a name and financing her education, Paradise House dominates Angel's imaginative landscape and supplies the setting for Angel's first blockbuster romance novel, *The Lady Irania*. When Angel strays too far from this society—for example, translating one of her plots into ancient Greece—her readership suffers. Elizabeth Maslen, picking up on the fairy-tale quality of the novel, notes that Angel is "a writer trapped in a world that can only ever be an escape from living, yet sadly becoming trapped in it, adopting it as a blueprint for her own existence."[104] The country house both activates and limits her imagination, and these opening scenes underscore the relentlessly intertwined nature of Paradise House and Angel, country house setting and women's novelist.

And just as Milton's Satan enviously challenges Christ's place in the heavenly hierarchy, Angel hates the other Angelica who lives in Paradise House and she resents her own life as a shopkeeper's daughter. Angel further parallels Milton's Satan in her egotism, fiendish behavior, and the tenancy and ruination of Paradise House (read: Eden). "Author" is synonymous with "creator" in Milton, and just as Satan's creations in Pandemonium are perversions of the Heavenly Kingdom,

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[102] John Milton, "Introduction to *Paradise Lost*," Poetry Foundation, accessed May 15, 2019, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69378/introduction-to-paradise-lost.

[103] It's also worth noting that her education takes place in the Four Cedars—also a converted country house.

[104] Maslen, 141-2.

Angel's hack authorship is a perversion of good literature—or even reality, as her inaccuracies regarding aristocratic life are mocked by unkind reviewers. But Angel is not simply a poor writer (and this is important). As her publishers are discussing her first manuscript, noting that women will devour her books despite their inaccuracies regarding the gentry, her editor Theo notes, "I feel an extraordinary power behind it all, so that I wonder if it is genius or lunacy."[105] She possesses a Satanic magnetism and undeniable power with words—but, again, the masculine literary reference to Milton's Satan is linked with the female literary reference to the country house heir[ess]. We are told on the first page of the novel that Angel "had a great reputation as a liar,"[106] and, in the very next scene, Angel outrageously lies to her school friends about being the secret heir to Paradise House—complete with lavish descriptions gathered from Aunt Lottie's conversations with Angel's mother.

Fictive vision overpowers the "real" setting in these early scenes and throughout the novel as Angel "wills" reality away whenever the truth peeks through.[107] The first pages of the novel establish thinking patterns that will dominate Angel's consciousness throughout the narrative; indeed, when Angel passes a sign years later pointing to Paradise House, the narrator notes,

> It was a strange moment for her: the shock of recognition, finding that the house was real, had some location. Before, it had seemed to her like heaven . . . She would—if she had known—have avoided going in its direction; yet this evening's discovery had done no harm; the evening itself seemed outside time and on the fringe of magic; the house, smothered in leaves, unseen, was safe in her imagination.[108]

Indeed, occupancy of Paradise House is disastrous for Angel. It is the place where Esmé proposes, and Angel's career immediately deteriorates as she begins unsuccessfully to live out her country

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[105] Taylor, *Angel*, 52.

[106] Ibid., 7.

[107] Ibid., 15.

[108] Ibid., 94.

house romances. The "fall" for Angel is her materialization from the quasi-divine authorial male role into the role of the human wife. The neat separation that Angel has always maintained between her fictional inner life and "real" life is cast aside as Angel moves into the lowercase decadent country house. The renovations that the house requires quickly eat up all of the money that Angel has made with her country house novels. Her marriage to the decadent artist Esmé is accompanied by the expected clichés—he is the moody, unfaithful, degenerate nephew of a country squire and marries Angel after his uncle, Lord Norley, disinherits him after learning of his debaucheries in Italy.[109]

After Esmé commits suicide on the property's "Venus Lake," Angel continues to resist the reality of her disastrous marriage with the same willpower that she uses to ignore the realities of her setting; but Angel's physical body, Paradise House, and the illusion of her marriage rely on one another in the mythical syntax of this narrative. Angel's fall from fame begins the moment she sets foot in Paradise House, which slowly crumbles and decays around her.[110] The second half of the novel is a slow creep towards Angel's death and the destruction of Paradise House.[111] As Angel's cough worsens and Paradise House continues to deteriorate, the fantasy of her perfect marriage is in peril; if one illusion breaks, all three delusions are in jeopardy. This domino-effect plays out when

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[109] It would be interesting to see who shows up in Elizabeth Taylor's Commonplace Book, (1928-1936), though I *believe* it's among the family papers. "Many of her copied-out extracts are of poetry, as is the way of commonplace books, and although Elizabeth was devoted to Austen and Forster she did not copy out any of the latter. She does not mention Mrs Gaskell or George Eliot or Dickens (whom she loathed)" (Beauman, 36). Also, it's notable that the girls at the Abbey School had "to learn poetry off by heart of the *In Memoriam*, 'Mariana', *The Faerie Queene*, Wordsworth variety" (Ibid., 21-2). In other words, canonical male poets. In fact, the school was "run as though it was a boys' school" (Ibid., 19).

[110] This is also, perhaps, a witty atheist's way of lampooning Donne's religious themes.

[111] Suzanne Smith's observation about Donne's readers might equally apply to Taylor's midcentury country house readers: "These Adamic 'new creatures' of a 'new world' (l.76) face danger in the form of excessive confidence, for 'strength it selfe by confidence grows weak' (l.86). They must be told of the fearsome 'dangers and diseases of the old' (l.88) in order to further their knowledge of the 'true worth' (l. 90) of things. Readers are to fear forsaking their status as new creatures, but also, it would seem, the danger of becoming part of or too like the infected world from which they emerged (ll.245–6). The old world is necessarily to be known, but only in order that it might be rightly feared" (Smith, "The Enfranchisement," 317).

her neighbor, Lady Baines, inquires after an escritoire which Nora, Angel's companion and sister-in-law, has surreptitiously sold off to pay debts. Nora claims to have sent it away to be treated for worm-wood, but when Nora mentions that the worms come out of the wood and "fly about," Lady Baines suspiciously asks how worms can fly; the interrogation leads Angel to consult one of Esmé's insect books in his library, where, unbeknownst to any of them, he has hidden a letter from a former mistress.

Throughout her life, Angel resists every suggestion to read more widely. Reaching for her husband's book, discovering the letter on the library shelves, is her undoing.[112] Theo and Nora explain away the letter by improbably suggesting it is from an old flame whom Esmé knew before his marriage to Angel even though it refers to Esmé's "leave" from the army during the Great War—but the narrator notes that Theo "could see that there were moments when the facts, as they seemed indisputably to be, leapt at her: the truth took her by the throat; then her hand would fly up to her cheek and her eyes stare. Her suffering at such moments was too sharp to be endured: she could not live with such a kind of truth."[113] For a woman who lives her life within her own literary imagination, the inscribed abstraction of the letter undoes her delusion like nothing else in the "real" world can, as we see when Angel replies to Nora and Theo, holding out the letter, "There are the *words*."[114] William May points out that, outside her fiction, Taylor's epistolary communication with other authors was "highly aware of its posthumous obligations and readership,"[115] and that within

[112] And here, too, Angel differs from Lady Drury who had read every book in the library. (Probably not so difficult as it seems to modern readers since seventeenth century private libraries were pretty slim even among the nobility.)

[113] Taylor, *Angel*, 233.

[114] Ibid., 230.

[115] William May, "Reporting Back, or The Difficulty of Addressing Elizabeth Taylor," in *Elizabeth Taylor: A Centenary Celebration*, edited by N.H. Reeve, 119-132 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 120.

her fiction, "The letter, a private entreaty sent out with a concomitant fear about whose hands it might fall into becomes the central symbol of her own fictive world."[116] In *Angel*, May's observation holds true: everything unravels from the letter of the posthumous recipient—in the next scene, Lady Baines blunders in offering Angel financial assistance with Paradise House, and soon after Angel sees her house as a "prison" for the first time, as Esmé and Nora often saw it, prompting her to walk outside, catch pneumonia, and die. Before she dies, though, she wakes in the middle of the night to let her cat back into Paradise House, and the narrator notes, "She sensed the dim well of the hall as a void into which she was being fatally drawn; taking each stair as a fresh hazard, she groped her way down." The "fatal draw" of Angel to the house is never more clear than it is in this penultimate death passage. In Milton, mortality is the punishment for eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; it is the same for Angel, as knowledge of the reality of Paradise House and of her marriage leads directly to her death. The final scene of the novel reflects the contemporary state of the English country house by the 1950s, as a journalist writing on Esmé's paintings, "remembered other ruined houses he had sometimes discovered in the depths of the country, often blackened and burnt out, or just abandoned, and he had found them fearful and haunted places. At Paradise House, the neglect had started long ago. With Nora gone, no one would come to take on the prodigious burden of its decay. It would be engulfed in the valley."[117]

In *Angel*, Taylor employs literal decay as part of her metanarrative on the woman author's (or reader's) place in literary history, raising the question: is the only way to renovate the country house novel to portray it in a state of dissolution? Corresponding to the actual destruction of country houses by the hundreds in the twentieth century, *Angel* joins the deprecation of this often gendered

[116] May, 121.

[117] Taylor, *Angel*, 251.

sub-genre and, ironically, by redirecting our pity to a fictional, unlettered, lowbrow author, Taylor herself builds on the crumbled foundation of country house literature. In doing so, she relocates the metanarrative scope of the country house novel into the Miltonic epic, activating the insecurities that lead Satan to fall from grace and Eve to seek knowledge independently of Adam. Literary inheritance is seen as a complicated network with elusive origins stretching back to Milton and the Bible and written into the social fabric of Angel's hometown, Norley. Just before she learns of Esmé's infidelity in the country house library, Angel asks her driver to go slowly through Norley and she notices a poster outside the chapel which reads, "In the beginning was the Word." Just as the Gospel of John stages a rewriting of Genesis and Milton stages a rewriting of both, in conceptualizing the female literary canon we will never leave its country house origins no matter what happens to Britain's country houses. In *Palladian* and *Angel*, Taylor suggests that we are fatally drawn—as Angel is to Paradise House—to Lanyer's Cookeham, to Austen's Pemberley, and to Brontë's Thornfield Hall.[118]

Conclusion

By the early twentieth century, the country house library was already in a state of decline, its secrets in danger of disappearing with them. But Milne asserts that a "country-house without books is inconceivable, and a bedroom of such a house is very near to barbarism." As we have seen, books in a bedroom are very different from books in a library—the change in location signals a change in the kinds of books that now belong to the country house. Just as the (until recently) middle-class family, having made their fortune, now belongs to the country house, so too do their novels.

[118] Alice Ferrebe writes in "Elizabeth Taylor's Uses of Romance: Feminist Feeling in 1950s English Fiction" *Literature & History* 19, no. 1 (2010) that although the novel's "diegesis run[s] between 1885 and 1947, *Angel* is nonetheless an account of romance-writing that serves as a nexus for the anxieties surrounding the politics, aesthetics and economics of fiction particular to the British 1950s" (Ibid., 59).

Vita Sackville-West and Elizabeth Taylor were two very different women and two very different authors—one born an aristocrat but exiled from her home (albeit to a castle), another had made the alienating journey from lower- to middle-class. But, as Sackville-West writes, "fine birth" is a "disadvantage"[119] to a poet, and if we compare these two authors against one another her observation holds true. Sackville-West was too attentive to the realities of country house life to write brilliant fiction. But Taylor constructed her country houses and their libraries from the fiction found in lending libraries. She was wise to do so because, according to Purcell, fiction outweighs fact even in the architectural history of the country house. Although the country house library resists classification by library historians, we readers know right where we are in a fictional country house library. And it is the country house canon, rather than country house libraries, that gives us that knowledge.

Fictional country house libraries form an important foundation for Taylor's metafictional discussions of canonicity in the midcentury. But it is important to note that real country house libraries, and other private libraries and archives, are another kind of bedrock of the women's literary tradition. In many cases, we can find women's writing that never made it to publication in these libraries, along with their diaries, account books, travel journals, and plays—the kind of sources that Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*, advises young historians to consult in order to reconstruct the life of an ordinary Elizabethan woman.[120] Such tomes might be incorporated into the family archive, but perhaps never properly belonged to the library catalogue, especially if it were a published catalogue. After all, for many years it was unseemly for a woman to publish her writing—she wrote only for a private audience and sought publication only on her family's shelves. Even published women

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[119] Vita Sackville-West, *Knole and the Sackvilles*, 3rd ed. (London; Tonbridge: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1973), 45.

[120] Although Elizabethan predate most of Chawton's collection, which ranges from 1600-1830. See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, ed. Mark Hussey, 1st ed. Harvest Book (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2005) 44-5.

authors used pen names: secrecy is in the DNA of the women's novel.

III

The Drawing Room at War:

Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and Country House Theatricality

> What if the glory of esutcheoned doors,
> And buildings that a haughtier age designed,
> The pacing to and fro on polished floors
> Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined
> With famous portraits of ancestors;
> What if those things the greatest of mankind
> Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
> But take our greatness with our bitterness?[1]
>
> W.B. Yeats, "Meditations in Time of Civil War"

> Also, she made manifest for me the wisdom (the wisdom, that is, for a novelist) of confining one's art in the bounds of a world one knows. In my day, that is more difficult than it was in hers—scenes now shift so fast; the once-fixed patterns break up; one knows more worlds than she did, but no single one so well.
>
> Be that as it may, I remain convinced (I learned that from her) that a novel, like a play, requires a stage. Or, if not a stage, should I say a frame? Strength—and what strength had Jane!—comes from the acceptance of place, of time, and also of the certain rules of society.[2]
>
> Elizabeth Bowen, "What Jane Austen Means to Me"

Approximately one thousand country houses were destroyed around the time of the Second World War—requisitioned and then neglected by the military, taxed into financial ruin, dismantled for profit, or converted to schools and hospitals.[3] As Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941) and

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[1] W.B. Yeats, *Selected Poems and Four Plays of William Butler Yeats*, ed. M. L. Rosenthal (New York: Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996), 109.

[2] Elizabeth Bowen, "What Jane Austen Means to Me," in *People, Places, Things People, Places, Things—Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 229.

[3] "The special contribution made by country houses to the Second World War effort is one of the most interesting episodes in their history. While it makes the six years between 1939-1945 their 'finest hour', it also led directly or indirectly to the destruction of a thousand of them" (John Martin Robinson, *Requisitioned: The British Country House in the Second World War* (London: Aurum Press, 2014), 7).

Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948) and *A World of Love* (1954) demonstrate, in losing a country house, we lose much more than an architectural monument and its interior decoration schemes: we also lose its performance of landed wealth and the social performances that the country house staged.

The widespread destruction of country houses in England must have felt like déjà vu to Anglo-Irish landowners, who had seen their own big houses legislated into the ground in a series of late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century land acts. Of course, the social and political dynamic was crucially different in Ireland—the Anglo-Irish had always been outsiders colonizing Irish land, their homes built as fortifications to keep the Irish out and the Anglo-Irish safe. By the 1920s, many big houses were already sold off or dismantled; still, the Irish Republican Party burned down a further 275 big houses in the beginning of that decade.[4] *The Last September* (1929), perhaps Elizabeth Bowen's best-known book, describes Anglo-Irish life during this time. Appropriately, the big house, Danielstown, is burned down at the end of the novel. Bowen's own eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish big house, Bowen's Court, escaped this fiery fate, but that did not mean it was safe. Throughout her life, Bowen financially struggled to maintain her beloved ancestral home. As an institution and as a literary symbol, the Big House has never been perceived as an eternal, unshakable symbol of land ownership like the country house in England—it had always announced its foreignness with its fortifications and its emulation of the English country house. Existential dread is built into its architectural history, and that dread only intensified when the English country house began to falter, too.

As England is faced with the loss of the history-infused architecture of the country house, there is a renewed emphasis in the late modernist country house novel on the traditions that are least

[4] See Peter Martin, "Unionism: The Irish Nobility and the Revolution 1919-23," in *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923*, ed. Austeijn Joost, 151-167 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2002).

easily preserved when its material analogue vanishes, its theatrical traditions. Conveniently, the self-consciously imitative nature of theatricality also helps authors such as Bowen and Woolf solve one of their greatest challenges: how to unite the metafictionality that is an essential component of midcentury literature with the marriage plot that is an essential component of the country house novel.

Authors had long been subverting the marriage plot in a way that any modernist could recognize as metafictional—*Mansfield Park* (1814), Austen's own theatrical novel, subverts the reader's expectations of a Crawford-Price union and then teases the reader by giving her too much control over the heroine's marital resolution: "I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion [Fanny's marriage proposal], that every one be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much to time in different people." Throughout the novel, Fanny Price has tried to hold back from acting on Mansfield Park's—sometimes literal—high society stage. Her family (along with the comic conventions of the stage) urges her to accept the hand of the eligible bachelor, Henry Crawford, who is socially talented and a good amateur actor, too. As a reader, Fanny wants to keep herself from "acting"—from being socially performative, from participating in the family's private theatricals—but she cannot. Once exiled from the stage of Mansfield Park, she longs to return and even accepts Crawford's proposal before changing her mind. She returns to live in the rectory at the periphery of the theatrical country house with her readerly qualities *just* winning out. Thus, instead of describing the scene of the proposal, *Mansfield Park* leaves the details—like the physical novel—in the readers' hands. Likewise, twentieth-century authors find a way to subvert the marriage plot using metafictional means that are particular to the pressing concerns of their era, thus breathing fresh life into a sub-genre that was as old as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). In doing so, they draw on both the literary tradition of the country house novel and the theatrical traditions of the

endangered country house.

But what is country house "theatricality?" We can see how a country house is like a stage: its grounds, architecture, and interior are designed to display the wealth and power of the landed family that occupies it; the same name, or role, is inherited by different bodies; its cast wears lavish costumes; its crew works behind the scenes; the showiest actors provide celebrity fodder for the newspapers.[5] Country houses are built as show houses, and the life inside a country house is marked by performativity. In his influential study of country houses, architectural historian Mark Girouard writes, "Essentially they were power houses . . . This power was based on the ownership of land . . . It was a show-case, in which to exhibit and entertain supporters and good connections . . . It was an image-maker, which projected an aura of glamour, mystery or success around its owner." Girouard emphases the visibility, above all, of these houses: like a theatrical production, they "showcase" and "exhibit" and "entertain."[6] Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley are even more overt in their description of country houses as stages:

> Landed society clearly read the precise standing of fellow members from knowledge about the cost of their shoe-buckles, looking glasses and sea furniture. But it was the country house itself, *the theatre for all this display*, which was the most important item of expenditure in working out of social position. A great house symbolized many things: wealth, political clout, taste, genealogical respectability (emphasis mine).[7]

Architectural historians and literary figures agree: the country house is a stage. Therefore, a country

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[5] Sometimes the actors and aristocracy were once in the same, especially during the private theatrical craze. See Gillian Russell, "Private Theatricals," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel Quinn, 191-203 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Russell writes, "print media disseminated news of such activities, thereby blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres. Intelligence about private balls, masquerades and theatricals developed as a distinctive subgenre of journalism in this period: it served the interests of the print media by attracting readers intrigued by the affairs of the fashionable world, while for the subjects of such reports it offered fame without the stigma of performing for financial gain" (Ibid., 193).

[6] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 2-3.

[7] Richard G. Wilson and Alan. Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880* (London; New York: Hambledon and London, 2000), 240.

house is a strange mixture of a fundamentally authentic and private structure—a home—and an artificial and public medium—the theater. When hundreds of country houses are destroyed in the midcentury, this unique domestic theatricality is also threatened. In *Between the Acts* (1941), Virginia Woolf draws on the literary and material traditions of country house theatricality to problematize the heteronormative impulses that the country house perpetuates; the novel's open-ended conclusion stages a question about the future of the English novel—and it is a question that Bowen is well-equipped to answer.[8]

One of the most striking features of Elizabeth Bowen's novels, as many critics have remarked, is their attention to the home, or, more accurately, to living spaces—from the London townhouse to the Anglo-Irish big house, from continental hotels to British seaside retreats. She is a true *theoros* and a philosopher of the novel's background. Theatricality is another dimension of her writing which receives less attention but goes hand in hand with her study of domestic scenery. Throughout Bowen's writing, the metaphorical language of the theater is extensively applied to nontheatrical settings—a drawing room is staged, a scene is set in a bedroom, the actors pause, and so forth. Most of us use the language of the stage in everyday discourse, but in Bowen's novels this theatrical language is much more pronounced and—like the background settings she brings to the fore—exceeds its metaphorical limits and asks us to look more carefully at the ground facilitating the

[8] See Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen*, 1st Anchor Books Ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2006). Glendinning quotes Bowen's letters extensively to sketch this complexity of her feelings toward Woolf—Bowen was not an intimate friend of Woolf's, but they were within each other's extended circle, wrote to one another, and stayed in one another's houses. Bowen was not in the Bloomsbury circle's generation, which as a young writer she thought of as the "'establishment', 'the great elder group…the people in Bloomsbury" (from Bowen's preface to the 1952 Knopf edition of *The Last September* , quoted in Glendinning, 94). After becoming acquainted with her, Bowen also saw Woolf's human flaws, including her "professional sensitivity and jealousy about work" (Ibid., 122), and the smugness of the Bloomsbury group, which in a letter to Rosamund Lehmann Bowen claimed depressed her and made her feel claustrophobic (Ibid., 126). And so, Bowen is also uniquely qualified to respond to Woolf since she was familiar with her but did not let her hero-worship get in the way of constructively building on the project Woolf began in *Between the Acts*.

novel's social and metafictional commentary.[9] As Vera Kreilkamp writes in *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House* (1998), "the successes or failures of Big House novels lie not simply in a writer's talent for fictional narration, but also in the complexity of her confrontations with the political and historical matter she chooses as subject and setting."[10] Bowen engages political and historical matter in her novels, but she seems most interested in their material and cultural histories—categories not entirely distinct from politics and history, but categories which foreground aesthetic traditions. What we find in Bowen's novels is a contemporary commentary that is anchored in the literary tradition of the country house and in a deep-rooted tradition of country house theatricality.

As the last heir to Bowen's Court in County Cork, Elizabeth Bowen knew this complex world intimately and deploys country house theatricality expertly in her novels. In her prose fiction, the country-house-as-theater trope facilitates her explorations of the generic and social constrictions of this institution and the prospect that neither form—neither the country house nor the novel—possesses the structural integrity to survive and produce meaning in the modern world. Rather than declaring an opinion about whether or not we should hold onto an elite institution that is at odds with social progress, Bowen gives us something infinitely more valuable: she shows us how to create within a privileged tradition while emphasizing the necessity of letting that privilege go. In 1942, Bowen published a history of her family home eponymously titled *Bowen's Court*. In a 1963 afterward

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[9] This theatricality is difficult to miss: "Her fictions are 'uncannily dramatic'; everyone is playing a multiplicity of parts; no identity is stable or single. Above all, her texts are constantly reminding us of themselves as 'writing and textuality'" (Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives*, quoted in Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen*, rev. ed. (London: Vintage, 1999), 13).

[10] Vera Kreilkamp, *The Anglo-Irish Big House and the Novel* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 3. Kreilkamp continues, "Because Anglo-Irish fiction emerges from a history of conquest and occupation, to stupid the genre of the Big House novel is to trace the gradual evolution of a literary symbol set against the political history of class and sectarian conflict, rather than conciliation" (Ibid., 4). This observation seems to be truer for *The Last September* than it is for *A World of Love*, her other Big House novel. Bowen even seems to mock the sectarian conflict in Maud's fights against the Catholic schoolchildren in the van on the way to school. *The Heat of the Day*, although it features a fairly stable big house, is equally interested in lost, disappearing, or converted country houses in England.

to this book, she admits that her family "obtained their position through an injustice, they enjoyed that position through privilege," but also claims that as Anglo-Irish gentry, they "honoured, if they did not justify, their own class, its traditions, its rules of life."[11] The latter part of her career is a long goodbye to these country house traditions—and it is a goodbye that, instead of eulogizing, attempts to document the theatrical traditions that will be lost with its buildings.

The reclamation of the land from the landed class forms an important part of the discussion embedded in the art and literature of late modernism about social mobility; it is a discussion that finds theatrical expression in the twentieth-century fad of the pageant-play. The pageant-play shifts theatricality out of the house and onto the common land; in doing so, it draws even more attention to the theatrical tradition that is left behind in the country house. *Between the Acts* reflects this shift by depicting a pageant-play which is hosted by the inhabitants of the country house, Pointz Hall, and ends with the curtain rising in the theatrical epicenter of the house, the drawing room.[12] Woolf's conclusion to *Between the Acts* is an unwritten new beginning and an invitation for the writers following in her footsteps—an invitation to which Bowen responds. However, Bowen's war work for the Ministry of Information offered her a sharp perspective on the type of nationalistic pageantry depicted by Woolf since these kinds of pageants were similar to fascist spectacles in Axis countries. Such pageants were even more unsettling in neutral Ireland than in England, especially to an Anglo-Irish observer like Bowen. As a consequence, when Bowen responds to *Between the Acts* in *The Heat of the Day*, she doubles down on the ideological dangers of the pageant ethos of the unlanded classes.

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[11] Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court & Seven Winters: Memories of a Dublin Childhood*, Vintage (New York: Random House 1999), 456.

[12] It's a theatrical nucleus that's also portable—the theatrical tradition of the country house drawing-room is carried with the gentry to their townhouse drawing rooms and also emulated in middle-class drawing rooms. It seems fitting that Bowen is born in a room designed to be a back drawing-room—her mother's bedroom in their Dublin residence (See Bowen's *Seven Winters*).

In Woolf's novel, pageant-plays create a useful division for conceptualizing a broader midcentury genre contest—a genre contest which, in turn, reflects class mobility and concomitant shifts in aesthetic representation. As Jed Esty observes, "The novel's conclusion seems to resolve the genre contest between pageant and narrative in favor of the latter: the play is textualized and ironized, its communicative powers subordinated to those of the frame narrative."[13] I would add that Woolf's novel subordinates the pageant to the narrative in a much more concrete move from field to house as the pageant disperses and Giles and Isa face off in the drawing room. This seemingly regressive move is a significant commentary on the future of the novel. By contrast, Woolf's Bloomsbury contemporary, E.M. Forster, abandons the novel in favor of the pageant-play because the English novel cannot escape the marriage plot, but Woolf returns the bride and the groom to the drawing room in order to stage the next chapter in literary history.[14] In doing so, Woolf suggests that the annual suspension of narrative via the pageant is only a temporary relief and, indeed, the pageant-play tradition itself has proven fleeting. Woolf determines that the real theatrical work left to be done is in the novel; in the drawing room.

Bowen takes up this work in *The Heat of the Day*—her next novel after she had read *Between the Acts*. Victoria Glendinning relates an anecdote which suggests that Pointz Hall's drawing room is very much on Bowen's mind when she first starts work on *The Heat of the Day* in 1942. While on the train to stay at Stephen Tennant's requisitioned country home, Wilsford Manor, Elizabeth bumped

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[13] Joshua Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2014), 97.

[14] Forster's final novel, before *Maurice* was published posthumously in 1971, was *A Passage to India* in 1924—but even *Maurice* was written in the 1910s. "The most useful and most accepted account of Forster's abandonment of the novel is that he had last found the inherited conventions of heterosexual courtship and marriage plots both stifling and dishonest" (Esty, 77). This is something the Clara Tuite picks up on in "Decadent Austen Entails": Forster, James, Firbank, and the 'Queer Taste' of *Sanditon* (comp. 1817, publ. 1925)" in *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees*, ed. Deidre Lynch, 115-137 (2000). Tuite argues that *Maurice* also "suggests a growing disillusionment with what we would now call the compulsory heterosexuality of the country-house novel genre" (Ibid., 129).

into Augustus John and they began talking about writing and "how dialogue must always give clues, or counterpoints to clues; in that sense, Elizabeth said, every novel is a detective novel."[15] Their conversation turned to *Between the Acts*, and Bowen recounted Woolf telling her that, "[f]or six weeks I have been trying to get the characters from the dining-room into the drawing-room and they are still in the dining-room."[16] Of course, the characters of *Between the Acts* eventually get from the dining room to the drawing room via the Pageant of England—a pure spectacle which illuminates the subtler theatrical elements that we take for granted in these domestic interiors. This reminds us that, crucially, the theater is not defeated by the novel in Woolf's generic contest but that the contest itself is part of the novel's DNA—to inherit the country house tradition is to inherit both the novels of its literary forebears and the theatricality of its architectural and social history.[17]

Woolf's *Between the Acts* is a metafictional invitation to the novelist to engage in country house theatricality, and Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* and *A World of Love* are arguably the most sensitive and thorough responses to this invitation. This chapter focuses primarily on Bowen's reception of country house theatricality in her novels—a project sparked in part by Woolf, in part by the imminent loss of her own country home, Bowen's Court. I will give an overview of the theatrical traditions of the country house that influence these authors before analyzing *Between the Acts*. Next, I will take stock of the Irish wartime climate in which Bowen begins her response to Woolf's final novel before analyzing *The Heat of the Day* and *A World if Love*. In doing so, I will explain how these country house novels play into the theatrical traditions established both by literature and by the buildings themselves.

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[15] Glendinning, 175.

[16] Ibid., 176.

[17] Plus, it mirrors the struggle between the social performativity and authentic expression of its characters and it also mirrors the tension between artifice and realism that is fundamental to the genre of the novel.

Theatrical Genealogies

Between the Acts, The Heat of the Day and *A World of Love* draw on a pre-existing theatricality that wends its way deeply into the material, social, and architectural history of the English country house. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, a craze for private theatricals broke out among the aristocracy. Numerous impromptu theaters were set up in country houses to accommodate actors and audience members, and some houses went so far as to build a dedicated private theater.[18] One such theater still survives inside the ducal palace of Chatsworth House in the wing added in the early nineteenth-century by Wyatville. The theater features a gallery for servants and a proscenium painted in trompe l'oeil to give the illusion of tasseled stage curtains. Before private theatricals took off, it was considered demeaning for a member of gentry to act in plays, but they would patronize traveling theatrical groups to entertain them in the great hall.[19] Inigo Jones is the progenitor of another theatrical genealogy—generally considered the first true English architect and the father of the Palladian style that characterizes the English country house, Jones started out designing sets for court masques.[20] In fact, his architectural icon, Palladio, designed the famous Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza which was completed after his death with trompe l'oeil scenery

[18] See Girouard and Russell.

[19] Girouard, 88-89.

[20] See Christy Anderson, *Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Lord Burlington, who purchased Jones's library and promulgated his influence after Jones's death, really stressed Jones's role in architectural history in these genealogical terms. "Burlington's architectural method employed a model of lineage and biological progression. As if he were describing the breeding of an important line of dogs or racehorses, he traced the parentage of classical architecture back through generations" (Ibid., 220). This worked; when the great age of the English country house came along, Jones provided a point of genealogical contact for the classical world: "The new generation of classicists in the eighteenth century saw the establishment of an architectural lineage that could be traced back through Jones to Palladio and Vitruvius was part of ensuring a dynasty into the future. The Scottish architect William Adam . . . used the image of Inigo Jones on his personal seal" (Ibid.).

(Figure 11). Jones's set designs were so impressive that he quickly gained favor at court and the patronage to design "real" buildings influenced by the antique structures he had seen while traveling to Rome with the Duke of Arundel.[21] The decorative arts add another theatrical dimension to the country house: famous dramatic scenes were popular subjects for paintings or prints, especially those drawn from Shakespeare—Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery exemplifies the trend. Even the humble Georgian doorframe has a genealogy that can be traced back to classical architecture and to the Roman aedicule which created a *mise en scène* for murals, as John Summerson points out in his formative essay, "Heavenly Mansions."[22] In fact, the proscenium idiom pervades the English country house from its gateways and porticos to the intricately carved mantle pieces or the pietre dure cabinets in the state rooms. An exceptional example of the proscenium idiom is found in the chapel at Petworth where the family's gallery is framed by elaborately carved "curtains." Although the family is already held aloft from the congregation by the gallery, the carved curtains emphasize the notion that the earl and his family are never part of the audience: they are always a part of the show.

[21] See John Newenham Summerson, *Inigo Jones* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2000), 3-13, and Anderson, passim.

[22] "Heavenly Mansions" was first delivered as a lecture in 1946 to the Royal Institute of British Architects and first published in an essay collection of the same name in 1949. See John Newenham Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions: And Other Essays on Architecture*, The Norton Library (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

Figure 11: Palladio, Andrea (1508-1580, Italian) architect; Scamozzi, Vicenzo (1552-1616, Italian) associated architect. 1580-1585. Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza, Italy; Translated: Olympic Theatre, Interior. View of the frons scenae. theaters. Harvard Fine Arts Library, Digital Images & Slides Collection. https://library-artstor-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/asset/HARVARD_UNIVERSITY_9492554521.

Looking beyond the country house's embellishments and into the evolution of the drawing room out of the great hall, it becomes clear that the English country house is a domestic theater from its conception. Norman manor houses were meant to accommodate "[d]ozens of people—stewards, bailiffs, clerks and other manorial officers, house servants, gardeners, grooms"[23] for feasting. Separate, private spaces were developed around the twelfth century to counterbalance the public nature of the great hall since, "with its dais and collapsible furniture, the hall was less like a home than a theatre where the family was always on stage. Even very great people found the

[23] Clive Aslet, *The English House: A Story of a Nation at Home* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 25; N.B. Aslet is using Boothby Pagnell as a case-study for the Norman Hall in this chapter.

experience uncomfortable."[24] However, the theatricality of the great hall follows the family to their own withdrawing rooms. Jeremy Musson points to the drawing room scenes from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) which exemplify this theatricality, and, quoting Mr. Darcy's criteria for an accomplished young lady—'A thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages'—Musson notes, "These were just the kind of accomplishments for which the drawing room had become the well-finished and well-furnished stage."[25] The neat distinction between the public, theatrical great hall and the cozy, private withdrawing room collapses early in the architectural history of the country house as the great hall, the dining room, and the withdrawing room evolve and exchange roles over centuries of development. By the eighteenth century—the beginning of the "golden age" of the English country house—the drawing room has become a place for the hostess to entertain guests.[26] Consequently, the drawing room receives some of the finest furnishings in the house—even the decorations put on a show to articulate the wealth and good taste of the owner.[27] Similar to the life in a Norman hall, the family and their guests still progress from the feasting/dining room to the parlor/withdrawing room in the evenings, though the gentlemen first shut themselves away in the library to smoke cigars and talk politics before rejoining

[24] Aslet, 25.

[25] Jeremy Musson, "History of the Country House Drawing Room," *Country Life*, Oct. 3, 2014, accessed May 9, 2019, https://www.countrylife.co.uk/out-and-about/theatre-film-music/history-country-house-drawing-room-63348. Casual theatrical metaphors are common enough in country house descriptions, but Musson is interested in country house theatricality and currently working on a project on the topic himself.

[26] Wilson and Mackley, 3. As suggested by their title (*Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880*), Wilson and Mackley mark the "golden age" of the English Country House as the years between 1660 and 1880.

[27] See Jeremy Musson, *The Drawing Room: English Country House Decoration*, photographed by Paul Barker and Country Life (New York: Rizzoli, 2014).

the ladies in the more inclusive domain.[28] The intensified privacy of the gentleman's space throws the comparatively public nature of the drawing room into relief.[29] When the men rejoin the women, the accomplishments of the latter are displayed with an infinite skill and practiced discernment that such a highly theatrical but intensely intimate venue requires: "The awkward moment when, in Pride and Prejudice, Mr. Bennet observes to his daughter Mary, 'That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit' suggests all too painfully the acute sensitivities involved in these displays."[30]

This highly skilled domestic theatricality becomes literalized into the genre of the drawing room play, or comedy of manners, which scripts the witty banter of the theatrical drawing room and performs it either in actual drawing rooms or on the "real" stages of playhouses.[31] The clever inversions and theatric-domestic conflations of the country house reach their apotheosis in the works of Oscar Wilde. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), Jack says, "When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring," underscoring the labor that the actors undertake to amuse the audience in the playhouse or drawing room. Besides entertainment, these fictional and real drawing room theatricals usually have one

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[28] As Musson explains in "History of the Country House Drawing Room" and *The Drawing Room*, the gentlemen sometimes remained in the dining room.

[29] We see this in Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, Anchor Books (New York: Random House, 2002 [1948]): "When anger ran out she was left alone with uneasiness—liking the library less and less. Now primarily it was the scene, for her, of those conversations late into the nights—what *had* they been up to in here?" (189). The gentlemen's conversation in the library remains a mystery to Stella while she is at Mt. Morris. Thus, Bowen plays on a tradition of blocked access to the important, private conversations of men. After this scene, Stella will move to the drawing room which she understands much better—especially since the particulars of conversation do not need to be recalled so much as the patterns and ritual of the space. See also Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[30] Musson, "Country House Drawing Room."

[31] My disclaimer here is that this does not work both ways—the performances of ladies in the drawing room literalizes into drawing-room comedies, but participation in theatricals by *actual* ladies always threatened to undo their virtue. We might think of Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* or Maria Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*.

endpoint in mind—marriage. Marriage is the goal that the genre of comedy demands; it is a goal mandated by the space itself. In addition to a husband, the future bride is gaining the stage: the country house and, more specifically, the hostess's territory of the drawing room. With such spatial-generic reinforcements at work, it is no wonder that the English marriage plot proves as durable in the country house novel as it is, even among such unconventional authors as Oscar Wilde or Elizabeth Bowen.

Elizabeth Bowen was born in 1899, one year before her compatriot Oscar Wilde died, and, beyond their mutual interest in the decadent country house, the two writers share particular aesthetic affinities ingrained by their nationality. Bowen's persona has been described as highly theatrical because she cultivated a performative imperviousness that was similar to that of other Anglo-Irish writers, evolving into a "dandy, playing a role, maintaining with strenuous energy a nonchalant front, like Oscar Wilde. Dandies are the 'final, decadent flowering of a tribe, who can play any part except perhaps themselves, and who perform on a dangerous edge, since if you live by style alone, 'the performance is always liable to break down.'" [32] Although Bowen's dandyism is tied to a particular, intensified and "final" cultural moment as the Anglo-Irish gentry all but dies out, we should bear in mind that the tribe itself has always been theatrical. Accordingly, her performativity is nearly two centuries deep and coeval with the construction of her birthright, Bowen's Court:

> A good deal that this Henry Bowen could not foresee was built into Bowen's Court as the walls went up. In building as in writing, something one did not reckon with always waits to add itself to the plan. In fact, if this (sometimes combative) unexpected element be *not* present, the building or book remains academic and without living force. In raising a family house one is raising a theatre: one knows the existing players, guesses at their successors, but cannot tell what plays may be acted there . . . A Bowen, in the first place, made Bowen's Court. Since then, with a rather alarming sureness, Bowen's Court has made all the succeeding Bowens.[33]

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[32] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 366.

[33] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 31-2.

Bowen's constructed performativity is based on a literal construction of a performative space, her family's stately home. Her life, home, and family history offer the best example of a theatrical persona and an aesthetic that is mandated by the architectural elements of a country house. Moreover, the extraordinary passage above equates buildings with books and claims that theatricality is essential to the liveliness of both. Bowen tells us quite clearly that it is the combination of these elements that has shaped her—the building is a greater agent in the family's history than the family members themselves. Pointing to the index in Hermione Lee's literary biography of Bowen, Ian d'Alton points out that Bowen's Court has two entries, "one in plain typeface, one in italics. This encapsulates how this building has come to be seen. The house had its own existence as a sturdy reality in the landscape, a plain typeface entry. But it also possesses an italic, imaginative, historical and literary significance as the eponymous biography of the house and its inhabitants."[34] The division between plain typeface and italics, between building and book, de-emphasizes the living force of the house as a theater.[35] Subordinating the house-as-theater to a house-as-character, d'Alton claims to know "what the Big House really means to Bowen," seeing the "House as stage-set or background…[as] hardly sufficient."[36] Any analysis which ignores Bowen's own assertion—that the house is a theater which has made her—is puzzling, but the stubborn refusal to engage with the house on its clearly stated theatrical terms indicates a larger underlying problem in Bowen scholarship: the refusal or inability to see the country house for the complex, domestic-theatrical medium that it is. We want to believe that *Bowen's Court* immortalizes Bowen's Court and a "new,

[34] Ian d'Alton, "Bowen's Court as an 'Aesthetic of Living': A Lost Mansion's Significance in the Imagining of the Irish Gentry," in *Lost Mansions: Essays on the Destruction of the Country House*, ed. James Raven, 63-79 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 64.

[35] d'Alton does indicate that Bowen conceptualizes her home as a "stage" but the significance of this is downplayed (Ibid., 68).

[36] Ibid., 70.

and higher reality has been created."[37] In fact, *Bowen's Court* hasn't been in print since 1999 and, frankly, is a bit "academic and without living force." As a literary artefact it is appealing only to the die-hard fan. Without the house to visit, we probably cannot save this text from obscurity—but we can promote Bowen's country house novels in a more meaningful way if we understand them in their traditional and contemporary theatrical contexts.

The pageant-play emerges in the twentieth century and adds another crucial dimension to country house theatricality. During the interwar period, national pageants like La Trobe's Pageant of England in *Between the Acts* were a popular form of outdoors, democratized social theatricality in Ireland and England—and essentially antithetical to the indoors, contained theatricality of the country house. As such, they stand in contradistinction to the country house theatricality that Bowen cultivates in her novels. The pageant-play was a type of amateur dramatic production introduced in 1905 by Louis Napoleon Parker. It was thrilling to watch the villagers act out the local history of their ancestors in the very place such history had unfolded. Woolf and other late modernists, such as E.M. Forster and T.S. Eliot, experimented with the genre, but it is important to keep in mind that in its original, Edwardian instantiation, the pageant was strictly codified.[38] Parker instructed that the pageant represent history from the Romans through Cromwell, but not go beyond the mid-seventeenth century in order to avoid depicting the "class division or political sectarianism" of the industrial capitalist world and ever-expanding mercantile middle class, thus keeping up the illusion that English traditions and history have remained the same for centuries.[39]

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[37] Ibid., 75.

[38] Depictions of local pageants made their way into novels besides *Between the Acts*, as well. One popular example is E.F. Bentley's *Mapp and Lucia*—in the first book in this series, Lucia engages in a power struggle over control of the pageant and over which villager is selected to portray Queen Elizabeth.

[39] See Esty, "Insular Rites: Virginia Woolf and the Late Modernist Pageant-Play" in *A Shrinking Island*.

On the other hand, the Parkerian pageant of 1930s England felt uncomfortably fascistic to some late modernist writers and such pageants were even more closely allied with military activities in Ireland.[40] Clair Wills outlines the efforts of the Irish government to get its citizens to actively support wartime neutrality under the campaign, "Step Together,"[41] hosting fairs in 1940 whose "rhetoric of unity, sovereignty and moral righteousness"[42] was supported by various manifestations of Irish pageantry including, "military parades, precision marching to pipe bands, and parades of armoured cars and weaponry—the army also put on a number of theatrical displays and tableaux."[43] It is within this atmosphere of intense national pageantry that Bowen writes *Bowen's Court* while secretly reporting to England on the Irish political climate. She had a disposition suited for the job: "Like others of her kind, she lived at a certain remove from her own emotions, some part of her always held in reserve and able to monitor an experience, even as she submitted to it, with a cold, clinical precision. This observant detachment had long been a feature of Anglo-Irish writing, which achieved an almost anthropological status."[44] Since Bowen's reports were "much preoccupied with Irish attitudes towards the fascist enemy,"[45] it is possible that these reports on the atmosphere in Dublin lent her critical distance and amplified the insight into social and political theatricality that she displays in *The Heat of the Day*, her immediate retrospective on wartime London.[46] Her war work

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[40] Ibid 55; 95.

[41] Clair Wills, *The Neutral Ireland: A Cultural History of Ireland during the Second World War* (London: Faber, 2007), 95.

[42] Ibid., 96.

[43] Ibid., 98.

[44] Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 198.

[45] Ibid., 198. It would be interesting to see if she talks about pageants in particular, but Corcoran only offers a broad summary here.

[46] In his chapter on *The Heat of the Day* and Bowen's war reports in *The Enforced Return*, Corcoran tells us that her "1940 reports were passed on by Lord Cranborne, who received them in the Dominions Office, to Lord Halifax,

certainly makes her uniquely qualified to respond to Woolf's pageant novel.

Between the Acts

The internal logic of *Between the Acts* is agonistic—the text spins out endless binaries between women and men, love and hate, the new and the old, and, to borrow some of Isa's poetry, "what we must remember; what we would forget." As mentioned, the novel crucially boils down to a "genre contest between pageant and narrative in favor of the latter," as Esty notes. By examining the traditional settings of each genre—the landscape for the pageant, the country house for the novel—we can tease out even more metafictional commentary on this genre contest and situate Woolf's theatrical novel within the dual traditions of the cultural and novelistic country house tour.[47] Woolf sets up a stark contrast between the peaceful and anti-genealogical ethos of the house tour scene with William Dodge and the aggressive celebration of local genealogy displayed by the traditional Edwardian pageant-play.

Land ownership is what establishes the gentry, what makes them the "landed" class and roots their family dynasty.[48] A fundamental element of the pageant-play is its stage, the "unchanging" landscape, and it represents the larger, democratizing trend to reclaim the landscape from the gentry and to preserve England's common land for its citizens. The landscape drives

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the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, with the opinion that this is 'a shrewd appreciation of the position'" (Ibid., 184).

[47] There is also a hidden *theatrical* tradition to the house tour that is evident in their amateur theatrical production, *100 Years Hence*. According to Christine Froula, "Making Fun: Bloomsbury's Coterie Comedy in Historical Perspective," paper presented at the 26th Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, Leeds Trinity University, June 2016, the conceit of this play, staged at Charleston, was a house tour that takes place one century into the future and features Bloomsbury exhibits.

[48] In fact, considering how often these houses were remodeled or even torn down and rebuilt, the land is usually much older than the architecture.

Woolf's novel's exploration of the shaky idealism on both sides of this class divide between the common people and the gentry. Woolf underscores the fictive aspects of this idealism but ultimately constructs a union between the common people and the gentry by staging the pageant of the former on the lawn of the latter.

For the gentry, the landscape forms an important component of the country house. In her introduction to *English Country Houses* (1941), Vita Sackville-West highlights this aspect straight away, writing that she wishes to, "emphasise that the house is essentially part of the country, not only *in* the country, but part of it, a natural growth. Irrespective of grandeur or modesty, it should agree with its landscape and suggest the life of its inhabitants past or present; it should never overwhelm its surroundings. The peculiar genius of the English country house lies in its knack of fitting in."[49] These three sentences by Sackville-West outline the whole psychology of the English country house for its aficionados: the family history follows seamlessly from an overstated suggestion that the house is part of the land before backing off and admitting its artifice. Similarly, in his introduction to his book on the English country house, *The Great Good Place* (1993), Malcolm Kelsall discusses the work of Vita Sackville-West and *The House: Living at Chatsworth* (1982) by the late Duchess of Devonshire, and he explains, "The great country house, it is claimed, is a natural excrescence. It has not been built so much as grown by organic process from the English soil. It is not a social phenomenon, but gives the impression of being out of time, 'as if it had always been there.' Thus, it

[49] Vita Sackville-West, *English Country Houses*, new ed. (London: Prion Books Ltd., 1996), 5-6. Sackville-West returns to this passage later: "the chief thing to be said is that they accommodate themselves well into the English landscape. This characteristic of the English country house was one of the first things I tried to emphasise at the beginning of this monograph, and now, as I arrive into the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, I must emphasise once more the peculiar genius of the minor English house for fitting into its surroundings . . . It may seem curious that the grandeur of the Italian model should have ever accommodated itself to the exigencies of the English Cathedral Close, the English small country town, the English village street, the English parkland and squire's estate. Yet so it was. We took the style and broke it down to our own needs. Once again we took something from Italy. As in in literature our Elizabethan poets took extravagant Italian romances and piled-up murders and turned them into dramas of the English stage, so, later, in terms of architecture, did we take and adapt the Italian classical tradition to our mild requirements" (Ibid., 69-70).

is as much a part of England as the rocks and stones and trees."[50] Sackville-West was conservative and Kelsall also admits that his book is a conservative project, but it is still surprising that they repeatedly claim that these houses organically sprang from the countryside.[51] This claim ignores not only the dispossession of the common land from the common people but also the entire villages which were relocated to make way for country house parkland. This was especially ironic in the parks of Capability Brown, who regularly displaced commoners in order to create his "natural" landscapes, as he did at Petworth.[52]

When we think of the conservationalist turn that began in the 1930s and saw the rise in influence of the National Trust, it is difficult to separate the Trust from the country house—but, in fact, the National Trust was originally established to protect English landscapes and combat the increasing loss of common land and preserve it for the people.[53] The Trust only began to *focus* on saving buildings after the Second World War, and just after *Between the Acts* was published. The battle

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[50] Malcolm Kelsall, *The Great Good Place: The Country House and English Literature* (New York ; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 6.

[51] Vita Sackville-West's appalling classicism is fairly well-known, but she really doesn't hold back in her archive. See Andrew Kingsley Weatherhead, *Upstairs: Writers and Residences* (Madison, N.J.; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 2000). Weatherhead quotes from one of her letters to her husband: "I hate democracy. I hate *la populace*. I wish education had never been introduced. I don't like tyranny, but I like an intelligent oligarchy. I wish *la populace* had never been encouraged to emerge from its rightful place. I should like to see them as well fed and well housed as T.T. cows" (quoted in Weatherhead, 76). Yikes.

[52] In light of these and other stubbornly optimistic oversights from the conservative camp, it comes as no surprise that some disagree that the country house has a "knack of fitting in." As Raymond Williams points out, these houses were rarely built to fit in, but to impress. "The working farms and cottages are so small besides them . . . What these 'great' houses do is to break the scale, by an act of will corresponding to their real and systematic exploitation of others" (*The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 206). Of course, these are two sides of the same coin—the scale of the smaller buildings was the official reason that villages were relocated beyond view of the great houses in the eighteenth century as taste shifted from the impressive to the natural. Characteristically, the conservative perspective only considers the great house itself, while the progressive prospective considers the great house with the common people in view. See also John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[53] See Ben Cowell, "Monuments for the Nation: Campaigning to Save Britain's Landscapes and Architectural Sites," in *The Heritage Obsession: The Battle for England's Past* (Stroud: Tempus, 2008), 79-89.

for common land versus the restricting enclosures that limited the people's access dated back centuries but intensified in the eighteenth century as parcels of land were purchased and restricted by landlords and other industrial developers. For this reason, there is a sense in which the rise of heritage culture in England is a reclamation of the common land—thus the outdoor pageants and the heightened status that attends a family's history in the same geographical place.[54] This renewed emphasis on land and place is evident in *Between the Acts* as Woolf repeatedly mentions the graves of resident ancestors. This local, land-based, and biologically continuous heritage of the village pageant play—a heritage which ostensibly belongs to everybody, but in fact belongs to some more than others—stands in stark contrast to the English novel's obsession with aristocratic estates entailed to only one first-born son of the "landed classes."[55] The issue of land *ownership* is crucial in *The Heat of the Day*, but in *Between the Acts* Woolf focuses on family connections to local land to highlight the risk of ancestral heritage as a system of inheritance that depends on sexual reproduction rather than a tradition built on aesthetic or intellectual affinities.

We see the risk of ancestral heritage mediated by a tradition of aesthetic or intellectual abilities as William Dodge takes his house tour. The pageant dominates Woolf's novel to such an extent that it is easy to overlook the importance of the house tour. But it is always worth noting that the original title of *Between the Acts* was *Poyntz Hall* and that in an early draft Woolf's chapters were

[54] Alexandra Harris outlines the authors and artists who turned from the abstraction and internationalization of modernism in the 1910s and 1920s to focus on the particular, local, grounded scenes of vernacular England in the 1930s and beyond (*Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010). The writing of Waugh, Woolf, Eliot and Betjamin during this time—along with many visual artists and architects—are part of a larger cultural shift, what Harris identifies as a "passionate, exuberant return to tradition" (Ibid., 10).

[55] This type of inheritance is of course also biologically continuous but extremely limited—and by "biologically continuous" I mean a system of inheritance that depends on sexual reproduction rather than a tradition built on aesthetic or intellectual affinities.

organized around different rooms.[56] On the overt house tour with William Dodge we become cognizant of the subtler house tour which has preceded the scene. By the time William Dodge is shown the house, we know all about the two paintings of the ancestor and the pseudo-ancestress; we know what little comfort the Olivers derive from their books; we can tie the intimate details of their family life to objects, like the account book in which Isa hides her poetry "in case Giles suspected,"[57] and to places, like a sunken spot beyond the lily pond where "[b]utterfly catching, for generation after generation, began."[58] In this way, Woolf's house tour participates in the late modernist celebration that Harris identifies of particular, grounded things.[59] But none of the poignant moments in Woolf's domestic narration rely on the Olivers' ties to local heritage—nor could they, since the Olivers have only lived in Pointz Hall for "something over a century,"[60] which is a trivial number of years compared to the pageant's timeline—or, indeed, to Lucy's *Outline of History*.

And the Olivers' dissociation from the land is evident. Although the characters praise the landscape around Pointz Hall, the narrator notes that after lunch they "stared at the view, as if something might happen in one of those fields to relieve them of the intolerable burden of sitting silent, doing nothing, in company."[61] The land, which is so celebrated by the pageant ethos,

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[56] Harris, 261.

[57] Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, ed. Mark Hussey, 1st ed. Harvest Book (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008) 11.

[58] Ibid., 40.

[59] That particularity is rooted in the title of *Romantic Moderns*: "The 'Romantic' . . . is meant loosely and inclusively, as Piper uses it in *British Romantic Artists*: 'Romantic art deals with the particular' he says, and it is this particularity that I have wanted to explore" (Harris, 14).

[60] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 5.

[61] Ibid., 45.

completely bores country house society. Mrs Manresa exclaims, "What a view," but the narrator notes that she is stifling a yawn and that "[n]obody answered her. The flat fields glared green yellow, blue yellow, red yellow, then blue again. The repetition was senseless, hideous, stupefying." In direct response to their apathy toward the land, Lucy says to Dodge, "Then . . . come, come and I'll show you the house."[62] The consequential "then" is linked to the land's inability to entertain anyone—at least, anyone from this group. Indeed, as William Dodge and Lucy depart, Bart falls asleep.

William Dodge is obviously visually literate in country house viewing and should be understood within this cultural tradition. Although the country house *itself* might seem to be a consummate symbol of continuity, anchored to the land and entailed to the next generation, the impetus *for* house tourism has roots in international travel and the European cabinet of curiosities. This cultural tradition of touring is diametrically opposed to the pageant's local, vernacular sources. These cabinets might contain anything from natural specimens to archeological artefacts, books, maps, relics, statues and paintings. The cabinet of curiosities developed in Renaissance Europe and was cultivated by the English elite as the Grand Tour became a standard rite of passage for young men, accompanied by their tutors, by the early eighteenth century; this is before it was adapted for honeymooning.[63] The collections they acquired on the Grand Tour became the precursors to public museums.[64] Art and antiquities dealers on the continent quickly capitalized on the Grand Tour fad

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[62] Ibid., 46.

[63] There were of course exceptions. Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire is one such exception—when she bore a child out of wedlock, her husband sent her into prolonged exile on the continent. Georgiana brought back an extensive mineral collection.

[64] Inigo Jones's patron, "The Collector Earl" of Arundel, is the man who "pioneered this movement" in England. Under Jones's guidance, the earl brought back a vast collection including priceless antique marbles which were eventually left to the University of Oxford and are now found in the Ashmolean. See Elizabeth Angelicoussis, "The collection of classical sculptures of the Earl of Arundel, 'The Father of Vertu in England,'" *Journal of the History of Collections* 16 no. 2 (2004): 143-159. In fact, many of the objects in these cabinets have long since found their way to museums, though one cabinet remains relatively intact at Burton Constable. However, its most

and, as a result, young Tourists were often duped by counterfeits. This meant that it was also important to develop a "good eye" for tour purchases. As the Grand Tour Exhibit of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (2014-2016) demonstrates, some properties like Welbeck Abbey and Chatsworth still retain many of the treasures acquired on their families' grand tours. However, many country house's authentic paintings have made their way to museums or have been auctioned for funds to maintain the houses—consequently they retain their counterfeits and are filled with paintings labeled "after Rubens," "after Titian," and so forth. When Dodge arrives, he is clearly primed to observe the objects of the country house within the originally homosocial tradition of the Grand Tour.

After the subtle and complex household tensions Woolf maps onto Pointz Hall's objects in the first section of the novel, and the intense homophobia, directed at Dodge, that Giles poorly conceals during the lunch scene, the shoddy, nearly slapstick house tour is made all the more humorous in relief. On the one hand, Dodge looks at the house's paintings discerningly—able to deny the suggestion that one of the paintings is by Sir Joshua Reynolds—and inspects the mark on the overturned coffee cup with an erudite gaze—apparently reaching a conclusion. On the other hand, Lucy is a riff on the traditional, inept tour-guide-housekeeper; as Adrian Tinniswood points out, it was usually the housekeeper's role to show visitors around despite being uneducated in art history—in *Pride and Prejudice*, Pemberley's Mrs Reynolds is among the exceptional guides.[65] In

popular object, the sperm whale skeleton described by Melville in *Moby Dick*, is too large to be housed in the same room as the rest of its wonders.

[65] Adrian Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist: Four Centuries of Country House Visiting* (London; New York: National Trust; H.N. Abrams [distributor], 1989), 102-103; one account of Stowe by an anonymous journal keeper in a tome titled "Journal of Tours in the Midland and Western Counties of England and Wales in 1795 and in Devonshire in 1803" held at the British Museum (Add. MS 30172) features "a long and detailed account of the house and gardens" at Stowe with a note at the bottom that reads "NB The servant that shewed the house, ignorant and insolent" (Ibid., 103).

contrast to Mrs Reynolds, Lucy pauses in front of the staircase and informs Dodge, "This . . . is the staircase. And now—up we go."[66] She pauses in front the portrait already discussed at lunch and in a moment of role reversal asks, "Who was she? . . . Who painted her?" before adding unhelpfully, "But I like her best by moonlight." [67] When they stop on the landing, we see that the Oliver family finds halfhearted compensation for their flimsy ancestry through books when Lucy says, "Here are the poets from whom we descend by way of the mind"[68]—but notes that the books get damp in the winter. They continue climbing the stairs with Lucy panting from the exertion. She attempts to refer to her predecessors and, perfecting her role as inept tour guide, says "Up and up they went . . . up and up to bed . . . A bishop; a traveler; —I've forgotten even their names. I ignore. I forget."[69] When Lucy points out the nursery and the bed she was born in—a staple of country house tourism when someone important is born in a bed—this serves to underscore the irrelevant and shallow ancestry of the Oliver family.

Beyond having fun at the expense of the cultural tradition of the house tour, William Dodge's tour situates the episode in a literary-tourist tradition that resonates with the specific canonical moment in Lizzy Bennet's visit to Pemberley. As mentioned in my first chapter, Lizzy's house visit changes her antagonism toward Darcy into love in the portrait gallery of his family. In turn, Austen's work in general and *Pride and Prejudice* in particular ensure the domination of the English marriage plot novel. *Pride and Prejudice* joins together one fantasy of country house visiting—where we imagine inhabiting such regal spaces—with a love story. Of course, the neat elision

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[66] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 47.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 47-8.

[69] Ibid., 48.

between Pemblerly's Palladian architecture and Darcy's noble character has long been recognized (and debated) by Austen's readers; but Austen's subtle satire does nothing to extinguish the force of the embodied fantasy at the nexus of country house tourism and a true love story. Yet Dodge's house tour overturns these conventions. As a gay man, Dodge will not marry into the family and produce more heirs for the portrait gallery like Elizabeth Bennet. Moreover, he has little interest in the poorly painted portrait of the Olivers' real ancestor with his famous dog. He looks instead at the portrait of the lady, who is described as an "ancestress of sorts"[70] and was purchased by Bart because he liked her. By placing these two pictures side-by-side, a male ancestor and an anonymous lady, Woolf stages a competition between the aesthetic values represented by the lady who is just "a picture"[71] and the biologically-contingent values that too often creep into our notions of heritage—and lead to hate, as they do at the luncheon.

By the end of the house tour we are offered another direct reason for the scene apart from the stupefying landscape. Lucy has led Dodge away from the group because of Giles's palpable homophobia—he mentally accuses Dodge of being a word not fit to say in public, but a word that Isa can practically hear her husband thinking. Clara Tuite notes that the programmatically heterosexual but deeply homosocial institution of the entailed estate often functions as a sort of "closet" for queer writers and artists in the English decadent period. I believe that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a strong theatrical example of Tuite's point—especially if we think of the buttonhole that Isa finds for Dodge among the flowers.[72] Adrian Tinniswood also devotes a chapter to Cecil

[70] Ibid., 6.

[71] Ibid., 25.

[72] Tuite, p. 117; 128.

Beaton and the less concealed "queer streak" of interwar country house society.[73] The scene between Lucy and William interacts with this queer literary country house tradition; furthermore, Woolf reclaims the country house fantasy to stage a nonreproductive, cathartic moment of healing and sympathy between Lucy and William. The narrator notes, "Old and frail she had climbed the stairs. She had spoken her thoughts, ignoring, not caring if he thought her, as he had, inconsequent, sentimental, foolish. She had lent him a hand to help him up a steep place. She had guessed his trouble."[74] Her sympathy causes William to inwardly reflect on the bullying he faced in school as a result of his sexuality—"At school they held me under a bucket of dirty water, Mrs. Swithin; when I looked up, the world was dirty, Mrs. Swithin; so I married; but my child's not my child, Mrs. Swithin. I'm a half-man, Mrs. Swithin; a flickering, mind- divided little snake in the grass, Mrs. Swithin; as Giles saw; but you've healed me."[75] As a cuckold, Dodge is an unwelcome reminder that the correspondence of one's surname to an ancestral lineage is never assured.[76] As the heir to the estate, Giles is enraged by the threat that his family dynasty, shallow as it is, might contain some fiction. It is just after this moment of healing by the window that Lucy sees the audience is gathering for the pageant. From here, the novel transitions rather harshly into a generic celebration of local heritage,

[73] See the chapter, "A Queer Streak," in Adrian Tinniswood, *The Long Weekend: Life in the English Country House, 1918-1939*, 205-220 (New York: Basic Books, a Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2016).

[74] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 49.

[75] Ibid., 51.

[76] In fact, Woolf's intimacy with Vita Sackville-West would have familiarized her with the scandal her mother provoked in order to win her inheritance of Knole: "Lady Sackville herself—in order to disqualify her brother's claim at the time of their father's death—had been required in 1908 'to avow, openly and emphatically, that she and her siblings were bastards' (Nicolson, 1973: 65)" (Elizabeth Hirsch, "Virginia Woolf and Portraiture," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm, 160-177 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 173).

predicated on continuous, familial ties to the land.[77] The half-hearted and hollow expressions of lineage displayed on the Pointz Hall tour—a sham ancestress, a moldy intellectual inheritance, Dodge's admission that "his" children are not his own—trouble the display of heritage that is to come in the pageant. This is particularly visible in the narrator's descriptions of the actors' and audience's local lineages—descriptions which devolve into increasingly absurd comparisons to each family's ancestral connections to the land. The winner appears to be the "great lady in the Bath chair, the lady whose marriage with the local peer had obliterated in his trashy title a name that had been a name when there were brambles and briars where the Church now stood—so indigenous was she that even her body, crippled by arthritis, resembled an uncouth, nocturnal animal, now nearly extinct."[78]

The Pageant of England is framed by Dodge's house tour and the final scene of the novel which takes place in the drawing room; the former scene's peaceful and nonreproductive nature is diametrically opposed to the violent and reproductive language of Isa's and Giles' scene at the end of the book. The narrator notes, "Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born."[79] Thus, Dodge's country house tour gains sympathy for the non-reproducing artist only to hand the narrative over again to the impulses of reproductive lineage that drive the marriage plot.[80] But it is a literary plot that is

[77] However, it must be said that La Trobe attempts to revolutionize the genre—for example, she stages the play on the terrace which suggests a compromise between the landscape and house. But the narrator sticks with the pageant ethos and continues to describe the audience members and their ancestors.

[78] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 65.

[79] Ibid., 148.

[80] La Trobe, who writes and directs the Pageant, is another queer artist who mirrors Dodge to a certain extent and is a central character in this discussion; considering her Pageant a failure, she is off attempting to write a new plot as well.

problematized by the cultural tradition that Dodge represents and is left unresolved by the open ending—and by Isa's tired thought, "Love and hate—how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot."[81] And so, Woolf leaves us with a wife, her husband, and the drawing room stage, stressing the need for the novel to innovate within the domestic-theatrical traditions of country houses and their literature.

Elizabeth Bowen

Bowen's characters are also placed somewhat reluctantly within this biologically continuous tradition in *The Heat of the Day*—the protagonist's son has recently and unexpectedly inherited an estate, Mount Morris. However, as a middle-aged divorcée, Stella, represents a character who has, seemingly, escaped from her own marriage plot before the novel begins. But before moving on to a reading of *The Heat of the Day*, it is helpful to get a sense of the state of the country house when Bowen is first beginning to draft the novel after publishing *Bowen's Court* in 1942.

As I mentioned in the introduction, in December 1942 Bowen met Augustus John on the train to Stephen Tennant's house, Wilsford Manor. She was traveling there with her lover, Charles Ritchie, to spend Christmas. On the train, they discussed *Between the Acts* and the detective genre which would shape *The Heat of the Day*. With Woolf's death in March of 1941, the challenges of keeping up Bowen's Court—where Bowen had once hosted the Woolfs (Figure 12), and the rampant destruction of country houses during the war, Bowen was faced with relentless personal, literary, and architectural loss. In her revised 1963 "Afterword" to *Bowen's Court*, she recounts how it felt to write about such a privileged institution during the war years:

> I was writing (as though it were everlasting) about a home during a time when all homes were threatened and hundreds of thousands of them were being wiped out. I was taking the attachment of people to places as being generic to human life, at a time when the attachment

[81] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 146.

> was to be dreaded as a possible source of too much pain. During a time when individual destinies, the hopes and fears of the living, had to count for so little, I pursued through what might seem their tenuousness and their futility the hopes and fears of the long-ago dead…But all that—that disparity or contrast between the time I was writing in and my subject—only so acted upon my subject as to make it, for me, the more important. I tried to make it *my* means to approach truth.[82]

Although Bowen does not believe that the tragedy of lost spaces outweighs the tragedy of lost lives, she makes it clear that *she* understands the world through the country house; the threat that the war poses to these spaces weighs heavily on her mind. This threat would have been very much present to her in Stephen Tennant's requisitioned home. Wilsford Manor is an important country house in its own right—Tennant and fellow Bright Young Things were famously photographed there. It is also six miles from another, grander house in which Tennant was frequently a guest: Wilton House. In *Country Life* Christopher Hussey described Wilton, the family seat of the Earls of Pembroke, as the most important house in the art history in England—this is largely due to its Holbein porch and interiors by Inigo Jones and John Webb.[83] Despite Jones's monumental influence on the architecture of the English country house, his work can be traced to precious few country houses: the Single Cube Room and the Double Cube Room in Wilton are rare exceptions.[84] Military occupation characteristically took a toll on the house: in June of 1941, a Wyatt ceiling collapsed. More distressingly, the paneling in the Cube Rooms was cracked and damaged by moisture. In general, requisitioning ruined a home—one thousand country homes were destroyed either directly or

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[82] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 454.

[83] Robinson, *Requisitioned*, 186.

[84] Summerson, *Inigo Jones*, 1. At the very beginning of his book on the architect, Summerson emphasizes how this perception of Jones as forefather of Palladian architecture has dominated his narrative and obfuscated the work that Jones actually did—but since only eight of Jones's forty-five works are extant and "not a single house can be named as being or having been indisputably his personal work." Summerson de-emphasizes Jones's involvement in Wilton House, saying the Cube and Double Cube Rooms are only built on the "advice of Jones" (Ibid., 116). But today, and after much subsequent scholarship, they are still attributed to Jones.

indirectly by the war effort. Between death duties and high taxation, most families did not have the money to fix the damage caused by military occupation. Wilton House saw mercy—the government sent the Ministry of Works to painstakingly restore the ceiling and Cube Rooms. This process took over a year to complete, and that it was undertaken at all shows the immense value that the government placed in the legacy of Inigo Jones—the proponent of Palladian architecture who forever changed the facade of England. Many people consider the Double Cube Room, with its perfect proportions and ornate detailing, to be the most beautiful room in England—and, as anyone can see by watching Georgiana play her pianoforte in the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*, it has been restored beautifully.[85]

[85] Will and Ariel Durant, *The Age of Reason Begins* (Riverside: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 63; et al.—this is a common sentiment, one echoed by Joe Wright, director of the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*.

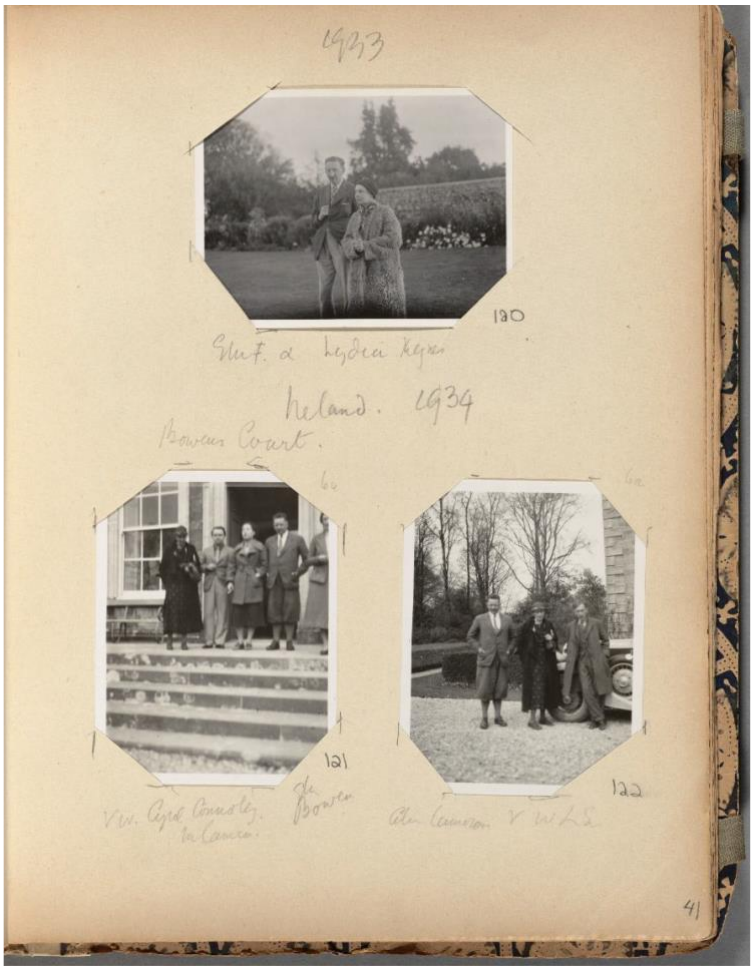

Figure 12: The Woolfs and Connollys visit Bowen's Court. Harvard University- Houghton Library / Woolf, Virginia, 1882-1941. Virginia Woolf Monk's House photograph album (MH-3), 1863-1938 (inclusive), 1890-1933 (bulk). MS Thr 560. Harvard. Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

However, the Cube Rooms were not restored until 1949. When Bowen was in Wiltshire, the ceiling had collapsed and nothing about this house's survival was certain. Just as Bowen had finished the biography of her own family's country house and was beginning work on her new wartime novel, *The Heat of the Day*, she found herself down the road from a piece of architectural heritage that also tied into the literary and theatrical heritage of England.[86]

[86] It's entirely possible that Bowen would have visited Wilton House even though it was requisitioned since Tennant was a friend of the family—and there are still places that I could look (Ritchie's memoir, letters, essays) to see if this was the case. At any rate, I think it's extremely unlikely that Bowen and Tennant *wouldn't* have discussed

* * *

In his discussion of the origin of genres, Todorov asks us to look at "what presides at the birth of a genre"[87]—but when a sub-genre is comprised of a literature as multigeneric as a country house story and of a space as multimedial as the country house, we are looking at a complicated web of origins that can go as far back as Pliny the Younger's country house. Luckily, with Elizabeth Bowen we can look through her eyes—or her essays—to find what presides at the "nearest perfection" of a genre. She indicates that Jane Austen brought the "English novel to a point nearer perfection that it has reached since"[88] by the theatrical framing of her narrative world. Bowen's unabashed emulation of Austen is clear as early as *Friends and Relations* (1931), a novel which features a family named Tilney. By the time she writes *The Heat of the Day* she hones this emulation to the elements she wants to keep and identifies the formal DNA that she will carry into her own novel: stages and frames.[89] By focusing on these elements, Bowen shows us that what is at stake in the loss of the country house tradition is a kind of contained theatricality germane to both the country house and the novel. Bowen writes about this contained theatricality in her undated essay, "What Jane Austen Means to Me":

> Also, she made manifest for me the wisdom (the wisdom, that is, for a novelist) of confining one's art in the bounds of a world one knows. In my day, that is more difficult than it was in hers—scenes now shift so fast; the once-fixed patterns break up; one knows more worlds than she did, but no single one so well.
>
> Be that as it may, I remain convinced (I learned that from her) that a novel, like a

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the devastation of Wilton House since country houses were so important to both of them, and since they would have been discussing Bowen's recent accomplishment, *Bowen's Court*.

[87] Tzetan Todorov, "The Origin of Genres," trans. Richard Berrong, *New Literary* History 8, no. 1 (1976): 161.

[88] Elizabeth Bowen, "Jane Austen," in *People, Places, Things People, Places, Things—Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 208.

[89] Form as opposed to content: in *The Last September*, Bowen emulates Chekhov in tone—Lois is even referred to as a Chekhovian character at one point. But Bowen does little else with theater in *The Last September*, and nothing particularly innovative, unlike in these later novels.

> play, requires a stage. Or, if not a stage, should I say a frame? Strength—and what strength had Jane!—comes from the acceptance of place, of time, and also of the certain rules of society.[90]

Bowen never loses sight of her dual-inheritance of place and text as a country house novelist. The "certain rules of society" and "once-fixed patterns" are a part of the cultural tradition of the country house separate from, but vital to, the text. On a formal level, Austen's stages and frames provide Bowen with the building blocks of literary country house theatricality that can be adapted to her modern cityscape.[91] As with the pageant-play, removing this theatricality from the country house allows us to see the political and aesthetic value of contained theatricality more clearly.[92]

The Heat of the Day is filled with stages and theatrical frames; when we trace these elements, we can also trace the metafictional commentary that Bowen is making on the generic constrictions of the marriage plot and the danger of removing theatricality from its country house container. Moreover, identifying these frames leads us directly into the theatrical country house drawing room and into an elegiac revelation of the material, performative tradition that has been discarded by Stella's (and Bowen's) generation. As we will see in the final section of this chapter, *A World of Love* takes on this conversation from another perspective. Set almost entirely within the microcosmic structure of the country house, this theatrical novel demonstrates both the aesthetic value and severe

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[90] Bowen, "What Jane Austen Means to Me," 229.

[91] Bowen writes about Anglo-Irish country houses in a similar way in *Bowen's Court*—"Life in these house-islands has a frame of its own" (Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 20).

[92] It's worth mentioning that, in the year that *The Heat of the Day* was published, 1948, an edition of *Pride and Prejudice* also came out which was introduced by Bowen. One of Austen's lines that Bowen echoes in her novel—"he had not the pleasure of understanding her"—is also quoted in her introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*. This echo occurs as the narrator describes Robert's reaction to his sister's letter about selling Holme Dene, which is "such a combination of haste and length that he could only respond, as indeed he had, that he had not the pleasure of understanding her" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 281-2); In her introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*, Bowen writes, "Infinite, in its time, must have been the disillusionment which drove Mr. Bennet to the solitude of his library, to the utterance of those deadly sardonic remarks…" (Elizabeth Bowen, "Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen" in *People, Places, Things—Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Allan Hepburn, 217-224 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) 222).

limitations of the country house narrative.

The Heat of the Day

The Heat of the Day focuses on Stella, an upper-class divorcée, whose relationship with the middle-class bachelor, Robert, is troubled when Harrison, her unwanted suitor, informs Stella that he, Harrison, is involved in counter-intelligence and that Robert, her boyfriend, is "selling his country."[93] Harrison offers not to turn Robert in if Stella will give Robert up; he warns her not to tell Robert what he has said, or he will know because everyone acts differently when they're being watched. Harrison tells Stella, "It would take tip top acting. How much of an actor would you, now, take [Robert] to be?."[94] And so on—both the narrator and the characters of the novel are hyperaware of the everyday, social performativity that is heightened by the war. Citizens must display their loyalty to England and also evaluate their potentially treasonous peers. At the same time, characters feel particularly vulnerable and betrayed when they detect that their peers are putting on an act. Even in the heartbreaking scene when Robert confesses his treason and says goodbye to Stella, he is terribly hurt that *she* has been able to act so well—and deceive him so thoroughly. Theatricality is introduced in the novel right away, as *The Heat of the Day* begins at an outdoor concert at a theater in which, the narrator notes, "no plays had been acted for some time."[95]

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[93] Bowen, *Heat of the Day*, 36.

[94] Ibid., 38.

[95] Bowen, *Heat of the Day*, 4. This theatricality is impossible to miss. Neil Corcoran also notes "the extensive imagery of the theatrical" (Corcoran, 188) in his war reports chapter, noting parallels to *Measure for Measure* in addition to the explicit references to *Hamlet*. He concludes this brief section with an allusion to "the uncertain 'I'" in the postscript of "The Demon Lover," observing that "the 'I' which is always 'uncertain' in Elizabeth Bowen becomes destabilized even further as a consequence of the politics of wartime espionage. Against those critics who find a lack of adequate characterization in the novel, notably in Robert Kelway, one might claim, therefore, that its modes of theatricality undermine the very self-identity of character. *The Heat of the Day* is governed by an almost Berkeleyan metaphysics, in which you are what you are perceived to be" (Ibid., 189).

The absence of actors on stage makes it clear that the stage has been enlarged to include the audience and, in fact, all Londoners—just as the pageant-play incorporates all villagers. We see this when Louie, an audience member, begins watching Harrison, a fellow audience member: "she had given him, the watcher, the enormity of the sense of having been watched. New, only he knew, to emotional thought, he now saw, at this first of his lapses, the whole of its danger—it made you *act* the thinker."[96] Love for Harrison, war for everyone else, puts an "unprecedented need for emphasis in the body"[97] and the way that it will be interpreted by the constant audience of their peers.

Beneath the surface, Woolf's genre contest continues in *The Heat of the Day* as Stella comes to terms with her place in the country house tradition and her mistaken assumptions regarding the metaphorical genres of her suitors. Moreover, these revelations take place *in* a country house scene, at the heart of the novel, as she moves from the library into the drawing room. Bowen's genre contest takes place between the "book" and the "theater" but, as with Woolf's contest in *Between the* Acts, land plays a crucial role in delineating the traditional theatricality of the country house versus a newer, egalitarian theatricality that fosters Robert's traitorous acting, i.e. spying. Robert's own theatricality plays neatly into the system of upper-class emulation that dominates the culture of his own middle class. The key scene in the Mount Morris drawing room ends with a description of a picture of the Titanic which has been torn from a magazine and "stuck crooked into an alien

[96] Bowen, *Heat of the Day*, 11. Harrison's "previously unconscious trick of the hands; he recalled this trick in his father, not before in himself—but it must have been waiting for him" (Ibid., 11) comes into his genealogical consciousness for the first time. See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. Social Foundations of Aesthetic Forms Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)—this is not unlike the era when the celebrity-actor Thomas Betterton ruled the English stage: "In the first decade of the eighteenth century, the wide dissemination of conduct books, dancing lessons, military manuals, and general advice on deportment of all kinds consolidated the kinesthetic imagination into a repertoire of incorporable memoir" (Roach, 100).

[97] Bowen, *Heat of the Day*, 11.

frame."[98] The ship—a container in many ways similar to the theatrical country house—is also a powerful metaphor for social mobility, and the tragedy of the Titanic underlines the danger of seeking new frames.

Running parallel to the epistemological uncertainty of the spy plot is a good, old-fashioned country house inheritance plot. Stella's son, Roderick, a soldier, unexpectedly inherits an Anglo-Irish estate, Mount Morris, from Cousin Francis—her former husband's cousin. Stella honeymooned and conceived Roderick at Mount Morris—an event which plays into the broader motifs of conception and origins that run throughout the novel. Stella returns to Mount Morris in the middle of the novel to settle some affairs for Roderick while he is away at war. Her visit, located at the crux of the novel, is a metafictional masterpiece. For example, it is here in the drawing room that Stella realizes that consequent to Roderick's inheritance is the inevitability of her son's own marriage plot; it is imagined in abstract terms: "For marriage, so far so inconceivable in the case of Roderick that she had not bestirred herself to envisage a daughter-in-law—could not but be somewhere in the directive . . . Born but not till now thought of, that future creature came into being mistily."[99] The inevitability of Roderick's marriage-plot narrative is written into the house and, in particular, into the hostess's domain of the drawing room.

Crucially, Mount Morris is also the place where Stella resolves the generic contest that takes place in her mind between Harrison and Robert. Anchored in the same scene as Roderick's more conventional, though abstract, love story, Stella sets in motion an alternative plot for her own unconventional love story with Robert. Stella is considering whether or not she will confront Robert

[98] Ibid., 195.

[99] Ibid., 190. There are also strong hints that Roderick is gay which might resonate with William Dodge and certainly with the queer country house scene of the interwar period.

with the truth she has gleaned from her time at Mount Morris, but fears that he will never forgive her for it.

> Or, he could lie; or rather, lie once again—the first lie spoken not being, in most cases, the first lie acted.—"Is he," Harrison had wanted to know, "anything of an actor?"—*If* actor, to her and for her so very good an actor, then why not actor also of love? Incalculably calculating, secretly adverse, knowing, withheld had Robert been, all this time, from the start? No, no, no, she thought: better anything! Better what, then? Better to hear him say, "Since you *have* chosen to ask me—yes." That would be love; that would be the consummation.

Echoing the inevitability of her son's marriage plot, Stella determines that her own love story could only end with epistemological certainty—with hearing the truth from Robert's own lips. Epistemological certainty is, after all, the object of desire in spy novels and, in Bowen's novel, it is what is substituted for tidy endings and containable narrative scope in the country house novel.

Stages and Frames

Roderick's inevitable marriage plot and Stella's pseudo-marriage plot gesture to the influence of the Austenian country house tradition in the *The Heat of the Day*—it is an influence which I am suggesting permeates the novel through the interplay of stages and frames. Bowen's narrator uses frames metaphorically to describe the interactions between these performative characters. One exemplary scene occurs before Stella's visit to Mount Morris. After yet another showdown between the two, Harrison sits "[i]n her chair an image of amazement" before, losing his temper, "burst[ing] right out of the picture"[100] and into a consciously dramatic scene. Once their argument dies down, Bowen stages her masterful conflation of "frame and stage" as Stella and Harrison stand in the dark, "between the window-frame and the [blackout] curtains," explaining that "[t]hese two, though fated to speak again, could be felt to be depersonalized speakers in a drama which should best of all have

[100] Ibid., 151.

remained as silent as it essentially was."[101] The staginess of this scene is absolutely essential for the forthcoming Mount Morris scene. Stella cannot trust Harrison or even bear his gaze because of "his failure to have or let her give him any possible place in the human scene. By the rules of fiction, with which life to be credible must comply, he was as a character 'impossible'—each time they met, for instance, he showed no shred or trace of having been continuous since they last met."[102] For "human scene" here we can substitute "the realism of the novel." As opposed to a character in a novel, in written fiction, Harrison's entrances into Stella's narrative are characterized as "appearances" with the specific qualification: "'Appearance,' in the sense used for a ghost or actor."[103] For Stella, at this point in the novel, Harrison belongs only to the *stage*—a different medium than the *book* that represents her "real" romantic relationship.

In contrast to Harrison, she has categorized her relationship with Robert as a book; Chapter V opens with the lines, "What the inheritance came to be for Roderick, Robert was for Stella—a habitat. The lovers had for two years possessed a hermetic world, which, like the ideal book about nothing, stayed itself on itself by its inner force."[104] Within *The Heat of the Day*, there is another conceptualized book to compare with Stella's and Robert's love: Mount Morris. Stella's life is a "chapter missing from this book"[105]—as a divorcée, Stella initiates a modern love story that deviates from the marriage plot that Roderick's inheritance promises. But if this description of her personal book of love sounds suspiciously hollow—"the ideal book about nothing"—that's because it is:

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[101] Ibid., 154.

[102] Ibid., 155.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., 97.

[105] Ibid., 194.

Stella has radically miscategorized her lovers and she realizes this when Harrison, "ghost or actor," is placed within the country house book of Mount Morris. As the butler tells Stella, Harrison used to visit Mount Morris and chat into the night with Cousin Francis in "the book-darkening room" of the library. Having met Harrison at Cousin Francis's funeral, Stella had assumed that Harrison's story about knowing Cousin Francis was fabricated—now she realizes that the "last London meeting between the two must have been continuation of *some* actual story, however cock-and-bull,"[106] putting him firmly in the Mount Morris narrative—in the book. This realization solidly indicates to Stella that she has miscategorized the men competing for her love. And so, Stella's revelation that Robert is a traitor is also a revelation of medium: he is not the prose character she thought him to be but the actor that Harrison originally accused him of being—one whose continuousness beyond (Stella's) narrative gaze has betrayed us with its dual-identity. When an actor is off stage, he is a different person—not his character, but himself. Harrison's actions outside Stella's gaze prove continuous with his claims—he really has spent time with Uncle Francis. Robert, on the other hand, is like the actor: a different person off stage than the character presented before Stella and the reader.

At Mount Morris, Stella can no longer ignore the intimations that Robert is an actor which were glimpsed during her visit to his family's home, Holme Dene, shortly before her trip to Ireland. At Holme Dene, frames play a large part in underscoring Robert's deceptive acting. In his childhood bedroom, "sixty or seventy photographs . . . had been passepartouted or framed"[107] dominating the scene.[108] "All of the photographs featured Robert," and they tie together everything that went wrong

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[106] Ibid., 189.

[107] Ibid., 127.

[108] Passepartout is a kind of frame which might refer to an ornamental mat or a picture framed between a piece of glass and a piece of cardboard and adhered using adhesive strips—either of tape or gum paper. It is unclear from the passage what technique the Kelways used for the pictures which have been passepartouted, but it seems to

to make him a traitor: his narcissism, fanned by his mother and sister who hung the frames in the first place, and the photography hobby which offered an adolescent Robert "an alibi, a dark room whose door he could respectably lock, and more or less free pass out, for technical requirements"[109] to escape the surveillance of Holme Dene. "Photographer" is a part that Robert plays as he perfects his acting, duping those who should know him best: his mother and sister. The photography itself also contains a theatrical element—as Raphael Samuel puts it, "Any photography, whether or not it aspires to the status of art, has hidden aesthetics. Framing is necessarily theatrical, and, as on the proscenium stage, what it leaves out, accidentally or by design—not least the photographer, sometimes the missing interlocutor and always the impresario responsible for the mise-en-scène—may be more germane to the progress of the drama than what is offered to the viewer's gaze."[110] Robert's presence in all of his pictures draws even more attention to him as the "impresario responsible for the mise-en-scène" of his own image.

There is a spatial interplay between the frame and the theater at work in Robert's bedroom as well. Moving away from these unsettling pictures of Robert, Stella positions herself at the window and he tells her that Holme Dene is up for sale. She expresses her dismay on Robert's behalf but, before he replies, the narrator notes "[f]rom this attic height you looked through the tops of trees; their illusion of forestlike density was gone…Seen through the transparent dusk the pattern of flowerbeds in the lawn looked impermanent."[111] Framed by this attic window, the land gives away

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indicate a simpler kind of framing since seventy frames would be visually cumbersome as well as expensive. Thus, the passepartouted photographs gesture toward the thriftiness of the Holme Dene household.

[109] Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 288.

[110] Raphael Samuel, "Scopophilia," in *Theatres of Memory,* ed. Alison Light (London: Verso, 1994), 364; Samuels goes on to describe the choreography of the country house picnic and other performative country house scenes documented by photography.

[111] Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 133.

the impermanence of their household before Robert can express his lack of concern. Robert tells her what she has already glimpsed: "Everything was brought here from somewhere else, with the intention of being moved again—like touring scenery from theatre to theatre. Reassemble it anywhere: you get the same illusion."[112] That "illusion" refers to the relentless middle-class practice of aristocratic emulation. The architecture of Holme Dene might conjure up visions of Tudor England, but it is clearly built in 1900. But although middle-class homes like Holme Dene add another layer of theatricality to the architectural history of country houses, Bowen suggests that houses divorced from an inherited landscape go too far. Holme Dene's foil is Mount Morris, which is described in terms of immortality, continuity, and tradition; it is conceptualized as one long book rather than just an ephemeral production. Although Mount Morris is as theatrical as Holme Dene, it is built as a monument to express the family's connection to the land; therefore this "book"—symbolizing inherited land—gives Mount Morris's theatricality weight, meaning, and longevity. By contrast, Holme Dene is a vehicle without the tenor of landed wealth. Accordingly, Robert grows up and is shaped by an empty signifier—by a theatricality that lacks a tradition or underlying meaning and is, therefore, merely an "illusion."

Beside the "real" landed gentry of Stella's family, Robert's home is a sham; even worse, the Victorian morals of earnestness and honesty backfire in Holme Dene and *create* in Robert a traitorous spy. Neil Corcoran describes Holme Dene as "one of the most heavily moralized houses even in Elizabeth Bowen, with its rebarbatively alienating spaces, its kitsch garden, its 'swastika-arms of passage leading to nothing'—we are offered, and chillingly, a convincing genealogy for the development of a fascist sensibility and psychology."[113] Robert thinks back on his childhood and

[112] Ibid.

[113] Corcoran, 176-7.

notes that the home's now largely unoccupied upper floors are "not hollow, being flock-packed with matter—repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges, and fibs."[114] In the maze of hallways, the children had learned to listen for and avoid one another; they prepared for meals together by "working on their faces the required expression of having nothing to hide."[115] In fact, the house all but gives Robert away long before he confesses to Stella, at the moment the narrator notes those "swastika-arms"[116] of the passageway.[117]

Bowen's conception of a middle class that is unmoored and unpatriotic because it lacks ancestral landownership is problematic—it says more about her than it does about the middle class. But working within the logic of her novel, Holme Dene's shamminess, its unlandedness, offers Robert no point of continuity with his father, no patrilineal anchor, and no connection with his country, or native *land*.[118] When he is further alienated from the land, fighting on the continent, he is finally taken too far away: Dunkirk is the last straw. But when Stella protests that she never knew him before he was wounded at Dunkirk, Robert clarifies:

> I was born wounded; my father's son. Dunkirk was waiting there in us—what a race! A class without a middle, a race without a country. Unwhole. Never earthed in—and there are thousands of thousands of us, and we're still breeding—breeding what? You may ask. I ask.

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[114] Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 287.

[115] Ibid., 288.

[116] Ibid., 289.

[117] The tyranny, vigilance, and rigidity of Holme Dene appear to be in the line with other Victorian middle-class homes of this type; it is very much like the house in Hove that Alison Light describes Ivy Compton-Burnett growing up in. See Light's chapter, "Demon in the House," in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars*, 20-60 (New York; London: Routledge, 1991).

[118] Corcoran claims that it is the mother's "bullying antagonism" and the "spinelessness" of both the house and his father (Corcoran, 176) that causes Robert to turn to fascism in a reaction against the wartime propaganda that glossed over the terrors at Dunkirk (Ibid., 177). This reading ties in nicely to the end of the novel, which Corcoran notes begins to use the patriotic first person plural more and more, and notes that Bowen's line on the secrecy of Robert's death, "the country was spared a demoralising story," ties into the ironic propagandistic echoes throughout the novel (Ibid., 179).

> Nothing to hold, nothing to touch. No source of anything in anything. I could have loved a country, but to love, you must have.[119]

Social mobility has created a world that no longer fits the romance that anchors English loyalty to England: there is no room in the metaphorical "book" of the country estate for the Holme Denes. Nor, Bowen suggests, is common land enough. In this way, she conceptualizes the relationship between a theatrical class and the land in a way that is quite different from the communal pageant ethos of *Between the Acts*.

As an Anglo-Irish writer, Bowen would have been even more attuned to the emotional and political necessity of land ownership—she was born one generation after the Land War (1879-1881), and the Irish government was still in the process of helping its citizens to repossess their land from their historically rack-renting Anglo-Irish landlords.[120] Her own father spent sixteen years writing a "monument" of a book called *Statutory Land Purchase in Ireland*.[121] She ultimately sold Bowen's Court to a farmer and, although disappointed that he knocked down the building, was evidently at peace with the redistribution of the land. In *Bowen's Court*, she writes, "[w]ithout putting up any plea for property—unnecessary for it is unlikely to be abolished—I submit that the power-loving temperament is more dangerous when it either prefers or is forced to operate in what is materially a void. We have everything to dread from the dispossessed."[122] Through her characterization of

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[119] Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 307.

[120] For more on the legislative, financial, and political pressures of Anglo-Irish big houses, see Terence Dooley, "The Destruction of the Country House in Ireland, 1879-1973)" in *Lost Mansions: Essays on the Destruction of the Country House*, ed. James Raven, 44-62 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.) The first major piece of legislation was the Land Act of 1881—its "provision for the establishment of the Irish Land Commission, with statutory power to adjudicate on fair rents, infringed on previously sacrosanct landlord property rights" (Ibid., 46) and decreased the rents by 21% throughout the country. But the Wyndham Land Act of 1903 was the first major incentive landlords had to sell their land since it "provided a generous 12 per cent cash bonus to landlords who agreed to sell their estates" (Ibid., 49).

[121] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 444.

[122] Ibid., 455.

Robert, she draws out the "power-loving temperament" of a man who is dispossessed; a landless man who has "[n]othing to hold, nothing to touch. No source of anything in anything."

Bowen cautions against carrying the theatricality of the country house away from its geographical anchor. If the institution of the country house is no longer supportable, it is better to make "a clean end,"[123] as she later writes when Bowen's Court is razed by its new owner. In *The Heat of the Day*, as in the burning of Danielstown at the end of *The Last September*, Bowen shows the country house as an insupportable and potentially dangerous institution within an emulative culture. Thus, the novel is another part of her long goodbye to the country house—but in saying goodbye, she also shows us the complex tradition of contained theatricality we lose when we move away from the space.

The Drawing Room Tradition

Bowen understands that Jane Austen was able to bring the English novel to its point of nearest perfection because of the contained theatricality of the microcosmic country house.[124] Yet Bowen recognizes that inheriting Austen in the twentieth century requires her to adapt the stage and the frame *to* "more worlds." Therefore, the knowable world ruptures, escapes the gaze of the novel, and Shakespeare's trope, "All the world's a stage," breaks apart and multiplies: "War's being global meant it ran off the edges of maps; it was uncontainable. What was being done, for instance, against the Japanese, was heard of but never grasped in London. There were too many theatres of war."[125]

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[123] Ibid., 459; Bowen revised her "Afterword" when the book was reissued in 1963 to address the unexpected end of Bowen's Court.

[124] Raymond Williams, Mark Girouard, Clive Aslet, and Bowen herself all use this term, "microcosmic," to describe the country house.

[125] Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 348.

The Mount Morris section of *The Heat of the Day* is a respite from the uncontained theatricality of war-torn modernity—the estate's microcosmic constrictions throw into relief the complications of the present day and allow Stella to see the present, past, and future in a clearer light. Accordingly, a purely aesthetic constriction—a frame—suddenly reveals the performative and material traditions of the drawing room that Stella's generation has abandoned. These traditions include nonverbal women's traditions, like needlework, and the performance tradition of sung lays.

After her revelation about Harrison and Robert in the library, Stella, on a whim which annoys the servants, decides to move into the drawing room. At first she thinks it "sad…that a drawing room should have so little power over a woman";[126] however, as soon as she glimpses herself in the mirror, once she sees herself *framed* in the drawing room, "she became for the moment immortal as a portrait. Momentarily she was lady of the house, with a smile moulded against the drapery of darkness. She wore the look of everything she had lost the secret of being."[127] Doubly framed by the theatrical "drapery of darkness," she is able to see the "illusion" that drove Aunt Nettie—the last lady of the house—to Wisteria Lodge, a mental healthcare facility. There, the narrator suggests that Nettie is acting "mad" to escape the constrictions of Mount Morris, noting "Hamlet had got away with it; why should not she?"[128] The sad irony is that Wisteria Lodge is a converted country house and it seems Nettie hasn't escaped the theatricality of the drawing room after all. At least she is allowed to keep her own collection of postcards unframed—free from the constrictions that weighed upon her. But back in the drawing room, Stella can finally see the "society

[126] Ibid., 193.

[127] Ibid., 193.

[128] Ibid., 240.

of ghosts"[129]—the past generations of her own class—on their own terms and in their own place. It's important to remember that although Stella's "extraction" was from the "gentry till lately owning, still recollecting, land,"[130] she has only visited Mount Morris once, on her honeymoon, and soon after divorced her husband. On her own family's side, a "handsome derelict gateway opening on to grass and repeated memorials round the walls of a church"[131] seem to be the only remainders of her ancestral estate. Therefore, when she thinks about Nettie, oppressed by "Virtue" and "Honour," Stella still believes that "her kind knew no choices, made no decisions—or, did they not?"[132] Framed and contextualized, Stella finally realizes:

> Everything spoke to them—the design in and out of which they drew their needles; the bird with its little claws drawn to its piteously smooth breast, dead; away in the woods the quickening strokes of the axes, then the fall of the tree; or the child upstairs crying out terrified in its sleep. No, knowledge was not to be kept from them; it sifted through to them, stole up behind them, reached them by intimations—they suspected what they refused to prove. That had been their decision. So, there had been the cases of the enactment of ignorance having become too much, insupportable inside those sheltered heads. Also in this room they had reached the climax of their elation at showing nothing.[133]

The narrator's description of an "enactment of ignorance" by largely nonverbal women is, in part, a harsh critique of Stella's and Bowen's dying class. But it also acknowledges a theatrical tradition and material knowledge transmitted through the generations and dependent upon place, upon the drawing room. On the surface, this passage, which emphasizes the nonverbal nature of these ladies, seems completely nonliterary—but consider the rich tradition of women's textiles as text within literature extending back to classical mythology where weaving is "the sign-making activity of

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[129] Ibid., 193.

[130] Ibid., 125-6.

[131] Ibid., 126.

[132] Ibid., 193.

[133] Ibid., 193-4.

women *par excellence*."[134] During the Elizabethan era, the influential Bess of Hardwick built Hardwick Hall on the property she inherited from her father to display her independence, wealth, and authority. Hardwick Hall is unmistakably a powerhouse that, from the outside, displays her initials from the turrets and, on the inside, is filled with priceless tapestries and embroideries. Bess is said to have supervised much of the needlework herself—when she was Mary, Queen of Scots's jailer, Mary lent Bess the expertise to execute what Susan Frye calls "the most ambitious known artwork produced by a woman in the early modern period."[135] Created while she was still living with her fourth husband at Chatsworth and later transferred to Hardwick, these tapestries used an appliqué technique to rework costly ecclesiastical vestments, seized during the dissolution of the monasteries, into depictions of female exemplars and their attendant virtues. Bess modeled the chaste Penelope, the wiliest weaver of the classical world, after herself.[136]

More specifically, the "design in and out which they drew their needles; the bird with its little claws drawn to its piteously smooth breast, dead"[137] recalls the twelfth-century lay, "Laüstic," by Marie de France. Set in a castle—the precursor to the country house—a lady falls in love with a neighboring knight and she uses the nightingale outside her window as her alibi for lingering there at all hours, hoping to glimpse her beloved.[138] Not at all fooled, her husband bids the servants to kill

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[134] Ann Bergren, *Weaving Truth: Essays on Language and the Female in Greek Thought*, Hellenic Studies 19 (Washington, D.C.; Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University; Harvard University Press, 2008), 16-17.

[135] Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 60.

[136] Ibid., 62. See also Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, new ed., (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

[137] Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 193.

[138] The nightingale is another symbol of feminine expression stretching back to the weaving myth of Philomela and Procne. See Patricia Klindienst, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours," in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World*, ed. Laura McKlure, 257-92 (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2008).

the nightingale and presents it to his wife. Lest her beloved think her unfaithful, she wraps the dead nightingale in a cloth "embroidered and inscribed"[139] so that he will know what has occurred. The lay of Marie de France is a powerful expression of the material tradition that is embedded within the canon of women's stories; it is a canon which faces the challenge of incorporating this "unspoken" dimension into its literature. Furthermore, the reference to Marie de France is also a reference to the performative medium of the lay—a precursor to the musical drawing room performances of later centuries. Finally, the allusion relocates the origin of the country house love story even further back from the marriage plot novel and fixes it to a tale of marital dissatisfaction more suitable to Stella's twentieth-century romance. It reminds us that there is a dimension of the lay that has been lost because its performance has not been transmitted along with its lyrics, or text.

Once Stella enters the drawing room, she seems to fully realize what she has given up by opting out of the country house story. The canon features the country house and the country house is featured within the canon from the very beginning of women's authorship in England. By moving away from this structure, Stella's generation has jeopardized their literary continuity: "That her own life should be a chapter missing from this book need not mean that the story was at an end—at a pause it was, but perhaps a pause for the turning-point?"[140] The modernist in Stella—who inhabits city flats and dines in London restaurants—recognizes that, in their innovations in experimental literature and abstract architecture, they have left the country house ethos behind. In leaving the country house behind, they have also abandoned the material tradition of women's knowledge transmitted through textiles, furnishings, the showmanship of the drawing room, and the literature by women that incorporates all of these nonliterary elements into itself. On the next page, Stella

[139] Marie de France, "Laüstic," trans. Judith Shoaf, accessed May 15, 2019, http://users.clas.ufl.edu/jshoaf/Marie/laustic.pdf, 2001, l. 136.

[140] Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 194.

worries that the drawing room will fail to hold meaning for her daughter-in-law because Stella's generation "had broken the link."[141] For Roderick's wife, "The room would be to be marveled at, nothing more than that. Of how much, of what, or by whom, the entering smiling newcomer had been disembarrassed she never would know—the fatal connection between the past and the future having been broken before her time."[142] The performative transmission of the traditions of the drawing room is vital—these traditions cannot just be inscribed, they must also be enacted to stay alive. The "fatal connection" of the woman to the book of the country house is, above all, performative.

The narrator ends on a semi-positive note—not that the book can continue, but that the next generation will arrange the objects of the drawing room to "the theme of a new song."[143] But this only preserves them as objects, not as objects within a tradition: "Required to mean what they had not, old things would be pushed into a new position; those that could not comply . . . would go."[144] However, the drawing room's musical future gestures back to its distant origin in Marie de France's lay and to the novel's starting point, *Between the Acts*, and the "crooning women" of Isa's poetry. Isa, too, focuses on the "the burden . . . laid on me in the cradle; murmured by waves; breathed by restless elm trees; crooned by singing women; what we must remember; what we would forget."[145] Isa's poetry is hidden in the account book—and country house account books are where Woolf suggests we might recover the life of everyday Elizabethan women. However, Bowen

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[141] Ibid., 195.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Ibid.

[145] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 106.

suggests that no textual traces will ever be enough to recover the performative transmission of the country house drawing room's material knowledge.

A World of Love

In her next novel, Bowen indicates her intention to pick up the thread of *The Heat of the Day* in her first sentence, which reads, "The sun rose on a landscape still pale with the heat of the day before." *A World of Love* (1954) concludes her metacommentary on country house theatricality by presenting a novel that takes place almost entirely within two Anglo-Irish country houses and their demesnes, thereby demonstrating what such a strictly contained stage, or frame, can still accomplish in the modern novel—and what it cannot. The tightening of this formal frame indicates a heightened metafictionality; although the social and cultural traditions behind the Anglo-Irish Big House are still important, they have all but disappeared from the active memory of the novel's characters. Instead, we see them interacting with the "continuous, semi-physical dream" that "runs on most through a family living in one place."[146] We are left with a defunct, residual country house theatricality which, ultimately, no longer functions to find the marriageable young woman a suitable (alive) love interest. Like the ghost that Jane falls in love with, this twilight country house theatricality is fostered in part by the material memory of its spaces, in part by the untrained actors in these spaces. Thus, *A World of Love* returns to the theatrically-infused drawing room and dining room and, once again, the novel substitutes epistemological certainty for the love story. This time, however, the epistemological uncertainty is literalized in the form of the epistles—the love letters from Guy, the former country house owner, to an unknown beloved.

[146] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 451.

A World of Love features a postwar Anglo-Irish country house called Montefort and the complicated relationship of its inheritors following the death of its intended heir, Guy, in the First World War. His cousin, Antonia, inherits—she is a middle-aged famous photographer who prefers city life. Through flashbacks, we learn that during the interwar period she invited Guy's hapless and bereft fiancée, Lilia, to marry their illegitimate relation, Fred, who can at least keep up Montefort's farm in exchange for free rent and Antonia's ability to drop in at any time. Lilia and Fred have two daughters, Jane and Maud, who are 18 and 11 respectively when the novel opens. Antonia has taken an interest in Jane especially, has directed her schooling, and has apparently selected Jane as her heir. With this complicated backstory in place, the narrative is set in motion when Jane finds a set of love letters in a trunk in the attic. Although the letters are from Guy, they are not addressed to Lilia although Jane assumes that they must be. The letters prompt a series of flashbacks as the elder generation—Lilia, Fred, and Antonia—try to come to terms with the lingering entanglements of Guy's affairs. In the meantime, a new tenant, Lady Latterly, has moved into a nearby castle and hosts a summer fete that recalls the pageant of Woolf's *Between the Acts*. At the fete, Lady Latterly meets Jane and invites her to dinner at her home. For Jane, this is her chance to "come out," as well as to ask more questions about her cousin, Guy, with whom she is falling in love via the letters. As Jane is ready to fall in love, and perilously close to falling in love with the ghost of Guy's memory, her mother must come to terms with her own first love's infidelity and lay the same ghost to rest in order find peace with her husband.

As in *The Heat of the Day*, the novel's theatricality is evident right away: Jane, the protagonist, makes her appearance on the first page wearing an Edwardian gown and walking toward the obelisk to re-read an old love letter she's found just found in the attic. The narrator notes that "her height and something half naïve half studied about her management of the sleeves and skirts made her like

a boy actor in woman's clothes."[147] The novel is filled with Shakespearean references and ends with a verbatim line from *As You Like It*. The explicitly theatrical scene of Lady Latterly's drawing room underpins the implicitly theatrical scenes back at Montefort, the country house of Jane's family, and the narrator constantly uses dramatic terms to describe the characters and country house settings.

By "confin[ing] [her] art in the bounds of a world [she] knows"[148] in *A World of Love*, Bowen creates a highly wrought masterpiece that showcases the confluence of the country house, the stage, and the textual love story. Despite this love story, and although it plays up the prewar throwback tropes of country house novels like *Brideshead Revisited*, *A World of Love* does not live up to the saccharine nostalgia for country house romance suggested by its title. The house feels increasingly claustrophobic and its decrepitude is increasingly visible as the novel progresses; for example, the narrator remarks, "Now it was not so much that the decay was more rapid or widespread, but that it was apparent—out it stood."[149] When we reach the final scene where the sisters are driven to the airport, we feel, with them, the shock of the new, paved road and the alien, clinical modern building of the Dublin airport. On the journey, they drive "into the scenery"[150] and beyond the frame of the country house stage to meet the *deus ex machina*, the plane, that solves Jane's otherwise unsolvable love story.[151]

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[147] Elizabeth Bowen, *A World of Love*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 10.

[148] Regarding the Irish country house, Bowen similarly wrote: "Life in these house-islands has a frame of its own" (Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 20).

[149] Bowen, *A World of Love*, 97.

[150] Ibid., 142.

[151] The plane-as-deus ex machine is no great innovation on Bowen's part—in *Cold Comfort Farm* three planes arrive from the sky to solve various dilemmas and whisk characters away in the final scene, humorously re-emphasizing the trope.

Until this last-page resolution, there is also a contest between tragedy and comedy at play. A creeping sense of foreboding surrounds Jane as the novel progresses; for example, in the final scene the narrator notes, "The girl made one of her beautiful blind impatient movements, perhaps the last,"[152] suggesting that Jane is about to meet her death rather than her future lover. Furthermore, most of the Shakespearean allusions in this novel are to his tragedies. We see this in the theatrical scene of Lady Latterly's dining room:

> 'Well, I can't stand Mamie being Lady Macbeth.'
> 'No,' Peregrine said, 'You've got this all mixed up with Ophelia.'
> 'Oh well, Ophelia; just as you like. I suppose you know Ophelia was raving mad?'[153]

The phrase "just as you like" is couched between these humorous and jumbled references to *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and is a close echo to *As You Like It*. This foreshadows the allusion that concludes the novel and settles the contest between tragedy and comedy as soon as Jane meets Lady Latterly's guest, Richard Priam, at the airport. When Richard exits the plane and they see each other for the first time, the narrator remarks, "They no sooner looked but they loved" and the novel ends. Like Celia's and Oliver's romance, Jane's and Richard Priam's is elided and subordinated to a larger metafictional comedy of itinerant love letters and role playing.

The procedures of the stage unite with the page from the start of the novel, and Jane's romance with romance is conceptualized both through the narrator's theatrical vocabulary and through Jane's playacting. Jane is enchanted with the prelapsarian Edwardian romance of the original country house heir, Guy, and the unknown recipient of the love letters. In an intense enactment of readerly empathy Jane "[f]all[s] in love with a love letter;"[154] dressing up in costume

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[152] Bowen, *A World of Love*, 148.

[153] Ibid., 66.

[154] Ibid., 39.

and going to the landmarks identified in the letters, she puts herself in the role and in the *places* of Guy's love-interest, the absent protagonist of this narrative. When Jane accuses her younger sister of spying on her while reading the letters, Maud replies, "I didn't bother to watch you, I simply saw you. But you performed as though you meant to be watched."[155] The house holds onto its theatrical legacy as well as its love letters, and it seems that Jane has fallen as much in love with playacting as she has with Guy.

Jane's playacting and Guy's writing form two aporian vacancies that propel the narrative forward through the mechanics of pure desire: we want to find a living love interest for Jane and also discover the identity of the letters' addressee. At the same time, Bowen unsettlingly distills the essence of falling in love as she depicts Jane, a present person, becoming more and more enamored with the absent, ghostly, and vacuously named Guy. The interplay between these two reaches its climactic intensity during Lady Latterly's dining room and drawing room scenes—and it bears repeating that these two rooms share an architectural origin in the theatrical great hall.

Since Lady Latterly has purchased the castle, she is in charge of continuing the annual Hunt Fête, "which drew the entire country, [and] was now the sole festivity of the lonely year."[156] This is a social scene reminiscent of the pageant in *Between the Acts*—although it does not feature an actual play, the Fête "had as backdrop the stucco face of the castle" and Antonia shows up "playing her part of fame." [157] It also recalls the theatrical language of *The Heat of the Day*, as the narrator relates, "The Danbys 'appeared' at it…There they were, still themselves, still alive; forgotten since their time

[155] Ibid., 49.

[156] Ibid., 28.

[157] Ibid., 29.

last year they had gone on existing."[158] We are reminded of Harrison "appearing" like a ghost or an actor in *The Heat of the Day* as Bowen once again uses scare quotes to draw out attention to the word "appeared" in this passage. At the Fête, Lady Latterly sees Jane and decides to invite her over for dinner the next evening. When Jane arrives, she is instructed to go upstairs to Lady Latterly's bedroom to help her get ready and the young woman is annoyed since she "would have liked to wait downstairs in the drawing-room whose theatrical emptiness had been glimpsed through an open door as she was conducted past it."[159] Jane patiently endures Lady Latterly's conversation and brightens up considerably when she pulls on her bright yellow-chiffon dress: "Jane's spirits mounted: this *was* what one had come for! For the girl tonight was in a mood for the theatre, and for that only—what else, as a finale to her inconceivable day, was to be endured? Here she was, spirited out of Montefort into this foreign dimension of the castle, in which nothing, no one could be unreal enough."[160] Although Montefort contains its own performative elements, including a drawing room arranged so that "the effect, according to mood, was that there had lately been a catastrophe or that there was about to be a performance,"[161] Jane needs a country house that is sufficiently unfamiliar to act out the bizarre love she has formed for her deceased cousin.

The material memory of Lady Latterly's dining rooms enables Guy—ghost or actor—to nearly make his appearance. However, the performative memory of these spaces has all but disappeared from the consciousness of the characters, except for Lady Latterly's improvisations. Only one member of the dinner party has frequented these spaces since the Edwardian Era—

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[158] Ibid., 28.

[159] Ibid., 56.

[160] Ibid., 57.

[161] Ibid., 31.

Terence, an old man. He possesses the innate performativity of the Anglo-Irish: "His exaggeration of his bravado, his brogue, himself was less exactly deliberate than he fancied—how much was acting, how much second nature?"[162] He has undoubtedly been shaped by country house theatricality, and his impatience with his fellow dinner guests suggests that their amateurism annoys him. Jane presses him for information about Guy, but he does not answer her questions. Instead, he tells her, "You can buy up a lot; you can't buy up the past. What is it?—not even history. Goes to dust in your hand."[163] Terence refuses to invoke the past, but the dining room itself is ready to bring back Guy, who "had dined here often."[164]

In the dining room it becomes clear that the room has more agency than its present actors. An extra space has been set at dinner across from Jane and it unsettles everyone. Lady Latterly explains that the butler must have thought Priscilla was coming—an unattributed speaker asks, "Are you sure he thought it was for Priscilla?"[165] A minor squabble ensues where Lady Latterly, though clearly annoyed by the plate, cannot bring herself to have it removed and Peregrine, her lover, reminds her that she never invited Priscilla at all. Jane feels Guy's presence across from her in the empty chair and, "not a soul failed to feel the electric connection between Jane's paleness and the dark of the chair in which so far no one visibly sat. Between them, the two dominated the party. Or, so they acted on barbarian nerves. In this particular company, by this time in the evening, even counterfeit notions of reality had begun to wobble…Even Shakespeare had stalked in."[166] The very

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[162] Ibid., 63

[163] Ibid. Terence's words ("Goes to dust in your hand") echo Evelyn Waugh's darker country house novel, *A Handful of Dust* (1934).

[164] Ibid., 67.

[165] Ibid., 65.

[166] Ibid., 67.

theatricality of the dining room has the upper hand in this scene; for the dinner guests, it is chaotic and half-understood—just like their grasp of Shakespeare's plays.

Abandoning this lovely foray into the unremembered material memory of the drawing and dining rooms, Bowen returns to Jane's metafictional love story. Jane is a reader of the love story within Guy's letters and is attempting to put herself in the place of the heroine, like many novel readers before her—like Catherine Morland, for example, in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817). And, since Jane inhabits the same setting, Montefort, as the love story she is reading, there is an unsettling sense that she almost succeeds. But, as with a novel reader, the love that flourishes in her imagination can never be looked at directly—until Hollywood, we could never *see* Mr. Darcy in front of us. Accordingly, Guy's presence is only diminished when Jane looks directly at the chair. In his absence, he is even dearer than before: "That he had been with them, with her, was an unfettered fact—where is there perfection but in the memory?"[167] As a ghost, Guy is the perfect object of desire—literalized, but, crucially, not materialized. This point is underscored at the end of the scene when Peregrine advises Jane to metaphorically "make hay while the sun shines."[168] When Jane replies that she actually was making hay that morning, he pulls hayseed out of her hair, replying in a sad tone, "How literal of you."

In *A World of Love*, Bowen indicates that the marriage plot will not die, in part, because the younger generation will not cease to fall in love, nor cease to be enamored with the fantasy of a simpler, more romantic past. Moreover, as long as there is a country house, young women will fall in love with its heir—even if he has died in the war. Yet Bowen does all of this without depicting a love match. Instead, she stages a metafictional commentary on the hollowness of the country house

[167] Ibid., 70.

[168] Ibid., 71.

love story. Again, Guy's vague name suggests a role that will be filled and Jane's romantic finale feels like an inevitability—there is no question Jane will fall in love with a real person, but figuring out *who* that real person is pulls the plot forward, especially since her prospects are alarmingly limited. Guy's letters are responses to missing letters from his beloved, and the question of *who* the beloved actually is/was propels the plot forward in another direction**.** Jane's mother, Guy's former fiancée, is supposed to be the beloved, but when she sees them, she realizes that the letters are not to her. This complicates her strained marriage and strained, warped relationship to Guy's cousin and the heir of Montefort, Antonia, even further. Thus, the appearance of the letters both sparks a fictive prelapsarian romance for Jane and reveals the fiction of her mother's prelapsarian romance by revealing Guy's betrayal. For the older generation, the revelation of this betrayal is liberating—the necessity of letting go of Guy, the letters, and the past becomes clear and they face the present with renewed happiness and a mended marriage. Accordingly, the answer to both questions—who will Jane marry and who are these letters addressed to?—are found in characters beyond the scope of the country house.

Does this "letting go," then, extend to the country house novel? The end of *A World of Love* is ambiguous. Antonia threatens to bring Jane back to London and make her get a job but, before she departs, Lady Latterly sends for Jane. Waiting in the drawing room, Jane looks at the room in which she staged her best scene with Guy and sees the ghostly affair more clearly:

> Anybody's game, she had thought, breathlessly slowing down into one of those pacing, far-ranging circles in whose course Peregrine had found her—anybody's game! Though which of them, dead man and living, had been the player, and which the played-with? Either way, Jane seemed doomed to know that this dallying and being dallied-with had gone on long enough. The trouble was the aptitude for love—and, on top of that, hadn't her mother said that one never knew when or what at he might not laugh? And as for the world, who knew when *it* might not start laughing behind its hand? . . . So here now was Jane, through the instrumentality of Peregrine (acting under orders) biting upon the void in the whole story in this void, staled, trite and denying drawing-room—a goodbye is not what it's said to be, her mother'd said. Jane suffered nothing but dismay, but there are sometimes no bounds for that. She once or twice hammered with her fist to keep whatever it was down—then, rearing

> imperatively up among the cushions, reached a hand out for the martini. 'Do you think,' she put it to Peregrine, 'I could be a medium?'[169]

Jane is at a crossroads—between surrendering herself to the "society of ghosts" that Stella glimpsed in Mount Morris's drawing room as a medium, or leaving the "void, staled, trite and denying drawing-room" behind. Lady Latterly helps her along in her decision by sending her to Dublin, and it is here that we break free from the microcosm of the country house for the first time and, in a sense, go into the green world to the new, alien terrain of the modern airport to pick up a man from rugged Colorado.[170] Outside the country house but still firmly within the bounds of comedy, Jane breaks free from the constraints of a defunct society to find the romance she craves, just like a Shakespearean heroine. She and Richard will now return to civilization and, we assume, marry; but which civilization they will ultimately return to—the country house, London, or America—is Bowen's open-ended question. We only know that their first return is to Lady Latterly's theatrical drawing room. And so, *A World of Love* leaves us almost, but not quite, where we started at the end of *Between the Acts*.

Conclusion

In 1941, Woolf's *Between the Acts* sparked a metafictional discussion about the future of country house theatricality in the novel. Bowen brought her personal background to this discussion and continued it during the decade of horrifying loss for England's and Ireland's country houses. Bowen's novels are thoroughly engaged with the literary history of the country house novel, but also draw on the rich and complex performative traditions of the country house that she knew so well as the last heir to Bowen's Court. In 1963, she writes that her "family, though notably 'unhistoric,' had

[169] Ibid., 120.

[170] A "green world" in the Northrop Frye sense.

their part in a drama outside themselves. Their assertions, their compliances, their refusals as men and women went, year by year, generation by generation, to give history direction, as well as colour and stuff."[171] Bowen knowledgeably incorporates this "colour and stuff" into her metafictional commentaries on genre in the novel. *A World of Love* is usually interpreted as Bowen's final goodbye to the country house—her way of making peace with a defunct institution and the loss of her own family home. But, as she tells us, "a goodbye is not what it's said to be."

We are almost certain to keep going back to the drawing room, especially now that films and television series have revivified country house literature and even the country houses themselves. Estates receive immediate and long-term compensation for their roles as film sets. Castle Howard is an iconic example of a country house that is inextricably linked to *Brideshead Revisited* and its film adaptations—its curators have even preserved some of the film sets as part of the house tour and several editions of *Brideshead Revisited* are available in the gift shop. In our contemporary world, country house novels, films, and estates have a symbiotic relationship to one another. Thus, it *is* a theatrical medium that preserves the country house—though it is not quite the same as the performative tradition that is all but lost.

In 2001, when Ian McEwan writes his own metafictional take on the country house novel, *Atonement*, he references a wide range of country house authors from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence.[172] But only one of these authors really walks into the book—and Bowen walks into *Atonement* via a letter. It is fitting that she makes her appearance in a novel that is framed by Briony's amateur theatricals—even more fitting that she should appear in one of her favorite media. This encouraging rejection letter is written by a fictionalized Cyril Connolly to Briony, who we learn at

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[171] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 452.

[172] See Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers: The English Country House in the Contemporary Novel*, Mediated Fictions 7 (Frankfurt Am Main, [Germany]: Peter Lang Edition, 2015), 219-238.

the end of the novel is the "author" of *Atonement*, and it discusses improvements for the first draft of the story we are reading. According to Connolly, Bowen walked into his magazine's office, took Briony's manuscript, and returned it with extensive feedback which he has paraphrased. The feedback Bowen provides for Briony's novella closely matches what happens in *Atonement*, so we must assume that Bowen has had a ubiquitous impact on the finished product in our hands. It is a tremendously apt way to conceptualize Bowen's pervasive influence on McEwan's theatrical country house novel—a novel that is built equally from a love story and from a plot of epistemological uncertainty. It is also a plot that wonders aloud about the ethics of the fictional happy ending it provides for Robbie and Cecelia. Peregrine, looking at McEwan with a frown, would say, "How literal of you."

Coda:

The Red Album

> There is a subtle magic which none can define and none deny about the physical connexion with the past. Why otherwise does a blue plaque upon a London house afford such intense satisfaction to the passer-by? Why else do we make detours from otherwise rational journeyings to see the room at Abbotsford where the pain-racked Walter Scott wrote at white heat to avert the duns of his publishers, why browbeat reluctant college porters to show us the rooms from which Lewis Carroll looked out on Alice, or gaze wistfully between the railings and the privet of No. 2, The Pines? The opening of Jane Austen's house at Chawton signifies more than the preservation of a red-brick house which was in danger of dilapidation. One might have thought that Hampshire itself—that orderly county which so successfully resisted the onslaught of the romantic movement, and whose social pattern of small squires and retired admirals has remained so little touched by time—would have been sufficient to recall the atmosphere of the novels. But the reverencing mind finds in that unpretentious little house a centre for its affections which the wider landscape does not somehow succeed in doing.[1]
>
> "Jane Austen and Chawton," Red Album

The passage above is from a newspaper article written to commemorate the opening of the Jane Austen's House Museum in 1949. In defiance of this unknown columnist's statement, I have tried to define the "subtle magic" of physical connections to literature "which none can define." But (with the exception of Bowen's Court) I haven't been looking for these connections in authors' houses—I've been looking for physical connections to literature through the architectural and material-cultural history of the country house.[2] That said, I am sure that the experience of home mattered to the authors in this study. As Gaston Bachelard wrote in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), the house is the place wherein all personal experience reaches epitome—where personal experience

[1] A penciled citation in the Red Album implies this newspaper clipping is from *The Times* or *TLS*, but I have been unable to locate an article in the archives that corresponds with the approximate date of the piece.

[2] For an excellent account of the effect authors' studies on their writing, see Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers That Shaped Them.* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

manifests in a poetic image that precedes conscious thought and does not require knowledge. The objects in the home are charged with mental experiences. Although this dissertation has not primarily been about the home as a personal space, it's evident that the phenomenology of home forms, in part, an author's psyche. As the author's brain fires its neurons and builds its synapses, it pulls from what she has felt and learned through personal experience and what she learned or observed from a distance. Between, in other words, the private experience of home and the "require[d] knowledge" of country houses and the canon. The country house novel links the public and the private knowledges of home, and it links the book to its literary past—to a tradition of reading that is both experiential and profoundly distant. To return to "Jane Austen and Chawton," the public and the private seem to be rigid distinctions in this columnist's mind: he writes that the relatively unchanged social landscape of Hampshire *should* "recall the atmosphere of the novels," but implies that the Hampshire social landscape is not enough. And yet it's not the "atmosphere of the novels" that one finds in Austen's cottage, either (with the exception of Barton Cottage in *Sense and Sensibility*). Rather, the cottage gathers within itself a more tenuous substance than a literary landscape: it (like a church) provides "the reverencing mind…a centre for its affections." It is certainly a place to honor, and to better understand, a woman who wrote novels; but is it a place to better understand those novels?

Throughout this dissertation, I have carved out another rigid distinction: I have been careful to delineate between literary traditions and material-cultural traditions. I have conceptualized Jane Austen as a progenitor of the *literary* genealogy of the country house novel.[3] In the last several pages,

[3] See Deidre Lynch's "At Home with Jane Austen," in *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, edited by Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner, 159-192 (Durham; London, Duke University Press, 1996) for a more thorough account of Austen's influence on, and formation within, the culture and commercial literature of the interwar period. Lynch unpacks the dynamics between the home and the literary canon, or, "the ideological work of Janeisms in interwar England, ideological work performed by a concept of the 'classical novel,' on the one hand, and widely circulated narratives about English homes and a home-loving other, on the other" (Ibid., 159).

I would like to discuss the *material-cultural* legacy of Jane Austen during the 1940s and beyond. As Katie Trumpener has argued, for novelists like Taylor and other "twentieth-century women novelists, Austen's influence pervades both the consciousness and the deep structure of their writing."[4] A "complex engagement with Austen's legacy" is particularly visible in the works published—and introductions solicited—by the Virago Press, launched in 1973, which has not only "worked to spark public interest in forgotten female modernists" but also "implicitly to establish Austen as the mother of 'their' viragos."[5] The preservation of Austen's home adds another layer of complexity to twentieth-century women novelists' engagement with Austen's legacy; Taylor was a member of the Jane Austen Society and Bowen was on the committee. As part of a more general cultural trend, the preservation of Chawton Cottage is another clear demonstration of the commitment to the physical during a time of great loss—and a renewed commitment to the literary traditions that physical things and places monumentalized. The preservation of Chawton Cottage suggests that, during the interwar years of the 1930s and war years of the 1940s, more and more booklovers decided that words were not enough: our heritage as readers extends to homes. Though fascinating, I don't want to repeat familiar arguments about the ways that Austen's cramped writing desk and small cottage affected her compact style—rather, I'd like to address the elitist, capitalist, and nationalist problems associated with country houses. After all, country houses don't just curate and preserve art and architectural history—they curate and preserve society, fortunes, and bloodlines. Although Austen is not as attuned to these problems as we are in 2019, I'll argue that a

[4] Katie Trumpener, "The Virago Jane Austen," in *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees*, ed. Deidre Lynch, 140-165 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 141; Bowen, Taylor, and Compton-Burnett are just a few of many twentieth-century women novelists engaging the Austenian tradition, as Virago's book list of 687 titles makes clear: "The Complete Virago Modern Classic Collection," accessed May 4, 2019, https://www.virago.co.uk/books/virago-modern-classics/the-complete-virago-modern-classic-collection/.

[5] Ibid., 144.

visit to Austen's country cottage makes *us* more attuned to her criticism of the country house society she describes.

I have been trying to find the article quoted above in a digital archive without much luck. I read it in a red scrapbook album at the Jane Austen's House Museum. It is not clear who compiled the album, but several clues indicate that it may have been put together by T. Edward Carpenter—who purchased the cottage on behalf of the nation—or by his wife. The Red Album forms the backbone of this coda; it contains newspaper clippings, pamphlets, letters, and photographs from the 1940s related to the foundation of the Jane Austen's House Museum (Figure 13). The album is itself a relic of midcentury Austenian conservation: a distillation of the movement to save Austen's home and to record the effort to save Austen's home. But let me back up and paint a clearer picture of the "red-brick house which was in danger of dilapidation" in 1940.

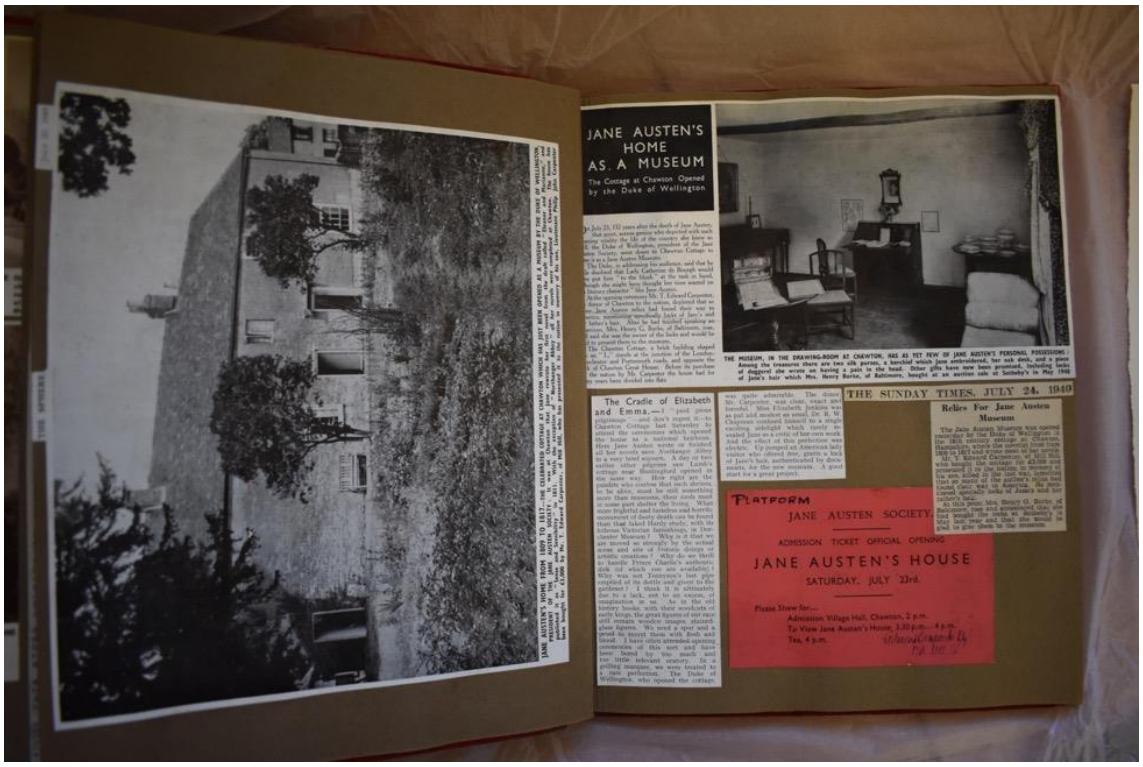

Figure 13: Details of the Red Album. Jane Austen's House Museum Archive. Author's photo.

Saving Chawton Cottage

About two hours south of London is a tiny village called Chawton after the entailed estate that was established in the thirteenth century there and which owned most of the property in the village until the twentieth century. Nearby is Alton, a more commercially robust town connected to the rail line. Dedicated Austen fans and locals knew that Jane had lived in a building known as Chawton Cottage in the center of the village. But, by 1940, that cottage was a tenement in ill repair. It was still owned by the descendants of Austen's brother, Edward Austen Knight, but, like all estates in the twentieth century, his was struggling to stay afloat after a steep increase in estate taxes and death duties. As a consequence, Knight (who seems to have been an otherwise generously lax landlord) could not carry out the necessary repairs to keep Chawton Cottage from falling into near-ruin. A local artist named Dorothy Darnell decided that something must be done: in 1940, she co-founded the Jane Austen Society with the novelist and Austen biographer Elizabeth Jenkins with the sole purpose of raising funds to acquire and preserve Jane Austen's home.

With a war on, salvaging Chawton Cottage should have been a hard sell. Major Edward Knight wasn't even home to discuss terms—he, too, was off fighting. But the final straw for Darnell, Jenkins later wrote, was finding a fire grate from Chawton Cottage's dining room on a scrap heap at the local forge.[6] Knight consented to sell the cottage to the society for £3,000—a daunting sum. They could not hope to fundraise the purchase price through membership fees, but instead rented the living room which "had been let to the Chawton Village Library, who kindly made way for [the Jane Austen Society]."[7] Wartime and postwar austerity must have made the Jane Austen Society wary of asking the public for money, but the house was becoming dangerously derelict, so

[6] Jane Austen Society, *The Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society, 1949-1965* (Overton, Hampshire: Jane Austen Society, 1990), ix.

[7] Ibid.

they wrote an appeal for funds to repair the cottage in *The Times* in December 1946. They raised £1,400 from mail-in donations and fixed the roof for £1,000. More importantly, they gained a benefactor: T. Edward Carpenter wrote to the society and offered to purchase the cottage for £3,000 on behalf of the nation and in memory of his son who was killed in battle in Trasimere in 1944. As long as the society agreed to install a memorial plaque to the soldier, the cottage was theirs.

As I have noted throughout this dissertation, wartime losses motivated the conservation of physical things, especially when those things were perceived to represent English heritage. The most obvious expression of this impulse in the Jane Austen's House Museum is, of course, that memorial to Carpenter's son, which is the first thing a visitor encounters when she walks through the entrance of the museum and into the drawing room. But the war also created a housing a shortage—a dilemma for the Jane Austen Society since the house came with tenants. Their public appeals had assured readers that they wanted, "to acquire [the] house and while keeping it in repair and the main part of it in use as living accommodation, to make those rooms which are definitely associated with Jane Austen accessible to the public." They maintained that turning the whole house into a museum "would hardly be suitable in the present housing shortage." This scheme worked at first, but only for a short amount of time: within a few years, all of the tenants were nudged on. For the last holdout, Annie Stevens, Carpenter actually bought a new property in Alton and moved her in.[8] The housing shortage was dire, but "reverencing minds" needed the space for worship.

[8] We also must remember that the triumph of the Austen society belied the dire circumstances of the Knight Estate—landlords are always loathe to sell their property, and Edward Richard Knight's fierce negotiations with Carpenter further suggests that his estate needed every penny. He certainly did not try to make ends meet by raising rent, which are described in nominal terms throughout the negotiations. But Knight's position was like most country estate owners in the twentieth century—especially after two wars of tax hikes and requisitioning. The solicitors, Bradly Trimmer & Son, wrote to Carpenter on 25th June 1947: "We have at last received an answer to our letter asking that the property should be defined on a plan showing exactly what we are paying. I enclose that plan, showing the part hatched in red as the property we are being offered. My only rely to the agents from whom I received the plan was, 'Do you really mean that that is what Mr. Knight was asking £3000 for.' We have not received any reply at present" (L., Carpenter Archive, Jane Austen's House Museum). These letters and plans

The articles cut-and-pasted into the Red Album repeatedly refer to literary tourists as "pilgrims" and their journeys to literary sites as "pilgrimages." I, however, did not experience a revelation at Jane Austen's House Museum when I visited it for the first time in 2007. Armed only with the novels, I saw Jane's desk. I walked into her bedroom. I didn't feel a thing. I snapped a picture, posted it to Facebook (then in its infancy), and went on with my life. I had a much more satisfying (though admittedly not religious) experience when I went back in 2018, thinking about interwar/midcentury women's writers. After reading many of Elizabeth Jenkins's polite and business-like Jane Austen Society letters in the Carpenter archive, I read her disturbingly brilliant novel, *Harriet* (1934), while serving as a docent in Mrs. Austen's bedroom. *Harriet* is a work of biographical fiction about an intellectually disabled heiress who is married and kept prisoner in the bedroom of a small country cottage not unlike the one I was sitting in—as a non-urban counterpoint to the pastoral, Jenkins showed a deep wellspring of potential evil in rural poverty. I found, to my surprise, letters from Bowen's personal secretary in the archive asserting her inability to serve as a trustee for the house museum but her enthusiasm for serving on the committee. Although I suspected that Ivy Compton-Burnett, who downplayed her own work's debt to Austen, wouldn't leave me a shred of discernible admiration for the Jane Austen's House Museum, I knew that Taylor wouldn't have resisted the site's pull. So, I looked, with blind faith, through the first log book for Elizabeth Taylor's name. I found it very quickly—she visited the house within a year of its opening. I took a picture; I posted it on Instagram (now in its heyday), and Elizabeth Taylor's granddaughter replied: "Oh wow! I'd know that handwriting anywhere. She was my grandma!"[9] I

go back and forth until Carpenter raises his price to three thousand pounds in order to buy a bigger piece of property, though he is still not satisfied with it.

[9] https://www.instagram.com/p/BkiHRpjj2pY/\.

didn't expect matrilineal inheritance to creep into my online picture gallery, but the world is now hyperlinked in unpredictable ways.

One reason that the Jane Austen's House Museum was so rewarding the second time around was because I walked through it as a reader of archives and not (just) as a reader of novels—a point I'll turn to at the end of this coda. The archives are a testament to the gargantuan effort made by T. Edward Carpenter, Dorothy Darnell, and other members of the Jane Austen Society to get the house museum on its feet.[10] The collected newspaper articles and letters of gratitude from members of the public (and from King George) testify to the widespread sense of relief that Austen's house was saved. Of course, Darnell's mission was like other literary crusades in the twentieth century: the Haworth Parsonage, in which the Brontë sisters lived and wrote, had recently been converted into a house museum. In the same week that Chawton Cottage opened its doors, Charles Lamb's house near Buntingford was also opened to the public. But the preservation of Jane Austen's cottage had an urgency to it because it was in peril and because it was so important to her writing career. Austen's family had been in a financially precarious position since her father had retired as rector of Steventon in 1801, relocating his wife and unmarried daughters to Bath—a city that Jane famously disliked. After his death in 1805, Jane, her sister Cassandra, and their mother moved to Southampton where they continued to struggle. Jane drafted, but was unable to publish, early versions of *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sense and Sensibility*. But Jane's brother inherited the Chawton Estate from a distant cousin and, in 1809, he brought the women back to the

[10] Even after T. E. Carpenter heroically stepped in to purchase the house, getting the contracts drawn up to everyone's satisfaction was an agonizingly slow process (made slower because of Carpenter's infamously illegible, but exquisitely elegant, handwriting). I read through many letters written between Carpenter and Darnell, Edward Knight (who sold him the cottage), the solicitors, the cottage's tenants, auction houses that had sold Austenian artifacts, the current owners of those artifacts, and the architect who was hired to repair the cottage.

Hampshire countryside and installed them in Chawton Cottage, today called the Jane Austen's House Museum. Jane, now in her thirties, revised and published *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* and wrote the rest of her novels from the comfort and stability of Chawton Cottage. Back in Austen's day, the entrance to the estate park was just opposite the cottage—visibly demonstrating the link of the cottage to the estate while remaining clearly distinct from the manor house's parkland (Figure 14). Edward not only owned their cottage, but he owned many of the cottages and most of the land in and around the village, collecting rents from tenants and selling lumber from his woodland to keep up with the costs of maintaining Chawton and his grander country seat in Kent, Godmersham Hall.[11]

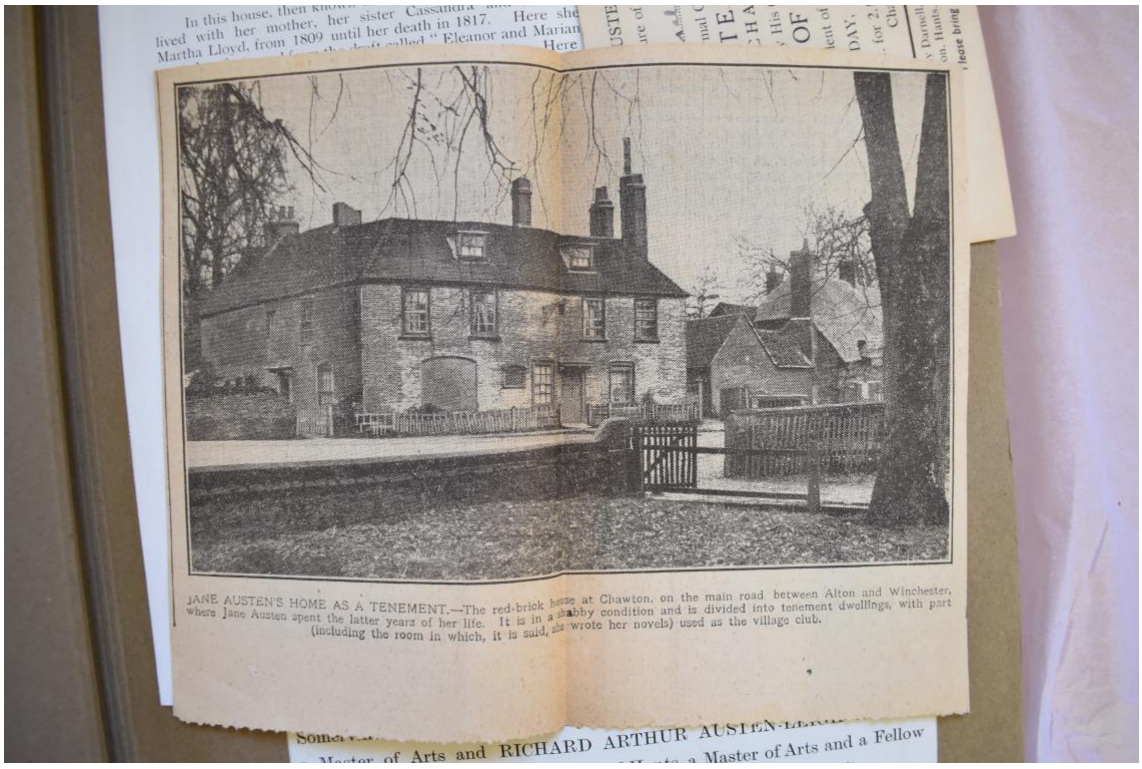

Figure 14: In this newspaper clipping from the *Sphere*, you can still see the drive from Chawton House across the street from the cottage. The wall is still there, but this is a car park and a public park now.

[11] See Linda Slothouber, *Jane Austen, Edward Knight & Chawton* (Gaithersburg, MD: Woodpigeon, 2015).

The paragraph above is my roundabout way of pointing out that Jane did not live in a country house though she visited them frequently. She brought the sharp insight of a near-outsider to the country house novel, penning her observations from her notoriously small chestnut writing desk in the dining room of the cottage across the street.[12] By now, the material conditions of her writing are well-known to Austen scholars and devoted fans. But when I was acting as a docent in 2018, a surprising number of visitors expressed surprise at the size of Jane Austen's house: they thought it was bigger. They thought she lived in a country house.

Heritage Trouble

There is often a wide gap between the idea of Jane Austen and the reality of Jane Austen, just as there is a wide gap between her movie-worthy plots and her ironic prose. Mike Crang has criticized the various fantasies and "displacements" of Jane Austen in the tourist industry, complaining that there are "imagined geographies produced through the text . . . which speak of a vanished English society."[13] Crang is reading Austen from a distance, more interested in the reception or appropriation of Austen for nationalistic expressions of heritage than in what her texts actually say. Austen has been mobilized by the tourist industry and reactionary nationalists alike to promote an idea of an island nation in the face of Britain's increasingly progressive and multicultural demographics.

The heritage of the country house is a fraught topic. As Crang explains, "[o]ne of the most

[12] Jane Austen's House Museum, "Writing Table," accessed May 9, 2019, https://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/jane-austens-writing-table.

[13] Mike Crang, "Placing Jane Austen, Displacing England: Touring between Book, History, and Nation," in *Jane Austen and Co: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Suzanne Pucci and James Thompson, 111-130 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 111.

cogent criticisms located a 'cult of the country house' as creating a symbolic heartland for this nostalgic English nationalism. The country house was a favored symbol for conservative commentators who could use it to stand for a stable, hierarchically ordered society that symbolized the 'English character.'"[14] I'd argue that the hierarchically ordered society was only appealing when it *wasn't* visible—a frequent criticism of Austen's books is that servants are practically invisible. The houses themselves structured the servants' invisibility—some architects even built tunnels underground so that the upper class didn't have to see their servants walking across the lawn.[15] In recent years, the National Trust and other country house museums have been working to heighten the visibility of servants—service room exhibits at Uppark and Petworth in Sussex are particularly impressive. While most houses have come around to talking about their servants, there is still some reluctance to talk about the exploitative labor practices, kept at a distance, that funded these houses. I was surprised when, at a November 2018 conference called "Reading the Country House," the room was divided over whether or not curators at Penrhyn Castle should make space in their interpretations to acknowledge the oppressed Welsh miners that dug out the English family's fortune from their own land.[16] During Attingham, one brave colleague asked every country house owner and curator she could find whether their properties had any connections to the slave trade or plantations. As when Fanny Price asks her uncle about the slave-trade in *Mansfield Park*, her question

[14] "One of the most cogent criticisms located a 'cult of the country house' as creating a symbolic heartland for this nostalgic English nationalism. The country house was a favored symbol for conservative commentators who could use it to stand for a stable, hierarchically ordered society that symbolized the 'English character.' In the country house, the Right promoted a set of 'virtues' as intrinsically English and associated them with a period of national 'success.' Various analyses indicated the symbolic centrality of the country house, which forms a disproportionate amount of preserved (and subsidised) landscape, archetypically located in a rural lowland landscape" (Ibid., 112-3).

[15] Castle Coole in Northern Ireland and Uppark House in Sussex are two notable examples of houses that have servant tunnels.

[16] It should also be noted that Richard Pennant, the 1st Baron Penrhyn, owned six sugar plantations in Jamaica, so a significant portion of the family's wealth was amassed through slavery.

often received a chilly or disinterested response:

> "Did not you hear me ask him about the slave-trade last night?"
>
> "I did—and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther."
>
> "And I longed to do it—but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like—I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel."

Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* that Fanny's remark is met with "dead silence" because "there simply is no common language" in which to discuss "both worlds"—historically, the country house is distanced from, and makes no effort to face, the plantation that materially supports. But we cannot just let Austen off the hook; Said explains that, "[i]n order to more accurately to read works like *Mansfield Park*, we have to see them in the main as resisting or avoiding that other setting, which their formal inclusiveness, historical honesty, and prophetic suggestiveness cannot completely hide. In time there would no longer be a dead silence when slavery was spoken of, and the subject became central to a new understanding of what Europe was."[17] Many literary critics have sprung to Austen's defense or added nuance to Said's critique; nevertheless, it was eerie to relive the scene over and again 202 years after the novel was published—at a time "when slavery was spoken of," supposedly. On the other hand, it was heartening to hear some curators and owners, like the Lascelles of Harewood House, respond candidly to the question. In fact, Harewood House sponsors an archive dedicated to slavery documents.[18] The Lascelles spoke frankly about how their family built their fortune on plantations and of the difficulty in visually representing that history in the house museum. The struggle to pull ugly labor practices into beautiful homes reminds us that the country

[17] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialsim*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 96.

[18] "Lascelles Slavery Archive," Harewood House, accessed May 9, 2019, https://www.york.ac.uk/projects/harewoodslavery/about.html.

house is designed to keep all other classes at a distance: as Crang writes, "the dominant frame is spatial and social exclusion where country houses reshaped the landscape around them, to both reflect and reinforce the exclusivity of the owners . . . The rather enclosed world of Austen reflected the power relations that enabled the wealthy to physically and socially distance themselves from the rural poor."[19]

We can't control bad readings of Jane Austen by racist conservatives, but we can't ignore them, either.[20] In recent years, nationalists have once again coopted Austen as a patron saint of whiteness. Shortly after Brexit, she made a celebrated debut on British currency to commemorate the bicentennial of her death. Certainly, misreadings of her novels and her politics could be prevented by more careful analyses of those novels. But these misreadings (and other, less offensive ones) would also be prevented by a more robust knowledge of the material conditions of her life. The Jane Austen House helps us delineate between the fact and fiction of the figure of Austen. Not only was Jane Austen writing as a country house outsider, but her own home was not "rather enclosed"—it was on the intersection of three busy streets. These streets were so busy that Edward boarded up the window in the drawing-room that faced the street, opening one instead onto the garden—but Austen wrote in the dining room, where the window to the street remained. Does Austen's relative distance from the country house change our perception of her enclosed works?

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[19] Crang, 114-5.

[20] These nationalist impulses are extensions from wartime patriotism. In Maroula Joannou, "'England's Jane': The Legacy of Jane Austen in the Fiction of Barbara Pym, Dodie Smith and Elizabeth Taylor," in *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives*, ed. Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson, 37-58 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Joannou explains that, "The exigencies of war produced a new pride in Englishness and national identity. Like Shakespeare, the name of Austen was conscripted into impassioned discussion about the importance of preserving and perpetuating the riches of the English cultural heritage for posterity. Writers of all political persuasions and now became preoccupied with discourses of Englishness, some attempting to formulate a notion of Englishness that would appeal to the patriotic instincts of the ordinary citizen, promoting a national cohesion through emphasis on shared values and common history . . . Austen's writings assumed importance precisely because they epitomized the civilized values that were threatened by a Facist victory" (Ibid., 42).

Doesn't it diminish their nativism and highlight their anthropological scrutiny? I can't help but think of how well Austen's dissection of an enclosed society prefigures the "anthropological turn" inwards of the interwar years—the reorientation that Jed Esty describes in *A Shrinking Island* of the anthropological lens from diverse societies throughout the British Empire to localities within England as that empire contracts in the twentieth century. The anthropological turn resulted in "several different textual and cultural locations during the period from 1930 to 1950" when "England was refigured as the object of its own imperial discourse, its own touristic imagination, its own historical affections, its own documentary gaze, its own primitivizing fantasies, its own ritual pageantry, its own economic theories, and its own myths of origin."[21] This was an impulse that Darnell clearly responded to. Elizabeth Jenkins writes that Darnell was just as dedicated to finding and recording local Austen lore as she was to conserving Austen's physical relics in the museum.

The Scrutiny of Objects

And what were the treasures that Dorothy Darnell saved? The Society was busy acquiring relics for the house from the early 1940s onward. As I mentioned above, they took over the drawing room from the Chawton Village Library before T.E. Carpenter bought the house outright. (One doubts whether Jane Austen would have approved of them ousting the library so that people could gawk at her necklaces but that's no matter.) As soon as they got possession of the dining room, the grate from the scrap heap was re-installed. Other early acquisitions include a work table, Jane's muslin scarf, two bead purses of that period, Sillouettes of family members, an ivory cup-and-ball, a patchwork quilt, and other books and papers.[22] Loans were also sought—most notably, from the

[21] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2014), 40.

[22] Jane Austen Society, *Collected Reports*, 22.

King. A letter in the Red Album from Buckingham Palace dated 18th January 1951 responds to Carpenter's request to borrow and display the first edition of *Emma* from the royal library at Windsor. The writer, Edward Ford, adds (perhaps responding to an inquiry of Carpenter's) that he "would like to be able to inform [Carpenter] that the Royal Library contained a copy inscribed by Miss Austen. Whether there was ever such a copy is doubtful; but, if so, it is certainly not there now." This assurance does not stop Carpenter from asking the Windsor librarian directly, who repeats, "I wish I could say in reply to your letter of yesterday that the King did still possess, either here or elsewhere, a copy of EMMA inscribed by Miss Austen: but whether or not such a copy was ever presented (and evidence is lacking on this point) it does not exist to-day, at any rate in His Majesty's possession."

This news must have been anticlimactic. But, to balance out these disappointments, there were also triumphant acquisitions presented with dramatic flair at Annual Meetings of the Jane Austen Society. The first took place during the opening ceremony of the Jane Austen's House Museum in July 1949. This event was widely reported on, and many of the newspaper columns collected in the Red Album emphasized "Jane Austen's Locks Com[ing] Home." One (again, mystery) paper delivers a thrilling summary of the day, demonstrating the society's commitment to conserving both local lore and object:

> Dr. Chapman said that when it became known that J. E. Austen-Leigh was engaged on the life of his aunt Jane he received a letter from a stranger, the Rev. G. D. Boyle, vicar of Kidderminster, giving him the recollections of a Mrs. Barrett—a mystery woman. Dr. Chapman read Mr. Boyle's letters, which has never been published in full but only quoted in Mr. Austen-Leigh's Memoir. Mrs. Barrett not only received letters from Jane, now lost, but could recall her saying that she was too fond of her created characters, the work of the imagination, to have portrayed the actual people known to her.
>
> After Mr. Carpenter had said he deplored the fact that so many Jane Austen relics had found their way to America, mentioning specifically locks of Jane's and her father's hair, an American, Mrs. Henry G. Burke, of Baltimore, rose and said she would be glad to present these very locks to the museum. She said she had bought them at Sotheby's sale in May, 1948. Dr. Chapman also presented the museum with a tiny ivory box made by one of Jane's descendants, an admiral.

To the horror of school groups, these locks of hair (along with most of the items listed above) are still on display at the Jane Austen's House Museum.[23] Poor Chapman—the American returned the locks but stole his thunder; what is a little ivory box next to her very hair? Twenty-five years later, another Annual Meeting speaker would follow Chapman's lead. The annual report for 1974 states that the "meeting was addressed by Mr. C. B. Hogan, who took as the title of his talk 'Lovers' Vows and Highbury'. At the conclusion of the address Mr. Hogan presented the Society with the two topaz crosses, which had originally belonged to Cassandra and Jane Austen, together with the original letter (Chapman No., 38), written by Jane Austen from Bath, to her sister Cassandra, and dated Tuesday, 26th May (1801)."[24] This story is pretty good but has less narrative force than the apocryphal version I heard from a society member—that in the 70s, a man had stumbled across the lawn at the end of an Annual Meeting and pulled the crosses out of his pocket, unceremoniously presenting them to the Society and going on his way. These acquisitions make fun stories, but most of the relics on display in the cottage were acquired through hard work and firm negotiation. The trove of back-and-forth letters and receipts in Carpenter's archive at the Jane Austen's House Museum is a testament to the labor and perseverance of the Society to bring Austen's things home.

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[23] And the ungraciousness with which the locks were received is on display in Claudia L. Johnson's *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), "Alberta Hirscheimer Burke, the most important American collector of Austen's letters and Austeniana, bought this lock at Sotheby's auction in 1948 as part of a lot also containing literary items, such as Austen's (last) verses on St. Swithin's Day, written three days before she died, and Cassandra's chronology of the composition of the novels. The locks came to 'Jane Austen's House' in a dramatic way, as Burke's husband would later relate: 'When we attended the [first] Jane Austen Society meeting on July 23, 1949, Mr. Edward Carpenter . . . complained bitterly that because of a shortage of funds valuable relics were leaving England and noted with particular sadness that a lock of Jane Austen's hair had been purchased at Sotheby's by an American. Alberta muttered under her breath, 'I will give them the damned hair.' She then rose and said simply, 'I am the American who bought Jane's hair and if the Society would like to have it, I shall be glad to make a contribution of the hair.' At that point, the tent in which the meeting was being held almost collapsed.' Accounts of this event appearing in reports of the Jane Austen Society present it as a happy coincidence. But Burke was irked to find herself reproached as a grasping American, purchasing what Britons themselves offered for sale, and she never forgot the ungraciousness that she shamed by her generosity" (Ibid., 155).

[24] Jane Austen Society, *The Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society, 1966-1975* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1977), 213.

Jane Austen's House Museum's rooms and objects are revisited every year during the Annual Meeting at Chawton. The house is no longer maintained by the Jane Austen Society but is open to them when they walk down the road from the manor to the cottage. These meetings are very much in the spirit and order of the opening ceremony from 1949. The photographs in the Red Album portray strikingly similar scenes to the one you'll find this July in a white marquee on Chawton House's lawn (Figure 15). Even the tables and chairs are laid out in the same way—though there are more chairs now. I would know; I helped lay them out—but I was amply rewarded for my trouble. Shortly after I arrived at Alton, I received an email from the secretary of the Jane Austen Society asking me to call her. I call her. Her name is Maureen Stiller, but I can call her Moe. She makes an offer which I "should feel free to refuse" of using her car to go to a remote Jane Austen site. Several ideas are floated, but I defer to Moe's judgment: we set a date, toward the end of my stay, to drive to Steventon and other sites around Hampshire. Moe is a no-nonsense woman: wry, full of knowledge, and an agile pilot of her compact car. She whisks me around the Hampshire countryside rattling off (to me) obscure quotes from the depths of Jane Austen's letters. Moe always thinks the best of me and my memory: 'As you'll remember, Jane wrote a couple of letters to _____, who was the cousin of _____, who lived here." Then Moe stops the car long enough for me to take a picture and we're off again, this time to visit a church that Jane attended twice, to our knowledge. "Imagine walking this on foot!" Moe says as we drive from Steventon to Overton. "Shameful how dirty the old post office has gotten!" (now the Deane Gate Inn) and I agree. By now, my head is starting to reel from Moe's encyclopedic knowledge of Austen's letters and every place in Hampshire she ever walked to. But, later on, strolling along the ramparts at Portsmouth (we decided to make a full day of it), I've come to see the way that Darnell's object-based and lore-based desire to preserve Austen's home has evolved into the Jane Austen Society's current culture of reading. For these Janeites, the novels are just the beginning: the real fun is in reading the letters against the novels, against the house and its

objects, against the distance between the Steventon Rectory and the local post. The Jane Austen Society will read everything that is there and nothing that isn't. The house museum is an effort to contain and scrutinize a small part of what is otherwise uncontainable and inscrutable—an author's life, her genius, her literary landscape.

Figure 15: The opening ceremony of the Jane Austen's House Museum. Red Album. Jane Austen's House Museum Archive. Author's photo.

Scrutiny

The House Museum, like Austen's country house novels, has the appeal of a contained study. Western civilization put god in a house—why not England? Why not English literature? People seem to want to ground the expansive notions of divinity, of nationhood, and of literary genius in houses—to domesticate the unknowable. That's one of the reasons that people love Austen's fiction and one of the reasons that they supported saving her home as a literary site even during a war. The Appeal for her home in *The Times* emphasizes her smallness, beginning:

> Jane Austen, that brilliant miniaturist of character, that quiet, serene genius who depicted with such amazing vitality the life of the country she knew so well, probably has more ardent admirers than any other novelist, but it is only since 1940 that there has been a Society devoted to the perpetuation of her memory, and only now, for the first time, is the Society becoming widely known.[25]

Nine years after this appeal was published, an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* echoes this characterization of Austen's writing: "In that quiet low room the visitor, forgetful of the stream of traffic on the Portsmouth road outside, can recapture something of the calm atmosphere in which the finest miniature painter in English literature did her work." Austen fans love to say that Austen is underestimated while emphasizing her exquisite smallness. They even love to point out how small (even though she was tall!) Austen was. It's true that she was strangely small—there is a mannequin that fits Austen's measurements in the attic of the Jane Austen House Museum. The curator explained to me that they had to order a child-size mannequin and stuff its bra. And it's also true that her writing is both narrow and tall: narrow in society, but complexly layered and subtly subversive. But it's not narrow because of how Austen looked (tall and skinny); where she lived (a frankly spacious cottage); how big her desk was (not big). It's not narrow because of what is intrinsic to Austen, but because of what is extrinsic yet closely within view: country house society. Austen is a social scientist and a responsible one—she does not stray beyond her field. She does not go beyond what she cannot scrutinize. And I think that's what we mean when we refer to Austen's smallness. It's not the quality of smallness but of expertise; it's an expertise that inspired James, Forster, Woolf, Green, Bowen, Taylor, and Compton-Burnett to look more closely at the country house; to consider the rooms and objects of the country house that are found throughout England and throughout English literature; to celebrate and interrogate, build up and topple the aesthetic traditions that the

[25] "Jane Austen at Chawton: An Appeal for the Preservation of Her Home," in "Red Album," Jane Austen's House Museum Archive.

country house preserves. And it's an expertise that led, ultimately, to this not-so-short tour of three country house rooms.

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