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RADICAL INTERIORITIES, AESTHETIC SELVES:
CHARLOTTE BRONTË, HENRY JAMES, VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

MICIAH HUSSEY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of
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ABSTRACT

Radical Interiorities, Aesthetic Selves:
Charlotte Brontë, Henry James, Virginia Woolf

by

Miciah Hussey

Advisor: Mary Ann Caws

In her essay “On Being Ill” (1926), Virginia Woolf writes “We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others...There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds' feet is unknown.” My dissertation explores how the novel’s attempts to represent this inherently intimate and estranging “virgin forest” also test its formal limitations. From free indirect discourse to stream of consciousness, the development of the novel is marked by different modes of reproducing inner life that push beyond the boundaries of historical, social, and physiognomic indices. I argue that these narrative and stylistic means to comprehend this paradoxical aspect of inner life offer an understanding of selfhood as aesthetic process. I use the term “radical interiority” to demarcate the ways that selfhood’s incoherence and enigmas eventuate discursive plenitude: Woolf’s snowfield as a stage for active interior relations in tension with the bounds of language. My work explores this space by connecting the aesthetic and the psychic: tying Roland Barthes’ desire “to open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely” to the psychoanalytic theories that have emerged after Freud and Lacan. Drawing on the ideas of Melanie Klein and others who see psychic life and its relation to the world as predicated on a creative act, my dissertation asserts how the representation of these mobile and aesthetic interior forces destabilize socially- and historically-constructed subject positions. The

novels in my study register the processes of understanding the potentiality and limitations of self-consciousness through varied experiments with formal rupture, metatextuality, narratological ambiguity, and poetic language in conflict with positivist constructions of inner life.

Using Charlotte Brontë, Henry James, and Woolf as case studies, my work identifies radical interiority in British novels of different periods—the Gothic underpinnings of the mid-Victorian marriage plot, the psychological verisimilitude of late nineteenth-century realism, and the visionary simultaneity of twentieth-century modernism. The novels in my study—Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* (1922) and *The Waves* (1931)—represent the relationship between inner and external life through highly aestheticized forms and practices; in this way, they can render the psychology of particular characters unique and irreproducible. In texts that interrogate the novel’s capacity to replicate a boundless inner life, these authors trace expanded affective networks found in the constant introspective “re-visioning” of the self. I locate the access to radical interiority in moments of formal and narrative rupture and incoherence, where poetic languages of vision and metaphor derail the stability of both chronology and characterization.

Dedicated to my sisters Jedidah and Macy
And to the memory of my parents, Robert and Phyllis

You see now why I have been so individualistic throughout these lectures, and why I have seemed so bent on rehabilitating the element of feeling in religion and subordinating its intellectual part. Individuality is founded in feeling; and the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done.

—William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902

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One/Self:
Radical Interiority and the Aesthetic Self

Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world. 118-119

In the “Conclusion” to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Walter Pater structures the “inward world of thoughts and feeling” as radically separate from the physical world, compelling the image of interior life keeping “its own dream of a world” in the solitary confinement of the mind (118-119). “The thick wall of personality” that cleaves one prisoner from another individuates as it isolates: it refracts the shared experience of physical life (that regulates everything from the embodied “passage of blood, the wasting and repairing of the lenses of the eye” to the environmental processes of rusting of iron and ripening of corn) into the subjective reality of singular experience (118, 119). Within “the chamber of the individual mind,” mental reflection disperses the cohesion of “sharp, importunate” reality into “unstable, flickering, inconsistent” moments of consciousness and registers them as formal qualities—“colour, odour, texture” (118-119). Through this process, apprehension of the external, objective world dematerializes: the fluid and unique concatenation of these sensations enact the vocabulary and syntax composing the prisoner’s dream of the world. The phenomenology of interior life—those intimate and reflective points of interpretation and creation at a remove from physical objectivity (and even “the solidity with which language invests them”)—becomes “a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a

relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by” (119). The single wisp of interior reflection—preserving the spirit of an embodied past, even as it changes while moving along the stream of consciousness—holds within it the potentiality of “all that is actual,” the world made real only in the visionary half-light of the dream. In holding at bay physical forces (“the gradual darkening of the eye,” the “fading of colour from the wall,” and “the movement of the shore side”), Pater’s radically distinct site of interiority produces and sustains constant and singular “flame-like” life (118). Behind the mind’s “thick walls,” he describes a selfhood that is neither subject to scientific forces and empirical epistemologies of the physical world, nor the stereotypes of language that seek out the ordered logic of causal relations and reductive taxonomies. The constant flight from any static formal ontology supposes an interior life as a phenomenological process that is as mutable as it is integral. Only the prisoner’s constant inconstant dream remains, and, as Pater says, “It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves” (119).

The hermetically sealed confinement of Pater’s conception of the mind—“through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without”—constitutes “radical interiority” as a distinct site that holds the self in both the generative world of thought and feeling *and* the world of physicality and objectivity. Placing interiority in a radically paradoxical relation to the external world that is never fully reconciled in individual experience, this image of the imprisoned dream forecloses any further critical mastery. To address this necessary paradox, my dissertation focuses on the novel as offering a point of intervention into the “perpetual weaving and unweaving” of the self as an aesthetic

phenomenology. As it progresses across the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the novel offers itself as an aesthetic form that allows for a penetrating and importantly discursive mode of translating the rhythms of interior life into representation. Before introducing the works of the specific authors that act as my case studies, I turn to another eminent Victorian, John Stuart Mill, and place his work in dialogue with Pater's to show how the imprisoned dream remains a crucial force in understanding the interpretive and creative energies corralled into literary representations of selfhood. In the section entitled "What is Poetry?" of *Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties* (1833), Mill not only grants access to interiority, but also illuminates its movements as an aesthetic process able to extend beyond the mind's thick walls. Mill declares that the "vulgarest" of all definitions of poetry "is that which confounds poetry with metrical composition"; in fact, he argues that "'poetry' imports something quite peculiar in its nature; something which may exist in what is called prose as well as in verse; something which does not even require the instrument of words, but can speak through the other audible symbols called musical sounds, and even through the visible ones which are the language of sculpture, painting, and architecture" (Mill). In finding poetry in a number of media from the lyric to the plastic, Mill opens his discussion of the poetic to more than just works of "metrical composition." Delving into its "peculiar nature," he sees poetry as functioning within a space akin to Pater's chamber of the individual mind in order to delineate "the deeper and more secret workings of human emotion": poetry comes to efflorescence not through a specific formal ordering, but through any form that addresses and attempts to reveal the "secret workings" of feeling (Mill). In this way, Mill foreshadows William James's notion of interiority in the epigraph that opened this dissertation, bringing to light "the darker, blinder strata" in which real fact and work is made.

In saying that “all poetry is of the nature of soliloquy,” Mill intensifies the implicit relationality between Pater’s interior experience of the imprisoned dream: what Pater recognizes as the key dynamic that composes the self, Mill sees as an intimate rhetoric that both produces and is produced by poetry’s aesthetic origins. Mill’s essay elevates intersubjectual dialogue from mere psychic phenomenon to the wellspring of creation. Scoring the rhythms of selfhood’s perpetual weaving and unweaving, Mill’s poetic soliloquy grapples with “the solidity of language” and gestures to its emergence from the mobile interior field of signs, symbols, and images. Mill’s essay also anticipates Pater’s work in its insistence on tracing the passage of “flame-like” life beyond the thick walls of personality:

Every truth which a human being can enunciate, every thought, even every outward impression, which can enter into his consciousness, may become poetry, when shown through any impassioned medium; when invested with the coloring of joy, or grief, or pity, or affection, or admiration, or reverence, or awe, or even hatred or terror; and, unless so colored, nothing, be it as interesting as it may, is poetry. np

Mill establishes an aesthetic network in which consciousness refracts “every truth,” “every thought,” and every “impression” through the “impassioned medium” of multivalent affects, translating the interior soliloquy into poetic enunciation. Thus “colored” by feeling, in returning to the world, the aesthetic rhythms of psychic life stand apart from the “matter of fact, or science” that Pater sees as dominating the physical world. Furthermore, Mill prioritizes intersubjectual relationality over the social, retaining a sense of poetry’s own generative isolation by proceeding with an “utter unconsciousness of a listener” (Mill). Resisting both positivist external forces and the compromises of social relations, poetry ushers the intimate and arcane images and feelings of interiority into the world. In expanding the capacity of language to gesture beyond the merely descriptive objectivity of “outward circumstances,” poetry extends the self into the word as the aesthetic interpretation of its interior sensations, visions, and feelings.

Mill outlines this process by which poetry midwives interiority's dream into the physical world: "Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which as the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind" (Mill). His description begins with the interior dynamic of "feeling confessing itself to itself," conveying both the intimacy and hermetic secrecy with which Pater's imprisoned dream screens its own vision of the world. However, Mill lets feeling flee the chamber of the mind, mobilizing the sensations and rhythms of psychic life toward a representation of forms and ideas in language. For Mill, poetry is generated in a two-fold process: first, in the self-interpretation of intersubjectival dialogue; second, in the aesthetic work of transforming feeling into linguistic symbol that contains potential to retain the impressions of interior life. In addition to providing a useful definition for the aesthetic process of literary creation, Mill makes Pater's firm delineation of the inward world porous enough to let "impressions, images, [and] sensations" manifest in "nearest possible representations" on the page. A skeptical position would point out that in rendering the "exact shape" of feeling to the approximate representations available in the objective solidity of language would irreparably subject the ineffable dynamics of psychic life to the command of the scientific forces and outward circumstances. And yet, the line of thought in this dissertation focuses on the latent speculative and imaginative work of translating interior life into form. Rather than insisting on selfhood as an object condemned by systems of social construction, I hold it as an *experience* of being akin to the aesthetic process, that is as a relational phenomenology of creation that sustains its own becoming by continually reliving the analytical and formal process. By not dismissing Mill's psycho-aesthetic process for its failure to claim positivist certainty, I read his sense of

poetry as a necessary and destabilizing force when reckoning the connection between interior life and representation.

However tautological the intimacy of “feeling confessing itself to itself” seems, the approximate “representations of the feeling” shadow the “exact shape” they take when leaving the solitude of interiority. This translation of affective phenomenology and psychic vision into literary form makes urgent an exploration of aesthetic formulations of the self as always held in tension with the external forces that compel positivist stability. In “Mediated Involvement: John Stuart Mill’s Antisocial Sociability,” John Plotz recognizes the relational aesthetics imperative in Mill’s essay arguing that “only when poetry has opened up the reader’s own feelings as belonging, antecedently, to another person can that reader begin to delineate his or her own discrete self” (76). The shared experiences of feeling that circulate through the real world and into the mind of another became palpable in the aesthetic formulation of the self. Mill’s poetry not only extends the affective aesthetics beyond the secrecy of feeling’s confessional but opens up the array of potential individuated “selves” through access to its formulations. In other words, emerging from either intersubjectival dialogue or one’s own dream of the world, the isolation of radical interiority compels a reorientation of the reader/writer paradigm. Moving to and fro from a recognition of social commonalities and back toward the potentiality of a discrete self, aesthetic process reimagines both social and intersubjectival relationality. Mill intervenes in hermetic interiority and asserts poetic practice as the wellspring of selfhood’s understanding of both its authentic feeling and the world. In this way, Plotz says, that Mill’s “poetry makes visible, to itself, a self that would otherwise have no reliable grounds of existence” (76). Plotz recognizes Mill as not only opening the aesthetic content of interiority to the outside world through the act of poetic creation but also giving intersubjective life a reliable ground for

existence through formal representation. In this model, writing and selfhood are inextricably linked within a phenomenological discourse of visibility and becoming that demands release from the reductive structures that would dismiss the vitality of inner life.

In following this aesthetic experience of the self, this dissertation tracks the process that continues well after Pater's analysis leaves off—in the perpetual emergence and evaporation of the self working and re-working itself through rhythms of its own “radical interiority.” By this term, I demarcate a fund of individual creative energies constituting the phenomenological nature of inner life that negotiates its becoming in tension with the bounds of Pater's chamber of the individual mind. Paradoxically, radical interiority acts as site simultaneously centered in introspective intuitive knowledge and forged through idiosyncratic relations to the external world. Its radicalism persists in—and, in fact, relies on—both capacious psychic phenomena available within and aesthetic form manifested without: exceeding the spatial binaries of interior and exterior via the psycho-aesthetic endeavor of self-actualization, radical interiority acts as a site of creative resistance in tension with the fixity of time, place, and even language. As a conceptual matrix, it offers selfhood the ability to give meaning to experiences that exist to the side of positivist objectivity. Just as the subjective gestures of sensation in Pater's mutable inward world challenge the determinations of an “importunate” physical reality, radical interiority offers a mode to rethink ideas of subjectivity as solely determined by intersections of various external philosophical, moral, or social discourses. This dialogue between Pater and Mill activates the theoretical blind spots of positivist social construction and employs them as footholds to argue for selfhood as an aesthetic experience based in simultaneous interpretation and creation. This argument not only grants a means to understand the psychic workings of

interiority that exceed social visibility, but also is able to reconcile the self's ephemeral, mutable, and idiosyncratic aspects as integral to being in the world.

The novel, as a form that aestheticizes both psychic and social rhythms, is readily available to think through the different registers of “radical interiority” and its latent presence in representations of selfhood. Considering the novel in the domain of figurative and poetic form, I explore how its interventions with the paradoxical, ephemeral, and idiosyncratic aspects of interiority reveal how new psychological and ethical understandings emerge from the matrix of creative possibility. I focus on the novel's attention to the development of individuals through both narrative progress and psychological access to show how its vast representational networks extend the mind's imprisoned dream beyond its bounds while still vouchsafing its ontological autonomy. Furthermore, this dissertation claims that representations of interior life test the novel's formal limitations: interiority poses specific challenges to its formal principles, staging theaters for continuous discourse of interpretation and creation that composes a self. Using Charlotte Brontë, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf as case studies, I examine differing modes of representing radical interiority through distinctive syntax, structure, and style that register “that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves” on the page. I explore how these authors capture the fleeting and idiosyncratic aspects of inner life in highly aestheticized rhetorical discourse not only as a means of literary representation but further to ground selfhood's very existence in aesthetic phenomenon. Radical interiority allows for selfhood's aesthetic efflorescence by proposing the experience of being as a discursive plenitude. Placing “the self” in tension with the porous bounds of language, it works against the flattening of “the individual” into the product of social construction. In this way, my study questions the stability of certain ordering assumptions. Most pressingly, I look to reconsider a handful of binaries: the

spatial parameters of interior and exterior (or surface and depth), the ontological relations of form and formlessness, the phenomenological qualities of dynamism and stasis, and the epistemological status of the known and the unknown. Each of these distinctions in some way organizes rigid distinctions to fortify the domains of empiricism from those of speculation; and yet, the principle of this boundary becomes more uncertain when refracted through the truth held in aesthetic experience.

By the “aesthetic self” I refer to a mode of being in the world—and understanding that experience—as continually composed and revised through a process of negotiating, interpreting, and, in part, creating an array of shifting formal relations. To shed light on how this integral aspect of selfhood manifests, I turn to Leo Bersani’s essay “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject” (2006). While I will be discussing this work in greater depth as a model for my work later in the introduction, his crucial intervention in the text elucidates those “darker, blinder strata of character” where William James finds that “we catch real fact in the making.” Bersani conceptualizes the radically intimate, estranging, and necessary idea of interior life “as an essentially unthinkable, intrinsically unrealizable reserve of human being—a dimension of virtuality rather than of psychic depth—from which we connect to the world, not as subject to object, but as a continuation of a specific syntax of being” (169). This “continuation” assures the wellspring of being as grounded in an experience that extends as it individuates, always in tension within the “essentially unthinkable” and “intrinsically unrealizable” limits of existence. His insistence on virtuality rescues being from both the static restrictions of “reality” and the voids of hermetic unconsciousness. Rather, in forestalling this reserve from the impinging demands of logic and mastery, Bersani allows selfhood to effloresce in the world as a psychic plenitude. This capacious excess of self “continues” in a dimension of virtuality marked by the

discursive production of one's own "specific syntax of being." This aesthetic subject persists not in the proscriptions of external definition, but finds itself in constant interpretation and creation. Bersani's idea of connection between self and the world as continuation offers a flexible and mutable mode of relation that allows for the paradoxical existence of the multiple psychic self states (remembered, imagined, etc.) that evade fixed temporal, spatial, and ontological definition. Allowing this virtual fund of being a place in the world, Bersani sees our moving within, understanding, and in part creating the realities of a communal world, as producing a version of the self as an aesthetic experience. Continuing within the world (and the world continuing within us), the experience of "specific syntax of being" models the representation of selfhood as aesthetic discourse.

Using Bersani and others, I follow this line of inquiry to consider how the texts I discuss make indivisible the representation of selfhood from the aesthetic possibilities of the novel. In returning literary narratives to their formal roots, I reveal how the aesthetic valence of literature not only vouchsafes the presence of radical interiority, but also imagines modes to understand self and other. Rather than exploring the novel as a cultural artifact irrevocably enmeshed in its specific socio-cultural context, I draw on a fount of criticism at the juncture between psychoanalysis and formalist theory to scrutinize the novel's aesthetic emergence as presenting expansive vistas of being. While these creative formulations can be employed for utilitarian purposes (i.e., the taxonomic or the descriptive), viewing selfhood as an aesthetic phenomenon services the expression of the abstract, theoretical, arcane, or fantastic aspects of interior experience that challenge the cumbersome stability of empirical reality. My study shows how representations of a selfhood centered in a radically interior life actually compels innovative ways to rethink modes of identity through aesthetic formulation. In this way, Mill's paradoxical

sense of approximate representation of feeling's exact shape enact sites of a discursive plenitude. Surveying the imaginative fields of the novel, I locate the access to radical interiority in moments of formal and narrative rupture and incoherence, where poetic languages of vision and metaphor derail the stability of both chronology and characterization. The specific novels in my study register the processes of understanding the potentiality and limitations of self-consciousness through varied experiments with generic instability, narratological ambiguity, and poetic language in conflict with positivist constructions of "a subject." Furthermore, I call into question the ethical implications of who is considered a subject by recognizing how discursive open-endedness, enigma, and fluidity challenge the reductive vocabularies used to delineate the experience of one's formation. The narrative and stylistic means to comprehend this speculative aspect of inner life actively negotiate the connection between the self and the world, rethinking its formation through psychically invested formal and interpretive correspondences. By examining how these techniques register in discourse—in composing narrative *mise-en-scene* or depicting character through descriptive likeness, for example—I highlight the role of artistic intervention within the mediation of objective reality and individual experience.

In selecting the novels of Brontë, James, and Woolf as case studies, my work identifies how radical interiority manifests in British novels of different periods—the Gothic underpinnings of the mid-Victorian marriage plot, the psychological verisimilitude of late nineteenth-century realism, and the visionary simultaneity of twentieth-century modernism. Specifically, the novels in my study—Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922)—represent the relationship between inner and external life through highly aestheticized forms and practices; in this way, they can render the psychology of particular characters unique and irreproducible. In texts that

interrogate the novel's capacity to replicate a boundless inner life, these authors trace expanded affective networks found in the constant introspective "re-visioning" of the self. From free indirect discourse to stream of consciousness, the formal development of the novel is marked by different modes of reproducing inner life that push against the boundaries of historical, social, and physiognomic indices. As the British novel rises in stature during the nineteenth century, it never loses a sense of pioneering experiment that made the initial forays by Daniel Defoe, Laurence Sterne, or Jane Austen radical departures in representations of the self. Brontë, James, and Woolf represent no less formal variation, even while each contributes to the lasting idea of the novel's form and capacities. While the authors I discuss seem to fit neatly in an historical arc that assumes the modernist novel as its telos, I wish to formulate a more historically broad notion of these energies as extending beyond the frame of the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century British novel. I recognize this aesthetic version of the self as existing alongside the same forces that other scholars have identified as producing the modern self, and that it has continued to exert pressure on the standards of what constitutes a subject for different times and places. In other words, this desire to disrupt or evade normative expectations of a self continues to this day. Furthermore, my choice to focus on these canonical authors and texts makes evident how radical interiority is latent throughout different stages of the novel's development. Each coalesces the formal innovations of representing selfhood as central to articulating the possibility of her/his narratives. Each author in my study not only strives to create palpable individuals, but also fashions an aesthetic framework for these selves to become visible. In this way, Brontë, James, and Woolf reimagine inherited conventions and expectations, shedding light on the phenomenological aspects of the self that depend on the experimental and poetic potential of language. While Brontë and Woolf directly confront the vestiges of novelistic traditions,

deconstructing the first person faux autobiography and the *bildungsroman* respectively, James revisits his own earlier self-imposed forms while revising his novels for the famed *New York Edition*. In my readings, I consider the novel's progress through these atavistic encounters: whether figured as a confrontation with genre or personal vision, they not only develop unique modes of representation but also forge deeper understandings of selfhood.

Before the discussion of these three figures in my individual chapters, this introduction addresses key critical and theoretical issues. First, I discuss the notion of the "aesthetic self," introducing it via a critique of Nancy Armstrong's assertion of the novel's complicity with the socio-culturally constructed "individual" and the vexing position of radical interiority in Judith Butler's ethical thinking. Both of these scholars explore models of subject formation that rely on positivist relations to understand "the individual" as irreducible from historical circumstance and linguistic orders. Each consider the idea of representing the self as emerging from contexts that not only precede but also determine it. And yet, both approaches acknowledge discursive blind-spots in which aesthetic inquiry elaborates how subjectivity and relationality emerge in working against and reimagining these bounds. My reading emphasizes how these often over-looked and speculative sites of the self are integral to understanding the form and process of being in the world. Conceiving of self-interpretation and self-creation as in tension with stable subject positions, I assert that the aesthetic self forces ruptures in systems of meaning that depend on static ontologies and epistemologies. Out of the tensions with both psychoanalysis and language, the self emerges as poetic discourse. Finally, I detail the theoretical model offered by Bersani's "Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject" that synthesizes these concerns by introducing the notion of the "aesthetic subject" as troubling the position of the self within the world and their relations. His "aesthetic subject" assures the self's position in the world through a series of

formal and psychic correspondences, rather than immutable external perspectives. My study looks at these correspondences as a phenomenology of being that composes the idea of selfhood via an *active* aesthetic practice.

Throughout this work, I use the term “self” for my own formulation instead of subject or individual as a way to make it distinct from the discourses of socio-historical construction. Instead, self and selfhood denote capacious amplitudes for all kinds of psychic, formal, and affective representations of being. While this dissertation does not forward an historical model of subject formation, it still recognizes that we live in tension with external forces. I argue that perhaps only by looking at how we understand ourselves in non-human forms—particularly the aesthetic forms of paintings, films, and especially novels—can we confront the most self-estranging truths of being. In their own formal arrangements of space, texture, light, and time can we, perhaps, understand how, too, our unique and irreproducible interior experiences constitute being in the world as a creative and interpretive phenomenology.

Nancy Armstrong begins *How Novels Think* (2006), her study of the intertwined history of the novel’s development and formation of the modern subject, with a discussion of Sir Joshua Reynolds’s *Portrait of Master Bunbury* (1780-81). Examining the quizzically ambiguous expression on the subject’s face, she details the anecdotal history of Reynolds’s process—telling the aristocratic toddler stories to entrance him into remaining still during his sitting. This legend affords her the opportunity to remark that “More than perhaps any other Reynolds portrait, the painting of young Bunbury invites the reader to speculate on the interior life animating the individual whose motion has been arrested by storytelling” (Armstrong 1-2). In her insistence that “speculation” is the only possible means to penetrate his thoughts, Armstrong asserts interior

life's resistance to anything more than approximate or subjective representation. In a passing gesture to formal analysis, she uses the painting as an emblem for how narratives produce subjects (and vice versa): Armstrong extrapolates the "the well-lit natural landscape to the left of the tree" as a stand-in for realist representation and "the dark and apparently phantasmagorical" atmosphere on the right as an evocation of the gothic style. In a condensing move of transference, Reynolds interprets the possible generic orders of the stories as both a means to interpret the painting's bifurcated background composition, and as the ambivalent poles circumscribing the interior life of the subject.

In the preface to the book Armstrong notes her own "life-long skepticism about the truth of individualism," declaring from the start an incredulousness concerning the ability for one to define a singular, unique life experience (ix). Thus, her project examines the novel as an object of a particular strain of cultural studies: she sees the construction of represented subjects—specifically those fit to be protagonists—as inextricably connected to the development of "an individual" that is always already predetermined from without. Her approach to the figures enmeshed within narratives of a very specific regional and historical framework serves to flatten difference in favor of a proscriptive hegemonic non-individuality. Thus, her study of the novel so firmly ensconces itself in the tradition of social-construction that she can claim with such rhetorical and theoretical confidence that the kinds of narratives that include "what we mean by 'the individual'" are populated by a "class- and culture-specific subject" (3).¹ These figures only

¹ Looking to the British novel as it emerges from the eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries, Armstrong picks up on the binary of the fantastic and realist in her halted reading of the Reynolds painting. She notes the legacy of the Gothic in the realist narrative's coherence around the creation of a protagonist who "requires the novel to offer an interiority in excess of the social position that the individual is supposed to occupy" (Armstrong 8). As the realist novel becomes an apparatus and reflection of the culturally sanctioned subject, the phantasmagorical "signs of excess have to be disciplined, that is, observed, contained, sublimated, and redirected to

register through a synthesis of generalized social norms, becoming visible or acceptable as subjects by wearing away the possibilities of idiosyncrasy and transgression. In a minoritizing gesture, her telescopic attention to positivist manifestations transforms “the individual” into a narrowly focused construction that is only, at best, mythically distinct. It is, perhaps, for this reason that she so quickly checks her aesthetic analysis of the painting: instead, she dismisses leaving its invitation to speculate as a rhetorical gesture, never taking up the vague and prickly questions of how novels can think through interior life as a gateway to unique individualism. This maneuver in her argument does not appear to me as coincidental, a mere introductory hook to entice readers beyond the first page where she will move toward the meat of her thesis. Rather, the move toward a specific subject as solely and universally constructed by an accepted tradition of “epistemology and moral philosophy” (in this case a Western European Enlightenment tradition), muffles the vexing speculative interpretations that aesthetic representation sneaks in through the backdoor (1). This dissertation builds its strength by pausing on the speculation that Armstrong’s self-assured thinking scrupulously avoids. It turns attention to this difficult question by asking how this aesthetic valence of the novel (unlike, say, its reflection of a historicized cultural or political subject) can—like the painting—represent a continually mutable and idiosyncratic interior life, even while its excesses chafe against the

a socially accepted goal” (8). The development of the British novel provides a germane litmus test for these questions given that the rise of the novel coincides with both a rise in literacy and the increase of citizens with modern financial, social, and political agency. Furthermore, the novel progressively becomes a mode for the narrative representation of selves that realistically resembles not only the reading population, but also social mores and codes of acceptable conduct. As the form becomes more pressingly associated with the abilities and capacities of an individual, it polices and molds just who that individual can be. However, the allure of reading the novel’s formal shifts through this historical valence all too often leads to the zero-sum game in which the questions of excessive selves become invisible by the preponderance of positivist data of the liberalist trajectory of the subject.

parameters of form. This work finds answers in close reading's deep dive into a handful of texts that does not seek the mastery of suspicious reading but opens thought into the experience of understanding the self.

To find a mode (for it is certainly a mode, as opposed to a definitive model) to read and formulate these enigmatic articulations of selfhood, we must question what exactly animates the mind of young Bunbury. Multiple different affects could form the embodied physiognomic indices—rapt fear or unselfconscious pleasure, absorbed interest or slack-jawed boredom. The ambiguous expression rules out none of these, while still inviting even more responsive interpretations. Instead of looking outward as Armstrong does to study the function of “storytelling” in the formation of the individual, I disrupt the tautological causality between the subject and the philosophies and moralities of its specific cultural context to engage interiority not as a seamless extension of them, but as a site of potential challenge. The multiple (and mutable) “self-states” that comprise interior life compels it to be read along a representational spectrum that moves from doubting inscrutability to compromised translation. Still, this conceptualization only speaks to modes of recognition—saying nothing of the continual rhythms of the unconscious that evade any apprehension of the individual himself. In this way, attempts to capture interiority cast it as an inherently intimate and estranging aspect of selfhood that, whether in language or in oils, will also test the formal limitations of any medium. While aesthetics resists the stability of positivism, it also, I argue, offers a more capacious, flexible, and ultimately more expansive framework for considering radical interiority. When turning to the novels in my dissertation, which roughly overlap with the temporal locus of Armstrong's study, looking inward—instead of out towards to the socio-historical and political construction of

selves—confronts the latent speculative energies of interpreting interior life through representative screens, symbols, projections, and other significations.

I approach the kind of formal condensation inherent in these manifestations of psychic life through the interventions of psychoanalysis after Freud and Lacan to provide a method for understanding self-interpretation and self-creation as available within interiority. Specifically, I look to Melanie Klein and her idea of “mental life as creative in essence” (Likierman 79). Meira Likierman unpacks Klein’s “links between the developing ego and a work of art”:

Her descriptions conjure up all the key features of human creativity, including the forging of new images to reflect life experience, the use of these in internal narratives, the creation of symbols as a central mental activity, and the mental creation of a subjective, personal mythology, and inner world inhabited by ‘phantastic’ beings and dominated by their adventures and relationships. 79

Klein recognizes psychic life not only as a formal corollary to the objectivity of art, but also, and most crucially, as an aesthetic process. Her approach grants access by thinking of selfhood as a work of art that stretches across and shifts among innumerable formal possibilities. Though Armstrong only speculates what swells within the chamber of young Burnbury’s mind, her reading of Reynolds’s rendering of the landscapes offers a glimpse into how aesthetics make visible internal “phantasies” that Klein recognizes. From the reflection of life experience and the creation of new images, to the relations shifting on the stream of consciousness, the field of the image offers a matrix to explore the aesthetic forging that Klein sees as composing psychic life. The creation of these visions, stories, myths, symbols, and relations—whether in mimicking reality or allowing for the imaginary or fantastic—posits the possibility of individual agency in understanding one’s self in the world. Klein’s mobile conception of a psychic life that changes through the creation and destruction of internal objects and relations presents the self as an

aesthetic phenomenon, not a stable construction, that exists as a constant process of refiguring its own shifting orientation to a changing world.

In many ways this dissertation responds to the question of whether it is applicable to use psychoanalysis to interpret novels by proposing a new understanding of psychoanalysis as an aesthetic project itself. Having visions, creating narratives, or interpreting signs, each of these psychic processes reaches toward a sense of one's relation to self and the world. In this regard only some aspects of psychoanalysis and the works of certain psychoanalysts apply effectively. Embracing the creative aspects of psychic life, allows us to imagine pre-verbal states as aesthetic fields of possibility and affective plenitude. Protected within radical interiority throughout our lives, these excessive aspects of self-understanding continually resist form, even when they are compelled toward representation in language. Klein's theories help to crystalize the capacity for novelistic representation to resemble the self, placing psychic and aesthetic life on similar registers. Interiority is essentially an aesthetic space: it is fictionally located somewhere in the body (even the biological knowledge that places the thinking self in the electrical synapses of the brain, does not dedicate a space for the speculative realms of "interiority"), thus the realms of fiction and art have a similarly imaginary origination. I argue that the connection between psychoanalytic and formal critique shows how the discursive process of aesthetic creation allows for individual interior life to become visible. This constant phenomenology of being, like Pater's wisp on the stream, recalls the importance of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Axiom 1" from *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) that "People are different from each other" (*Epistemology* 22). Invoking this connection, I extrapolate a version of "the individual" far different from Armstrong, but that is latent in Klein's psycho-aesthetic formation of the self. The differentiation enforced by interiority's separation from external objectivity and its phenomenological capacity

for variation can never be undervalued. Destabilizing the oft reductive grasp of the socially and historically constructed subject, radical interiority establishes the conditions that not only prove Sedgwick's axiom true, but also underscore the efficacy of looking at aesthetic representation as a mode of interpretation and understanding the non-positivist forms and relations that compose the self.

The British novel of this time offers wide and varied modes of representation, a panoply of actors, and diverse settings and circumstances. In this way, it also actively courts the aesthetic excesses that cannot be contained, sublimated, or redirected, vouchsafing the position of multitudinous versions of individuality that do not conform to Armstrong's specific construction of a protagonist. Perhaps it because the nineteenth century novel indulges in such thorough attention to and gives ample considerations of the self that Judith Butler uses it as an example to explore the construction of an ethical "I" in *Senses of the Subject* (2015). In the introduction to this collection of essays, Butler turns to "the rather fantastic beginning of [Charles Dickens's] David Copperfield [sic], in which the narrator speaks with extraordinary perspicacity about the details of ordinary life preceding and including his own birth" (Butler *Sense* 3).² She considers David's ability to muse and report on his own origins as an example of the "kind of impossible scenarios" on which "certain literary fictions rely" (3). This scenario remains impossible in an accounting of subject formation because it entertains the kind of individualistic speculation that Armstrong also demurred when discussing the interior life of Master Burnbury. And yet, as

² While, I will discuss the trouble with thinking of literary characters as anything more than representations at the close of the chapter, it is important to note that she focuses not on the novel itself, but on its titular protagonist, enforcing the wedge between the novel's eponymous form and the character's subject formation.

Butler points out, literary fiction is not only densely populated with such impossible scenarios but indeed requires them. While she focuses on the inherent fantasy in narratives of self-origination, these are not the only sites where novelists cover over logical accounting with aesthetic devices.³ Butler's ethical thinking destabilizes Armstrong's specifications of the novel's discrete individual, replacing it with a variable fictional subject that draws attention to the epistemological frontiers of aesthetic formulation. In fact, these impossible fictional sites are the moments that make literature distinct from history; and this distinction as such requires attention to what compels imaginative creation as necessary in the experience of individual selves. The essentially speculative or fictional valence of interior life mirrors the "impossible scenarios" on which the novel relies: radical interiority—the unique experience of being (unique) in the world—is not only formally integral to both the novel and conception of the self but also becomes a necessary site of invention, revision, and imagination to challenge the kind of external—and perhaps unethically rigid—norms Armstrong upholds.⁴

³ Think, for example, of Thomas Hardy's refusal to account explicitly for the rape of Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1892). There he uses images of dematerialized atmospheric bodies and tangents into Classical address to the gods in order to keep the events crucially ambiguous. In this way, he not only creates narrative tension, but allows for interpretive ambiguity regarding Tess's psychology.

⁴ Both Butler and Armstrong choose to reconcile the impossibility of intuitive or metaphysical self-knowledge by turning to the objective and considering fiction-making a function of the socio-historical milieu that enforces myths of identity from without. While Armstrong explores modes of socio-political construction to determine the specific limits of an historicized individualism, Butler follows a diverse model, tempered by Western philosophy, ethics, and psychoanalysis; but, it is her foray into a linguistic critique informed by all of these that initiates her discussion of subject formation. She asserts that "this creature that I am is affected by something outside of itself, understood as prior, that activates and informs the subject that I am" (1). In her thinking, self individuation through representation is presupposed by an array of external factors and *a priori* knowledges: "I am already affected before I can say 'I' and that I have to be affected to 'I' at all" (2).

While keeping the distinction between “literature” and “life” intact, Butler does gesture to an overlapping system in which the representation required for ethical thinking echoes the capacities of the novel:

My point is not to say that what happens in literary works such as these has a parallel in the theory of subject formation. Rather, I want to suggest that narrative gestures such as these find their place in nearly any theory of subject formation. Could it be that the narrative dimension of the theory of subject formation is impossible, yet necessary, inevitably belated, especially when the task is to discern how these transitive processes are reiterated in the animated life that follows? If we want to talk about these matters, we have to agree to occupy an impossible position, one that, perhaps, repeats the impossibility of the condition we seek to describe. (*Sense 4*)

Her exploration of the “narrative dimension” of subject formation is key, not only for the expansion of ethical thinking inherent in who we consider a subject and what rubrics compose this demarcation, but also because it calls necessary attention to the self’s inherently fictional origins. While demurring the suggestion of parallels between “what happens in literary works” and theories of subject formation, Butler neatly inlays “narrative gestures” in her theory. She does not invite speculation: her argument, though, honors these possibly fictive zones to make ethical thinking more capacious in a very real and social realm; however, she stops short of inviting a chaotic anarchy within her theories. However, my dissertation takes another tack: the capacious field of aesthetics—in this case the aesthetic form of the novel—allows one to inhabit this impossible place and describe its impossibility to another. It invites the chaos of a mutable affective life and renders it in the possibilities of discourse. My work explores this tentative site of selfhood: In the face of Bersani’s “essentially unthinkable, intrinsically unrealizable reserve of human being,” I suggest a plenary mode of aesthetic experience. Looking at how the novel registers the artistic process, I read these texts as sketching an imaginative typography to chart ways of surveying the self as discursive phenomena. In this way, literary forms do, in fact, offer

a another parallel theory to understanding subject formation. Simply put, thinking through the idea of an aesthetic self requires the audacious and intuitive vocabularies of aesthetic process.

My notion of radical interiority picks up where Butler's analysis leaves off—in that “impossible position” and its condition of impossibility. Radical interiority denominates that narrative dimension in which fiction contends with the positivist impossibility at the heart of selfhood: these aesthetic gestures and “transitive process” comprise the inward world of thoughts and feeling that Pater details in his “Conclusion.” It is there in one's “own dream of a world” that one finds the preverbal utopia of one's own “reserve of human being.” The “necessary, inevitably belated” valence of radical interiority rethinks the possibilities of being a self in the world by actively engaging the impossibilities of positivist knowledge. The concatenation of impressions behind that thick wall of personality are for Pater even more impossibly removed from Butler's narrative dimension, and yet they constitute a model of being that persists in formal germination that exceeds the stable accounting of subject formation. Within interiority's dream imagery and logic, we discover narrative fiction's impossible condition: its impossibility, however, is not only produced by its evasion of positivist accountability, but in the paradox that it is, as Bersani would say, both essential and unthinkable. Instead of dismissing the unknown amplitudes of interiority, I look at how novels must attend to such representations precisely because the mysteries of inner life orient accountability away from the mystifications of external structures (nationhood, binaristic gender identities, social constructions of race and class) and towards the potential held in the aesthetic “negative capabilities” of Pater's imprisoned dream.⁵

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Butler opens a space to locate the idea of “radical interiority” within the shadows of the individual account. She destabilizes “oneself” in

⁵ For further discussion of the application of Keats's “negative capabilities,” see Chapter Four.

her own formulation of self-referential narratives' lack of accountability by linking it to the aesthetic work akin to the novel. David Copperfield's impossibly "extraordinary perspicacity" in depicting events before his birth and in the early years of his life insists upon what Butler calls an "irrecoverable referent"—the actual experiential realities that precede a narrative account, but remain lost to us in the unconscious (*Giving* 37). Butler determines that "the irrecoverability of the referent does not destroy narrative; it produces it 'in a fictional direction,' as Lacan would say" (*Giving* 37). Where does this "fictional direction" take us? To a multitudinous registration of selves and self-states that is paradoxically impossible and yet axiomatic. It is in aesthetics—and in this case fiction—that we find the truth or at least a stable holding environment for the mythic referent. Irrecoverable and yet impossible to deny, the original referent for the self that compels imagination, mutability, and plentitude is in a congruent position to "radical interiority." In the void of a positivist referent, Butler reads fiction; and yet, as she says, there is no "I" until it called into being by enunciation.⁶ Radical interiority makes space for this pre-verbal being and assures its necessary position in self-understanding.

As opposed to Lacan who sees an exacerbated conflict when one moves out of the pre-verbal realm and into the symbolic, I argue that the persistence of radical interiority extends the pre-verbal in a constant palimpsest relation throughout the experience of being. As such it constitutes Bersani's "essentially unthinkable reserve of being"—unthinkable only in a sense that it will challenge the ordering logics of the symbolic realm. Butler offers a productive mode of reading the interaction between self and narrative as the ethical importance of skidding away from these ordering logics of the symbolic realm:

Indeed if we require that someone be able to tell in story form the reasons why his or her life has taken the path it has, that is, to be a coherent autobiographer, we

⁶ See footnote 4 in this chapter.

may be preferring the seamlessness of the story to something we might tentatively call the truth of the person, a truth that, to a certain degree, for reasons we have already suggested, might well become more clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness—in enigmatic articulations that cannot be easily translated into narrative form. 64

For Butler the seamlessness of a story that would ultimately support the socially accepted goal predicated by Armstrong obfuscates the idea of an ethical “truth of a person.” Her attention to the “enigmatic articulations” that both interrupt and unfasten the discourse of self-interpretation and creation from constraining norms compels the kind of speculative and dreamlike plentitude that Pater sees as formulating inward experience. Like Julia Kristeva’s notion of the chora—a “space underlying the written [that] is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation,” that I discuss further in chapter two—Butler’s ethical account requires language as it seeks to honor what exceeds it (Kristeva *Revolution*, 29). Pushing against the need for seamlessness and the requirement of social legibility, Butler negates the possibilities of “a truth of a person” as stable (whether read in a variety of ways from an essentialist point of view or as solely socially constructed) and replaces it with an aesthetic force that seeks to create new vocabularies and new understandings. This interior life, even when imprisoned in the mind’s thick walls, is the condition of possibility for being: it is the “self” that is both unknown and manifest, in excess and yet confined, constant and inconstant. Radical interiority, in lieu of hermetically sealing the self in Pater’s dreamlike isolation, moves the individualized psychic phenomenon into the realm of discourse by affecting aesthetic languages and forms that repeat, disrupt, and ultimately validate selfhood. In this way, the aesthetic self does not over determine how ethical relations will take place between subjects or within circumstances, but allows for a

constant thoughtful reinterpretation, reformulation and repositioning between self and other.⁷ I emphasize the speculative potential of these more esoteric, and yet essential, moments that Butler recognizes but leaves unexplored and look to how the novel relies on interrupted, formless, enigmatic, and evasive articulations to represent the expansiveness of the self. Releasing a richness of mutable and excessive psychic states into the deconstructed discursive field, these novels survey the uncharted domains of radical interiority that precede the aesthetic experience of selfhood.

The manifestation of a self rooted in unique intersubjective dialogue and in active negotiation with external forms and circumstances registers as an aesthetic phenomenon that is replicated in the forms of fiction this dissertation considers. The field of the novel makes visible—even in discursive ruptures—moments that cannot enter into normative records or be

⁷ Judith Butler has recently described this discursive dynamic as an “active position of figuring out how to live with and against the constructions—or norms—that help to form us.” Taken from an interview with Butler by Verso Books in which she discusses the misconceptions of her as supporting the views of so-called “radical feminists” to limit trans individuals from the condition of womanhood, these points are clear articulations of her larger philosophical practice. As she reminds readers, “We form ourselves within the vocabularies that we did not choose, and sometimes we have to reject those vocabularies, or actively develop new ones.” Like Plotz seeing Mill’s poetry as making visible selves that have no grounding in external positivist discourses, Butler’s rejection and development of new vocabularies, and by extension new syntax and media, reimagines the self and its narrative as simultaneously in psychic as well aesthetic action. While also recognized through a social visibility, I argue that this process of negotiating what a self is or can be also occurs in the more obscure relations of intersubjective life. Aesthetics, in this case fictional writing, becomes a site of agency over a representation that channels aesthetic energies not only challenging a regime of constructed norms, but opening up new modes of expression. Butler’s active refiguring of these constructions not only requires a release from the external delimitations imposed by that old representational regime, but also grants agency to aesthetic phenomenon to play upon these norms. The novel’s potential contains more than just a portrait of Armstrong’s “class- and culture-specific subject,” but rather is an aesthetic matrix for the formal, psychic, and ethical negotiations Butler articulates.

articulated in any definitive sense. Looking inward to radical interiority and the constant mutability of affective and relational self-states fractures the desires for cohesion latent in the demands of a socially constructed subject position. However, what promises does this anti-positivist view of the self make? In his essay “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject,”⁸ Leo Bersani offers a theoretical model for this kind of formal relationality between the self and the objects of the world:

There is neither a subject-object dualism nor a fusion of subject and object; there is rather a kind of looping movement between the two. The world finds itself in the subject and the subject finds itself in the world. What the world finds in the subject (in addition to physical correspondences) is a certain activity of consciousness, which partially reinvents the world as it repeats it. 168-169

Bersani’s notion of the “looping correspondence” between what he calls the “aesthetic subject” and the world situates the self within the world as it carves space for the world within the self. In pushing against the notion of “subject-object dualism” that presupposes a definitional difference organizing the ontologies of “self” and “world”/“other,” Bersani overrides the myths of mastery latent in fusional or projective dynamics. He replaces that figuration with a phenomenon of looping correspondences that continues the presence and understanding of both the self and world through an aesthetic experience of consciousness and form. In this way, Bersani explores the possibility of how “Art diagrams universal relationality” (Bersani 164). The aesthetic subject opens up the possibility of self-interpretation, recognition, and creation as “an activity of consciousness” that mobilizes the reality of the world by analyzing latent modes of “*ourselves*

⁸ For this chapter I refer to the version of this essay that first appeared in *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Winter 2006). There are minor rhetorical changes in the version that is later reprinted in the collection of essays entitled *Is the Rectum a Grave* (2009), which I have also consulted. However, the theoretical import remains consistent in both versions.

being” within an open system of perpetually active correspondences continuing to the side of both social construction of identity and the over-determinations of depth psychology.

Bersani theorizes how form, in his terms the work of art, “can in effect position us as aesthetic rather than as psychoanalytically defined subjects within the world” (164). While his essay establishes a distinction between the psychoanalytic and the aesthetic subjects, he continually utilizes the vocabulary and phenomena articulated by Freud, Lacan, Klein, and Laplanche to articulate how the aesthetic subject emerges. In this way the “and” in the title becomes inclusionary, and the different subjects—both psychoanalytic and aesthetic—appear as extensions of one another. Bersani’s distinction between the psychoanalytic subject and the aesthetic subject in this essay reminds me of a passage from Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself* where she says:

Full articulability should not be deemed the final goal of psychoanalytic work in any event, for that goal would imply a linguistic and egoic mastery over unconscious material that would seek to transform the unconscious into a reflective, conscious articulation—an impossible ideal, and one that undercuts one of the most important tenets of psychoanalysis. 58

Bersani’s aesthetic subject neither attempts full articulability; and yet, it still offers, perhaps, other ways to assert “reflective, conscious articulation” that work to the side of “linguistic and egoic mastery.” In many ways, attempts at mastering two vast stores of knowledge, experience and forms—the self and the world—cannot help but fail if asserted as two ontologically stable objects. Rather, what he calls “looping correspondences” and I see as a phenomenology of the self direct attention to the singular process of reinvention and repetition over exhaustive comprehension. Turning away from positivist certainties, he maps an aesthetic valence of self-interpretation that grapples with what Butler calls the “primary relations of dependency and impressionability that form and constitute us in persistent and obscure ways” (*Giving* 58). Both

the persistence and obscurity seem to me key ways to understand primary relations and are also apt descriptors for interiority itself. These values signal two ways in which works of art claim enduring footholds in both the conditions of culture and the individual experience of being. Looking to art to find universal relationality, we find the potential to grasp in whatever subjective, partial, imperfect gesture possible abstract notions that exceed ourselves. In this way, art suggests potential modes of persisting longer and touching deeper an experience of being than the myths of egoic mastery provide.

In his sweeping diagram of art as an overarching relation mode, Bersani, in a sense, collapses the self and the work of art in a manner that exceeds Klein's allegorical claims for the two and provides a foundation for my argument of selfhood as an aesthetic phenomenon originating in the continual psychic rhythms of consciousness. In the essay, he proposes that "the aesthetic subject, while it both produces and is produced by works of art, is a mode of relational being that exceeds the cultural province of art and embodies truths of being" (Bersani 164). While he may not clearly articulate what these extensive truths of being are, his claim that they originate within the "cultural province of art" leads us back to forms such as the novel as possible sites for "universal" relations and truths that exceed those in Armstrong's "class- and culture-specific subject." But even if these truths—outside the claims of scientific knowledge or certain extremes of epistemological philosophy—could ever be condensed to a certain number of dictates, they could never be as stable or clearly articulated as one may hope. Instead, the polysemic promise of artistic representations—wherein abstract ideas, mutable perspectives, and indistinct relations may flourish—points Bersani to works of art, writing, and cinema.⁹ In

⁹ In the essay Bersani discusses the unnamed protagonist/narrator of Pierre Michon's novel *The Grande Beune* (1996) (translated into English as *The Origin of the World* (2002)), and his relationship with the world through his desires and its objects. He declares Michon's protagonist

blurring the line between a “real” self and the kind of selves that exist in paintings, novels, or films, neither Bersani nor I attempt to argue that these forms represent actual people, but rather offer this discussion as a mode to understand how psychological and existential phenomenologies remain latent in aesthetic process.

Looking to similar formal techniques and aesthetic capacities of the self recalls Butler’s reminder that any autobiographical account relies on imaginative work and coheres through fiction and fantastic self-representation. The inexact and subjective methods of aesthetic work confront and can find formal—and even fictional—means to come to terms with the impossible and irrevocable aspects of self-knowledge that remain unaccounted by positivist considerations:

In our work on the visual arts, Ulysse Dutoit and I have been studying film and painting as documents of a universe of inaccurate replications, of the perpetual and imperfect recurrences of forms, volumes, colors, and gestures. We have spoken of these recurrences as evidence of the subject’s presence everywhere, not as an invasive projection or incorporation designed to eliminate otherness, but rather as an ontological truth about both the absolute distinctness and the innumerable similitudes that at once guarantee the objective reality of the world and the connectedness between the world and the subject. We are born into various families of singularity that connect us to all the forms that have, as it were, always anticipated our coming, our presence. 168

Like Butler’s truth of being, Bersani’s “aesthetic subject” also grounds itself in enigmatic articulations that are never fully recoverable in the psychoanalytic context and defy the stable separation between self and other, self and world. And yet, instead of dismissing them for their inexactitude, he claims their perpetual and tentative formations as the only way to understand the concomitant realities of the self and the world. In calling attention to aesthetic forms as “documents of a universe of inaccurate replications, of the perpetual and imperfect recurrences

as “an empty subject; he is not exactly, in psychoanalytic terms, a subject without an unconscious, but one whose unconscious can only come to him from the outside. The narrator receives from the world the material that will be fashioned into his particular fantasy of violence” (167).

of forms, volumes, colors, and gestures,” Bersani gives Butler’s interrupted and open-ended moments a crucial role. They become the votives for the broken repetitions, fragmented connections, and obscure experiences that not only challenge the coherence of narrative, but allow the self to persist without definition. Considering the almost infinite potential of physical and psychic life that occurs during mortal life, these moments that may go unrecognized or only conceived as ruptures actually give way to sites of existential plentitude. In this way, objectivity grows less familiar with positivist certainty and becomes akin to the kind of plastic formalism that exists in the “family of singularities” that continue the inexact and plenary rhythms of consciousness as it moves through the world.

While Butler’s and Bersani’s theories approach the subject of the self from the different perspectives of psychoanalytic literary critique and ethical consideration, they bear many similarities including their thoughtful reconsiderations of how psychoanalytic practices are best utilized when directed away from objective and determined goals. Throughout *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler repositions psychoanalytic work and points it in an aesthetic direction. Moving out from the irrecoverability of a fully articulated self that Butler discusses, Bersani’s aesthetic subject is a polysemous correspondence of “inaccurate replications” and “perpetual and imperfect recurrences” that destabilizes the construction of a bounded identity. In thinking of the self as aesthetically oriented, as opposed to socially constructed, Bersani’s subject not only exceeds external rubrics of legibility, but motivates the consideration of “a reality” composed of the psychic affects latent within forms, volumes, colors, and gestures. He sees the unconscious as challenging the epistemologies of self knowledge that cohere around discrete and seemingly inviolable binaristic definitions of space (particularly interior and exterior, surface and depth), temporality, and ontology (static and dynamic being). Bersani, rather, describes these

definition as existing in a mobile process that constitutes being as “an accretion: the psychic designates its place in the vast family of stored past and present being by contributing new inscriptions” (169). This accretion of “new inscriptions” on a store of past and present experiences, affects, and relations forwards the self as a continuing reparative phenomenon of creating forms that extend the self throughout time and space. Instead of appropriating the world, or merely projecting one into it, the self becomes a discursive syntax colliding affect, vision, and, most importantly here, language that repeats the presence of the world within the aesthetic framing of a self.

In place of fixed spatialization of being within the world, radical interiority supersedes the kind of strict adherence that cultivates social construction and psychic over-determinations. Rather, like Bersani’s aesthetic subject, it compels a mode of rethinking the self through reimagining and re-visioning relationality via forms that exceed the specificity of social “norms.” Bersani understands fantasy—itself an aesthetically oriented dimension of psychic life—as the means to exceed these externally enforced constructions:

The human subject does of course exist and act discretely, separately; but its being exceeds its bounded subjectivity. There is a perspective on fantasy that would imprison it within subjectivity. This perspective is consistent with the limited individuality traced by a psychologically defined subject. I’m suggesting something different: fantasy as a function more of contingent positioning in the world than of psychic depth. (170)

The idea of a subjectivity that is mobile through a series of “contingent positionings” replaces depth knowledge with formal relations. In this way, the self exceeds the almost Paterian imprisonment that Bersani evokes, while still keeping individuality intact through the specific syntax of correspondences. While leaning on the tropes of psychoanalytic theory, Bersani reactivates concepts like fantasy by placing them outside of a divisive schematization of self and other. The mobility of fantasy, not only in its changing position to an evolving reality, but also

within its own capacity to reimagine and reconfigure itself, shirks the delimiting bounds that regulate not just a psychically defined but also a socially constructed subject. The aesthetic subject possesses the paradox of simultaneous being and non-being: it is at once the phenomenon of self and the production of it. This release from the demands of a bounded subject position invites the possibilities of creation and recreation, imagination without necessary manifestation, constant reflection without appropriation.

Understanding self as a phenomenology when at play in the field of the aesthetic counters the models of it that demand coherence along historical concepts of psychology or social constructions of identity. Rather, I argue that selfhood is a psycho-aesthetic phenomenon that flourishes within interiority while engaged in a constant struggle to understand a world receptive to the arcane and paradoxical experience of inner life. The aesthetic process I am exploring does not involve stable definition, but rather an embrace of virtuality and potentiality of the being-to-come; in this way, it is always in an active negotiation to create forms that are in the perpetual present of becoming. Representing psychic life in terms of form—especially aesthetic forms of literature and the visual arts—may seem to require the instantiation of set limits for consciousness. And yet, origin and telos emerge as formal constraints only necessary within the bounds of positivism; in this way, the aesthetic self extends psychic phenomena through these correspondences and repetitions, testing all but the most abstract and utopic forms. A sense of compromise, though, does not foreclose the innovations provided by continual self-interpretation and formal experimentation, as the constant developments of the novel in the examples I provide attest. In this way, representation, especially self-representation in literature exist as psycho-aesthetic phenomenon, that while not exact, challenges and possibly extends the abilities to understand selfhood outside of external parameters of historically constructed morality and

philosophies. In this dissertation, I look to further Bersani's model of the aesthetic subject, by elucidating the role of radical interiority as a place of needed attention within novelistic representation. While Bersani's example of Pierre Michon's novel *The Origin of the World* follows the well-worn path of Freudian libidinal desires and fantasies of masochism, I expand his concept of the "unique syntax of being" as accounting for more various affective relations while applying it to different discursive styles.

To follow Bersani's proposition I turn to the novels of Brontë, James, and Woolf, not only as products of creative invention, but further, to reveal how selfhood is dependent on aesthetic forms and phenomena. In this way, I engage the latent interpretative questions brought to bear by both "suspicious" or symptomatic reading and surface reading.¹⁰ I utilize both throughout this dissertation, while not prioritizing one over the other; both, in fact, are useful and neither can be totally discounted when trying to "read" the obscure and formal manifestation of selfhood. This dual method is evident in my second chapter: I use Charlotte Brontë as my first case study to examine how her novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* channel the faux-autobiographical tradition to explore the psychoanalytic and aesthetic dynamic of radical interiority. For this chapter, I build upon Linda Peterson's historicist model of interpreting Brontë's novels through

¹⁰ Recently, the work of Rita Felski, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others have targeted the efficacy and the kinds of interpretive meanings produced by what Paul Ricoeur calls "the hermeneutics of suspicion." This kind of reading believes that meaning must be ferreted out and only in its exposure will the pervasive strength of it be recognized. Felski has explored the critique of suspicious reading in "Suspicious Minds" (2011), "A Critique of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion" (2012), and other works, while Sedgwick focused on its famous application in D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (1989) in her essay, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," which I will discuss further in chapter four of this work. In "Surface Reading: An Introduction" (2009), Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus confront suspicious, or symptomatic, readings by seeking meaning on the surface—what is readily apparent and does not need to be "demystified" to compel its truth.

the lens of Victorian life-writing to look at the underlying psycho-affective percolations of her first-person narrator/protagonists and the surface construction of the texts. I argue that the autobiographical construct employed by both of these two novels departs from the conventions of the “domestic missionary memoir” that Peterson compares them to and uses her notion of “self-interpretation” to focus on interior rather than exterior constitutive forces. Understanding Jane and Lucy Snowe as authors themselves emphasizes how Brontë's narratives problematize the stable conventions of Victorian self-representation and the accepted trajectory of the marriage plot. In both novels, interior subjective experience ruptures narrative and breaks with generic convention to reveal how the inner lives of both protagonist-narrators extends in palimpsest relation to the discursive space of the text. As authors, Jane and Lucy reveal their own “lives” as in-process and register unique selfhoods through moments of idiosyncratic discourse. Through this aesthetic agency, both characters are able to make selves that reimagine affective, relational, and narrative norms.

Moving from the conventions of the Victorian marriage plot, I turn to Henry James’s representation of consciousness in a text that engages nineteenth-century realism while complicating it through an attempt at an exhaustive portrayal of complex psychic life. Throughout *The Portrait of Lady*, James represents Isabel Archer’s selfhood as exceeding the forms of its containment, undercutting both *mise-en-scene* and the gaze of other characters. In James’s desire to carve out spaces for her consciousness, he creates discursive gaps between being objectified and phenomenological being that allow for radical interiority’s emergence. The chapter explores the leitmotif of the portrait as a device James uses to narrate the subjective expansion of characters into the liminal zones between language and vision. In *The Art of the Novel*, James dissects key instances when the tension between image and action eventuate a

“beautiful” excess that gestures toward as-yet-unrepresentable sites beyond either the literary or visual alone. In *Portrait* forms of aesthetic likeness—either actual or metaphoric—grant Isabel release from her embodied and socially constructed identities. In this chapter, I use Roland Barthes’ and Rosalind Krauss’s post-structuralist critiques of film and photography to show how the novel depicts portraiture, and viewing portraits, as points that breach formal delimitations and allow interior life to challenge the demands of objectification and social performance. In Isabel’s trajectory toward formal release in the novel’s open-endedness as a kind of death, James situates radical interiority as a site of selfhood that cannot be fully assimilated within the norms of Victorian and Edwardian social relations.

In my final chapter, I turn to Virginia Woolf’s experimental practice of representing selfhood in her first modernist novel, *Jacob’s Room*. Using her essay “On Being Ill” as a lens to explore the inability to know one’s self as or another, I explore how this belief that seems to run counter to the penetration of inner experience that exemplifies the stream of consciousness developed in her novels shapes her ethical comprehension of selfhood. My final chapter discusses her mode of representing characters as being in conversation with the idea of “significant form,” the notion developed by Clive Bell and Roger Fry to describe how the isolation of form elicits “reality.” In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf contributes to their theory of “significant form” by isolating the figure through rhetorical gestures that provide insight into the flexible relations that contour the interior lives of others without the reductive demands of knowledge. She constructs her protagonist Jacob Flanders as distanced or absent to question the modes representing the self in the *bildungsroman* through “sympathetic forms” that enshroud the phenomenological aspects of interior life. In doing so, she registers an ambivalence for sympathy through fragmented structure, evocative imagery, and impressionistic languages that strive to

capture reality while still isolating the unknown contained within the self. I claim radical interiority as the “significant form” in the novel, showing how Woolf honors the illegibility within the self as a means to keep essential existential questions continually open.

In each of these novels, radical interiority exposes the limitations of these forms, but also offers a mode of understanding it in perhaps a more flexible and less-positivist approach—within the aesthetically oriented imaginary and its manifestation in highly individuated formal correspondences. In this way, the self persists not only within interiority, nor in possessive and masterful projections, but as the looping and mutable rhythms between the mind and the experience of the world. The level of aesthetic form—narrative, character development, imagery and even language and syntax—seeks to represent interior process by referring to a paradoxical status of being both inconstant and irreducible. My interdisciplinary approach to these texts offers new interpretive avenues to understand issues at stake in the creation of novels and, more generally, the representation of psychic life. In analyzing these orders through an aesthetic lens, I focus on their manifestation as both form and process: I read the finished representation as continually registering the imagined experience of discursive practice. The cross-period connections of my work—not only in the swath of literary history covered, but also in the number of critical interlocutors I engage—reflects on this project’s urgency as it moves through periods and media. In this way, it further opens up avenues to think about contemporary issues of representation: I challenge certain liberal conceptions of identity by exploring different kinds of selves, such as those described by queer theory—genderqueer, trans, etc.—and other life experiences that are compromised or unrecognized in the broader socio-historical account. By asserting the idea of selfhood as an aesthetic experience rooted in the vast unmasterable phenomenology of being in the world, my hope is that the work

constitutes an initial move to rethinking how aesthetic theories may advance modes of ethical self-recognition and expression. What is revealed at the discursive edges is a reimagining of how to understand new versions, relations, and modes of selfhood.

Life/Writing:

Spaces of Selfhood in Charlotte's Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*

Lonely as I am, how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career—perseverance to plead through two long, weary years with publishers till they admitted me? How should I be with youth past, sisters lost, a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family? In that case I should have no world at all: the raven, weary of surveying the deluge, and without an ark to return to, would be my type. As it is, something like a hope and motive sustains me still. I wish all your daughters—I wish every woman in England, had also a hope and motive. Alas! there are many old maids who have neither.—Believe me, yours sincerely. 19¹¹

This 1849 letter from Charlotte Brontë to her publisher W. S. Williams ties so many key threads of her life—her writing, her family, her nascent feminism—to a romance with loneliness, that it goes far in weaving the Brontë legend of the alienated genius on the barren moor. Feeling isolated qualifies her very being in the first line before stretching into all aspects of her life: the sole survivor of a family decimated by disease and tragedy, the educated outsider in her community, and the resident of a bleak and isolated stretch of countryside. Her separation from the world seems a tragic sentence of solitary confinement she must carry out as reparation for unfortunate biographical circumstance (“youth past, sisters lost”), a prohibitive historical period (the hopelessness of daughters and old maids), and the destiny of one too singular for this world (courage and talent given by Providence). And yet, she seems so under the thrall of this state that she ends the letter with the wish that “every woman in England” share her lot. But while Brontë may feel alone, the career she credits for her solace sustains her. It is not any mere profession

¹¹ It is no wonder why Helen Moglen chose this letter to begin her literary biography *Charlotte Brontë: A Self Conceived* (1976). Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, July 3, 1849. Moglen, 19.

with the promise of social mobility and access to a cosmopolitan world that gives her comfort. (Perhaps just the opposite, as this form of employment could evoke her unpleasant experiences as a teacher.) Rather, writing—the creative work that occupied her since childhood when she began weaving tales of fictional worlds with her siblings and then continued on her own as an adult in her novels—is the life-giving "hope and motive" that offers her terra firma from the Old Testament Flood. Over the course of the next two chapters in this section, I argue that Brontë's own belief that her writing offers sustenance and expansiveness finds efflorescence in reading the fictional heroines in both *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) as authors themselves.

In this letter, Brontë's creative work, as contingent to both self-reflection and social critique, shapes her relation to the external world and her own radical interiority. In *Repression in Victorian Fiction* (1987), John Kucich argues that the fictional worlds she imagines in her writing open Brontë to "a locus of pure inward vitality and expansion, in opposition to the claustrophobic, lifeless world of everyday reality she regarded around her" (Kucich 55). Brontë's description of her loneliness in the letter replicates this dynamic of release into interior plenitude. It not only reveals her barren social condition—conveying the "lifeless world of everyday reality" as really "no world at all"—but it also posits writing as an escape from this claustrophobia. In trying to reconsider the function of repression and challenge its punitive aspects in Brontë scholarship, I situate this locus of inner life within what Julia Kristeva calls "the realm of signs" that "the negation of that fundamental loss opens up...for us" (42). In the letter, the fundamental loss of the world precedes the emergence of an aesthetic self. Her metaphoric transubstantiation into the raven grants her a subject position within a voided world that she fills with images of constant movement, birds in flight, and oceanic overflow. Or, as Kucich put it, her writing grants access to "the kind of subjective expansion—a euphoric

eccentricity of the self to itself—that we usually attribute only to more explicitly passionate forms of emotional abandon" (68). This passionate abandon into the vital expanse instantiates the primary function of her radical interiority as the "[production of] an endless narrative texture" (Kucich). The loss of a constrained world allows Brontë to generate a continuous discourse to reimagine new ways to represent and modes to understand the self. Free from the demands of a claustrophobic and lifeless reality, Brontë's writing, engendered by the expanse of psychic complexity and creative imagination, draws from the nonce possibility of signs that can challenge or exceed the limitations of coherence imposed on a subject.

However nightmarish, the unstable space of the non-world connects introspective release with the imaginative plenitude. In "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" (1968), Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis explain that "we are offered in the field of fantasy, the origin of the subject himself" (11). The subject in Brontë's letter does not merely trace its origin back to the biographical circumstance of that bleak moor, but further and deeper to a conception of the self in the mobile and poetic phenomenon of writing. This connection between Kucich's "locus of pure inward vitality" and writing becomes apparent in an entry from Brontë's "Roe Head Journal" that reworks the same poetic vocabulary of the letter to Williams written more than ten years later:¹²

A stormy day is at the moment passing off in a murmuring and bleak night. I now assume my own thoughts. My mind relaxes...and falls back onto the rest which nobody in this house knows of but myself. I now, after a day of weary wandering, return to the ark which for me floats alone on the face of this world's desolate and boundless deluge. JE 399.

¹² See Christine Alexander's excellent introduction to Brontë's "Juvenilia," reprinted in the *Norton Critical Edition of Jane Eyre*.

The occurrence of the ark that sustains her in the bleak desolation of the lost world in this earlier journal entry not only establishes a familiar image-repertoire that extends over the years, but also shows its flexibility to transform from a source of terror to one of solace. Within her own thoughts, she turns to that “still small voice” which releases “my spirit and engrosses all my living feelings... and, like Haworth and home, wakes sensations which lie dormant elsewhere” (JE 399). The genesis of this small voice, though like the town and the sanctity of the Brontë parsonage, exists in excess of the sentimental geographies of home; and yet, it gestures beyond the physical toward the imaginative landscapes of radical interiority. Bringing it forth in writing, she continues “I did indeed lean upon the thunder-wakening wings of such a stormy blast as I have seldom heard blow, and it whirled me away like health in the wilderness for five seconds of ecstasy” before a “trance seemed to descend on a sudden, and verily this foot trod” upon Angria (JE 399). Images of unconstrained interior release—the whirling heath, the overwhelming trance—hurls Brontë into the ecstatic possibilities of the fictional world she imagined with her brother Branwell. Angria overtakes the prosaic account of Roe Head tedium with a seamlessness that shows the porous boundaries between reality and fiction that structure Brontë’s intersubjectivity.

The blurred line between fantasy and fiction, gives Brontë’s writing the power to access the self as simultaneously psychic and aesthetic phenomena. In her ecstatic abandon, she turns away from physical reality and toward the expansive interior worlds made “real” in her writing. Like Laplanche and Pontalis’ fantasizing subject, she is “caught up...in the sequence of images” (17). Their theories recover Brontë’s presence as dispersed in every aspect of the Angrian *mise-en-scène*: she persists there “in a desubjectized form, that is to say in the very syntax of the sequence in question” (17). As the very grammar that articulates and composes the fantasy,

Brontë transforms into the signs and structures of signification that engender her writer. She exceeds the stability of a single subject position: she not only exists in the point of view of the observer who trespasses from one world into another, but also as the “war-shaken shores” of Angria, and its Byronic denizens (399-401). Anne Anlin Chen elaborates Laplanche and Pontalis’s theories of desubjectivation in fantasy: the fragmentation of the self into signs and syntax give way “a state of agencylessness that nonetheless constitutes the subject’s sense of integrity and hence his/her potential for agency” (Chen 120). Paradoxically the “scattering the ‘self’” is required for Brontë “to constitute a stage for the ‘self’” in writing (Chen 120). Caught up in the trance, with Angrian images availing upon her, Brontë’s interior staging makes the fictional narrative a platform to explore her radical interiority by remaking it outside the confines of everyday reality. The creation of Angria recalls Kristeva’s “level of imagination, level of writing” that “bears witness” to consciousness’s “hiatus” from reality (26). In this interruption of reality, Brontë harnesses the self’s reparative potential to maintain integrity and agency beyond the policing of a coherent socially constructed subject.

When the fantasy is suddenly dashed (literally) by the intrusion of Roe Head’s headmistress, Brontë finds herself back in the desolate bleakness of reality: the storm raging, the ark of imagination nowhere in sight. The structure framing this entry—bare reality circumscribing the overlapping spaces of Brontë’s interior life and her writing—mirrors Chen’s explanation of fantasy establishing “the limits of reality and illusion” that “as a result, constitute the *possibility* of desire itself” (116). While the longing to escape reality engenders the possibility of desire, desire also engenders the aesthetic possibilities in writing. The vast terrain of Angria becomes a matrix for Brontë to re-imagine her own interior expansiveness “as creative in essence,” to borrow Melanie Klein’s idea (Likierman 79). In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s

reading of Klein, writing harnesses a reparative impulse, equally psychic and aesthetic, “to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self” (149). This imaginative world offers not just possibility of continual recreation, but offers a responsive resource for self-care and understanding. In this way, writing fosters the means for Brontë to manage her “being in the world” as an aesthetic experience extending from radical interiority.

Just as Brontë herself sought relief from lifeless reality in the realm of fiction, her narrator-protagonists seek release from the formal strictures of narrative convention. Reading Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe as writers reveals the psychic desires and aesthetic discourse latent in their “self-representation” as the force shaping the novels. In this way, the release of their radical interiority on the page reimagines Jane’s and Lucy’s “continuous state of flux” as an aesthetic phenomenology of self-interpretation and creation (Kucich 111). What Kucich sees as disturbance reflects a continued desire to represent radical interior states that exceed the policed legibility of the subject: “introspection [that] is always sliding away from fixity, multiplying perspectives, [and] changing judgments in the face of temporal contingencies” speaks to the narrators’/authors’ struggle to make visible a selfhood in tension with both social structures and formal conventions of the novel, including the faux autobiography and the marriage plot (111). As opposed to this flux and turmoil, Garrett Stewart compares Jane’s ability “to create a bounded representation of herself in *Jane Eyre*, her ‘life,’” to the “fictive space of *Villette* [which] is all that Lucy produces” (Stewart 266).¹³ While Stewart contends that *Villette* “can denominate nothing more nor less than the site of writing,” I argue that in both novels the expansiveness of interiority exceeds boundedness allowing for the emergence of a unique self as concomitant to

¹³ In *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (1996)

the production of discourse (266). Just as Bersani's "aesthetic subject" exceeds its own subjectivity through formal correspondences, both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* reimagine selfhood as aesthetic phenomena.

These novels, like Brontë's relation to Angria, become the means their protagonists/narrators use to explore life experience as refracted through the flexible matrix of radical interiority's imaginative plentitude. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe* fill their solitary hours perusing books or writing: from the ornithological text that young Jane reads to the laboriously revised letters Lucy writes to Dr. John, both women engage language as thresholds of self understanding. While there is an obvious lacuna marking the process by which either woman writes her own story—no narrated scenes of Jane working on a manuscript and no preface wherein Lucy explains her intention for her autobiography—this lack actually emphasizes the intimacy between writing and introspection. The structure of Brontë's novels—composed of imagistic leitmotifs, inwardly directed address, syncopated tense shifts, and narrative evasions—act as a correlative to an active dynamic of refiguring a narrative account that mirrors the unfixity of interior life. Peppered throughout the texts are indications of retrospection, editing, forced transitions, and thematic reoccurrence that disrupt subjective coherence in favor of aesthetic phenomenology. The continually active interior processes depicted in their writing emphasize the palimpsest relation between the self's imaginary plentitude and the form, syntax, and grammar of representation. The "pure inward vitality and expansion" of radical interiority that *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe* access in writing structures their life stories in tension with the ordering logics that determines narrative.

With her farewell to Angria and its more radical model of collaboration and formal heterogeneity, Brontë's decision to pursue more realist fiction pushes her toward the more well-

traversed terrain of existing forms, such as life-writing and the marriage plot. Yet, her novels work against these inherited formal conventions: they both represent the *process of narrating* as a formal ethos that exceeds the representational stability of subject positions and external circumstance. Rather than following the conventionalities of life-writing and the Victorian marriage plot, both novels make space for an internal psychic wellspring by testing formal limits through discursive enigmas and ruptures of logic. In this way, both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* forward a counter-narrative that reimagines interior plenitude as the means to make visible the lives of women that exceed the social barriers of gender and class as well as normative representations. In other words, just like Brontë who found “vitality and expansiveness” in Angria and other fictional landscapes, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe write so as to make visible their own radically interior selves as aesthetic challenges to their stifling conditions of life. In this way, writing marks the intimacy between psychic dynamic and self-understanding. In the following chapters, I discuss both novels in further depth. In *Jane Eyre* we witness the titular protagonist's simultaneous struggle against social conditions of Victorian England and the formal conventions of life-writing and the marriage plot. While *Villette*, with its sly dynamic of intimacy and estrangement, proposes a more radical self-representation, making more complex claims about the complicated connection between intersubjectivity and narrative.

Jane Eyre as Author

In *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography* (1999), Linda H. Peterson rightfully stresses *Jane Eyre's* subtitle "An Autobiography."¹⁴ While she connects the novel with the ongoing historical discourses that Victorian life-writing was juggling—across various genres and different interpretive models—I argue that this same stress upon the title resonates deeper, signifying the concurrent psychic and aesthetic energies latent in Jane becoming an author. I use Peterson's term for life-writing as "self-interpretation" to consider Jane's relation to her own narrative as more radical than its reputation of hero's journey cum marriage plot may suggest. Rather, I push the term further to analyze representation as an aesthetic and psychic matrix of self-understanding and self-creation. With her writing actively engaged in charting her expanding intersubjective life, Jane's "self-interpretation" is motivated by discursive self-interrogation—"Who am I?" and "How can I express myself?"—rather than in the stable autobiographical account of a life that the genre implies. Placing her narration in a dynamic relation to the continuous positions of psychic life as opposed to the normative bounds of nineteenth-century fiction, Jane's representation of her experience occurs within a structure that echoes John Stuart Mill's poetic intersubjectival dialogue. This desire to reimagine from both the social and literary forms persists in the spatial, social, psychic, and aesthetic foundations of the

¹⁴ In chapter three, "'The Feelings and Claims of the Little People': Heroic Missionary Memoirs, Domestic(ated) Spiritual Autobiography, and *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*," Peterson remarks that Brontë "understood [her] work to participate in a Victorian tradition of autobiography, as [her] subtitle, "An Autobiography"...reiterates" (80).

novel. In this sense, Gilbert and Gubar's comment that the narrative is continually determined by volleys between "enclosure and escape" figuring the trajectory of her interior life as moving toward discursive plenitude (338). Jane continually evokes the trope of longing to see, grasp, and know that which is beyond her reach throughout the novel, engendering the intersubjectual dialogue as a mediation of the bounded limits of representation. She activates every relation as a site of active self-interpretation in an attempt to develop new forms of self-representation that mirror the continual flux of her interior life. From the binding of a book and the architecture of a building to the composition of a work of art, each form she encounters has the potential as a threshold for selfhood to emerge as an aesthetic experience.

In merging psychic and aesthetic energies with discursive sites (reading that bleeds into writing, fantasy that becomes autobiography, and drawing as relation) Jane claims agency over her own visibility and viability. In one of her most famous proclamations she demands to be seen by Rochester, asking, "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart!" (JE 222). Jane's desire to connect with Rochester as the "spirit that addresses your spirit" beyond the "the medium of custom, conventionalities" speaks to her longing to be released from the social vocabularies that determine visibility (JE 222). In much the same way as she wishes to supersede conventions for Rochester to see her for herself, the composition of her autobiography makes her interior self visible by challenging the expectations of life-writing. Gesturing to an interior space governed by desire and imagination as the wellspring of self-interpretation, Jane's psychic life can transcend interiority—that Paterian "thick wall of personality" buttressed by the medium of "conventionalities"—to find its representation in creative writing. Her demand to be seen by Rochester does not stem from a desire to satisfy his patriarchal authority, but to command her

visibility through the narration of her own story. Like Mill's view of poetry as "feeling confessing itself to itself," the disembodied site of spiritual communion Jane seeks with Rochester resembles the intersubjectival dialogue which precedes writing. In this moment Jane's writing and selfhood are inextricably linked within a phenomenological discourse of visibility and becoming that demands release from the reductive structures of convention that overlook the vitality of inner life.

This desire for self-understanding in discursive spaces that resist physical, social, and formal bounds mediates Jane's connection to the world from the novel's start. In the first chapter a young Jane communes with Bewick's *History of British Birds*, an isolated subject (percolating with an array of affective postures—including grief, hope, rage, and fear) engaging with form to flee the confines of her life as an orphan in her Aunt Reed's home at Gateshead. Her narrative begins with Jane reading in "mounted into the window-seat" and "having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close... shrined in double retirement" (JE 5). This isolated perch offers Jane a chance for creative engagement with the book—projecting herself into a series of vivid tableaux, including images of a "rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray"; a "broken boat stranded on a desolate coast"; and "the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking" (JE 6). The engravings depict physical isolation, desperation, and luridly beguiling devastation that, of course, recall Jane's emotional exile. Any possibility for mobility is foreclosed (for "there was no possibility of taking a walk that day," as the novel famously opens); Jane turns inward (JE 5). In the plenitude of an intersubjectival experience structured by image and text, Jane discovers a site of unboundedness—a release from the walls of Gateshead and her stiflingly stratified position.

As Rachel Ablow says in her introduction to *The Feeling of Reading*, Jane “is less absorbed in the text before her than actively inventing her own narratives on the basis of the materials and psychic space it provides” (Ablow, “Introduction” 2). While these images mirror the solitude of her life, they also show her longing to create an escape into the expansive and dynamic world of Brontë’s own invented narratives. Signaling the inchoate articulation of a visionary self, Jane finds the keys for self-understanding in the symbols that compose her own interior landscape. As the young Jane says, “while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon,” and in its offering of “a pale blank of mist and cloud,” “the wet lawn,” “the storm-beat shrub,” “the ceaseless rain,” and the “long and lamentable blast,” she discovers in the view the perfect setting in which to weave germ-like emotions into narratives inspired by her perusal of the illustrated volume (5-6). Projecting her mind beyond walls of Gateshead, Jane, safely within a comfortable comfy enclosure bounded by the illustrated page and the window pane, lets her imagination soar with a bird’s-eye view to Lapland and beyond in fantastic escape. The structure that emerges is one that lays bare writing as able to vouchsafe her interior life. Jane’s imaginative understanding of reality—which has been cold, isolated, and threatened—is an accretion of images in which she can visualize herself in a responsive world. Invoking reading as writing, Jane transforms the discursive site of the page into a world where she can emerge as a self with both agency and visibility. This scene of narrative invention initiates Jane’s self-interpretation through aesthetic and discursive immersion; an exploration that pushes her deeper into self-reflection and makes her more aware of her own subjective excesses that run against formal and social limitations. Through self-communion she not only better understands her own radical interiority, but also finds an aesthetic mode of “being in the world.”

While perusing the book, Jane draws attention to “certain introductory pages that, child as I

was, I could not pass quite as a blank” before she admits that “nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland” (JE 6). This short passage sketches an initial blueprint for Jane’s creative attempts to explore the swells of her interior life through the pages of her autobiography. The bleakness that bridges the dreary landscape outside Gateshead and the images in Bewick’s book make porous boundaries that position Jane in discursive relation to the world and its objects. The structural similarity and consonance of these adjacent phrases charge the embedded terms *blank* and *bleak* within a circuit of affect and aesthetics. While neither word percolates with connotations of positive feeling—“bleak” being clearly negative and “blank” only neutral at best—these two words undergo a lexical transformation through their relationality within the narrative space. Thinking back to Jane’s initial description of her view from the window as including a “pale *blank* of mist and cloud,” the word “blank” sticks out: she does not use the term *blank* in its meteorological sense that would fit her description (italics mine).¹⁵ Nor, does Jane qualify the mist as merely bleak, though this introductory scene illustrates young Jane’s attraction to bleakness. Rather, the term *blank* makes it apparent that she considers her view of the world as having the quality of empty pages, screens, or canvases ready to be filled with images drawn from her inner life. *Bleak* and *blank* act as looping correspondences in which Jane’s introspection turns into her imaginative projection. Through the conditionally blank pages filled with bleak images and the bleak weather rendered as blank spaces, Jane’s interior narrative comes into focus through its cast upon the collapse of these proximate planes.

¹⁵ A well-defined cloud mass that can be observed at a distance. It covers the horizon, but is not directly overhead.

In “Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*” Eve Sedgwick discusses the notion of spatialized interiority in James’s prefaces. She remarks that James’s production of the prefaces for the New York edition creates space by recognizing a distance “(temporal, figured as intersubjective, figured in turn as spatial) [that] seems, if anything, to constitute the relished internal space of James's absorbed subjectivity” (*Touching* 40). This notion of subjective space not only makes room for the foundational position of the intersubjectival dialogue within *Jane Eyre*, but provides the interior expanse for a concurrence of relations that tests formal limitations even as it may structure them. Throughout the novel blank spaces and empty vistas—figured through stretches of terrain or sky—becomes absorbing screens on which Jane projects and organizes her interior life that will compose her autobiography. Her yearning to encounter the unknown—both in the world and in her self—satisfies itself only in the creative forms that mirror the non-positivist expanses of her interior life. These forms—whether as real as mountains, or fanciful figures drawn from her imaginary reweaving of life experience—become meaningful only when invoked in the service of Jane’s actualization as an aesthetic self. The formal structure of Jane’s autobiography builds upon the opening up of these blank vistas as opportunities for her to work through self-understanding within the capaciousness of discursive process. Reading these sites as both affectively and formally cathected regions reimagines Jane’s mobility through the text as following a path of self-interpretation toward self-creation.

Between her departure from Lowood School and Rochester’s arrival at Thornfield Hall, Jane continually surveys, meditates, and projects her desires onto the open landscapes and stretches of sky, marking this period as the most intense, the intersection between spatial negotiation and self-interpretation in the novel. Emerging from strict and austere experiences at

both Gateshead and Lowood School, Jane brims with a desire to understand herself and live without constraints. She confesses that “My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils” (74). Jane spatializes the world as a varied field constructed not through geographic terms alone, but as a vast affective range of interiority: the spaces of the world become the spaces of intersubjectivity. In comparison to her past, Jane emphasizes the “reality” of the world and knowledge that exists outside the rigid proscriptions she endured at Gateshead and at Lowood. These contradictory conceptions of “temporal space”—the closed and fortified region of her past and the open and varied one of her future—marks Jane’s engagement with her own internalized “landscape of relational positionalities” (*Touching* 40). Jane’s release into the possibilities of different “positions” and away from the “rules and systems” allows her to discover how her own radical interiority constitutes “real knowledge” in its endless narrative flux. The field of experience that was previously so foreclosed to Jane that she projected herself into imaginative escapes now offers space in a world capable of reflecting, nurturing, and understanding her. This shift to a world of expansive landscapes where Jane possesses free mobility grants her the groundwork to author a visible self. Across planes that recall the space of pages, her desire to know, explore, and surmount these expanses transforms the varied fields into discursive sites of her selfhood. In mirroring Jane’s posture toward herself, the world, and, importantly, toward language itself, the spaces emerge as “real” through fluid relations that cross interior life and aesthetic creation. Her journey “forth into the expanse” of her autobiographical cartography gives Jane agency over her representation and the ability to chart the vast amplitudes of affective landscapes.

In the famous sequence of passages that takes place while Jane paces Thornfield's roof and upper storey, her creative desires stretch in excess of her social position and manifest as the germinations of the novel. Connecting her movement through physical spaces with the movement through her spatialized interiority, this scene evokes her own process of writing, despite containing no explicit reference to it. However, the adjacency of these passages (just like the charged terms "bleak" and "blank") make implicit how Jane's experience of self—especially of her interior life—extends into the world as a narrative phenomenon. The passages' vital preamble establishes how the psychic plentitude of fantasy undergirds Jane's authorship function:

I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim skyline—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen—that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach. 95

This moment, like the one when Jane departs Lowood, emphasizes infinite space as a trope for self-interpretation. Jane's reaction to the dim vista from the great height of Thornfield's leads is not despair but desire. The limits of her view do not confine her to yet another imprisoning system, but rather kindles the "power of vision which might overpass that limit." As before, Jane's desire for release positions her in a dynamic relation between organizing forms that shape the world and a vision rooted in interior experience. Striving to reimagine herself in it, she gestures toward space as a sign for the process of self-exploration in desire's fantastic expansiveness. Like the bleak blank that rolled out before her while reading Bewick's in the window seat, the sky, though dim, takes on the cinematic aspect of the screen on which she sees

acknowledges desires, imagines experiences, and wishes for connection. Here, Jane envisions a world she has never seen—a world understood through its looping correspondence with herself.

Of course, visions in the sky only play in the theater of the mind, emphasizing Jane's position as a gauge between the porous intersubjective boundaries of fantasy and reality. This porosity is exemplified in the passage that immediately follows her ode to vision without limits—her emblematic soliloquy while pacing the third floor of Thornfield. In this striking moment she elaborates how the interior dynamic mirrors writing:

Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third storey, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. 95-96

In the infinite spaces Jane crosses as she paces the corridor, she composes an endless narrative of her own that resists containment in language. Without *Bewick's* mediation, Jane's inward address summons creative agency. In his reading of this passage, Stewart sees her as at “once encoder and decoder in this version of the unconscious structured like language” (Stewart 247). The simultaneous encoding and decoding mirrors the inscription and erasure of the palimpsest and places Jane the threshold of self-understanding through perpetual discourse. In keeping her tale to evocative and symbolic terms without further narrative elaboration, Jane, unlike Mill's poet, allows the inwardly told tale to expand without language's further approximation. Like her youthful escape into an illustrated book, or even Brontë's Angrian trance, language—whether read, written, or, here, imagined—quickens Jane's vitality in its capacity to weave psychic life

into a narrative full of all “that I desired and had not in my actual existence.” Unlike Sedgwick’s reading of James’s interior as both spatial and temporal, the relational dynamic of Jane’s intersubjectual dialogue exceeds these parameters: in structuring her introspection as “a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously,” Jane places the dialogue within the realm fantasy, allowing her to shape a story outside the confines of time and space. In a discursive site articulated in the excess of her radical interiority, Jane finds the narrative model that satisfies her desires to see so as to be seen. The tale transcends circumstance, time, and space in ways that only fantasy can, providing Jane self-actualization through endless narrative production.

In the introduction to *Touching Feeling* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores spatialized affective life most potently in her investment in the contiguous relation of *beside*. She remarks that *beside* obviates “implicit narratives of...origin and telos,” and rather offers:

an interesting proposition also because there is nothing very dualistic about it...Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction of the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. 8

For Sedgwick, *beside* has the power to represent a wide range of possible relations: “desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (8). The novel’s sequential passages—Jane’s vision from Thornfield’s leads and her tale told while pacing its third floor—are emblematic moments of psychic and textual absorption, emphasizing the palimpsest relation between interior life and aesthetic creation. Here, the relation of *beside* produces yet another interaction: the alchemical effect of aesthetic creation. In their adjacency, these passages emphasize the porosity and congruency between interior exploration and the

formal structure of the novel. In this way, textual relations deconstruct the boundary between psychic life and narrative creation. In first passage on the roof, Jane's desires annex the expanse; then in the second, while pacing the hall of the third floor, she inscribes it with the continuous tale meant to satisfy her longings. The extra-narrative space where Jane audits her own continuous tale is enveloped within the text by the bleak sky and the no-longer-blank pages. In this dynamic positioning between open space and an endless tale, Jane's interior narrative rehearsal becomes her writing's organizing matrix. The proximity of these two sequences—"beside" each other as they are—not only shows the intimacy between Jane's spatialized interiority and her writing, but roots the autobiography in expansive release.

While the adjacency of these passages illustrates the dynamic that links Jane's psychic life with crafting a narrative, the content of the tale she tells herself consists only a few evocative words—paltry clues still for a reader trying to interpret what fascinates her. I argue that this extra-narrative text, in holding selfhood outside articulation establishes the loss of the self necessary for it to emerge in writing. Or, thinking back to Chen's belief that the self must be scattered in the field of fantasy to cohere as a stage for its emergence, the Jane Eyre in the throes of a tumultuous interiority necessitates *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. The persistence of Jane's interior tale of mythic endlessness contradicts the bounded representation Stewart sees, establishing a deconstructive "site of writing" at the heart of her "life." The process suggested here illustrates Jane's desire for a release from the pressures of representation by asserting the presence of a constant discursive production of the self. The psychic and aesthetic mechanics manifest in Jane's writing mirror those of fantasy as described by Laplanche and Pontalis who recount that "Freud always held the model fantasy to be the reverie, that form of novelette, both stereotyped and infinitely variable, which the subject composes and relates to himself in a

waking state” (13). The infinite layers of narrative produced in Jane’s fantasy realm—both in length and variation—work with and against this structure as the palimpsest for the eventual novel. In this manner, Jane’s telling herself the “endless tale” continues its active play of narrative making, eroding the bounded representation imposed by the novelistic form. Laplanche and Pontalis’s equation of the literary with fantasy form invites readings of the novel as consequential to Jane’s own interior symbology. Though it is not a far leap to read the “incident, life, fire, [and] feeling” through their parallels in the novel (one could innumerate the emotions and events—obviously, Bertha’s nocturnal adventures and eventual death come to mind—that satisfy the requirements of the tale), Jane never reveals the actual content of her fantasy. While the inwardly told tale is the closest Jane comes to narrating her process of writing (not including the implications of such claims of the title page), it further emphasizes poetic lacunae as spaces of self-interpretation. Invoking narrative as an interior phenomenon of self-understanding, this scene leaves the reader to interrogate Jane’s representation in the text in relation to her radical interiority’s own mythic persistence.

Jane Eyre’s authorship, evoked in connection to her own interiority throughout the novel, is dependent on both her psychic and narrative integrity. In this view, discursive process gains stress over the content: for Jane to narrate her interior life outside the matrix of infinite space and variation requires what Laplanche and Pontalis elaborate as the “reworking which takes place in the successive transformation we impose on the story” (12). This posteriori work “consists essentially in restoring a minimum of order and coherence to the raw material handed over by the unconscious mechanisms of displacement, condensation, and symbolism, and in imposing on this heterogeneous assortment a façade, a scenario, which gives it relative coherence and continuity” (12). That the raw material of fantasy, already so akin to the novel’s narrative form undergoes

the same textual process of editing asserts the never-ending tale as a shadow play of sorts of Jane's own life story.

In her reading, Chen ties this aspect of fantasy's secondary work to the project of autobiography and the phenomenology of selfhood:

Laplanche and Pontalis thus specifically connect this 'secondary elaboration' to a fundamental activity of autobiography or identity-positioning: how we *narrate* our lives and selves. The fantasmatic negotiates the real and the unreal, the conscious and the unconscious, in such a way as to render possible the sense of one's life as a whole. It is the fantasmatic that allows for a sense and structure of identity to take hold. 120

Chen connects the fantasmatic—the posteriori coherence of scenario, symbol, and structure—not only with the ability to articulate desires outside the unconscious, but also in understanding the self as a narrative gluing conflicted, contradictory, and idiosyncratic lives into a whole. While she contends it is autobiography that supplies the threshold for subject position, the aesthetic act that brings the self to existence must also negotiate a desubjectized interior plentitude before channeling it into representation. Fantasy seems to exist in tension with narrativity: transformative work must occur to articulate the tale embedded in these desires and to make the self visible within the formlessness of desubjectized imagery. The narrative sense and structure of *being*—bridging lexical categories of subject (identity) and action (living)—grounds the understanding of intersubjective life as a *creative* process. The fantasmatic makes writing a site to access and actively refigure the self's reliance on formal structures. Through this integral process and elaboration, the “wholeness” of life that emerges out of the work of composition must account for selfhood beyond a cut-and-dried parse between the real and the unreal, but as in active negotiation with representation. Jane's desires for “real” knowledge understood in a “real” world require the release of her own subjective monitor to take agency over the creation of a self

visible to itself. This novel, which Brontë places enigmatically between autobiography and fiction, emphasizes Jane's continual re-positioning of the subject of her life story by empowering writing with a capacity to exceed bounded representation.

Jane elaborates this notion while discussing her process of drawing and painting. Of these surreal watercolors echoing the illustrations in *Bewick's* and the portraits of herself and others, she says:

they are nothing wonderful. The subjects had, indeed, risen vividly on my mind. As I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived. 110

In Jane's division between her "spiritual eye" and her "hand," she emphasizes a mind/body dualism that favors internal vision over external manifestations. Like her self-portrait wherein subjective self-imaging trumps fact, this novel charts her journey to develop new representational means. The absorption and creation that Jane experiences while drawing, in a manner akin to Sedgwick's reading of James's prefaces, opens her interiority up as a discursive site of self-understanding much in same way that *Bewick's* and her fantastic tale have previously. As opposed to seeing Jane's failure in these art works, I read them as gestures toward the active currents nourishing Jane's interior affective life. While she sees these pale portraits as mocking her vision, I see them as emblems of how the novel is invested in discursive work: they establish a palimpsest dynamic as a viable groundwork for the relation between the final aesthetic representation and the aesthetic process of immaterial consciousness.

In its elaboration of how form connects fantasy and the fantasmatic, drawing stands in for writing as a process of this aesthetic figuring that mirrors Jane's process of self-interpretation

through representation. The fantasmatic performs a fundamental role in the negotiation apparent in Jane's representation. It operates so seamlessly alongside her writing that her fantasy life often emerges with seemingly little mediation. Attention to the "textual" coherence of psychic life—in the reoccurring images, inward soliloquies and dialogues—shows how Jane's representation ultimately tethers itself closer to fantasy than reality. The aesthetic emergence as she describes it here, reflects the process that Chen identified in autobiography—the negotiation of the real and unreal through comprehensible terms and formal coherence. Beyond the haptic congruency of drawing and writing, Jane's sketches, like the narrative she creates, reflect an intersubjective life that continually returns to its fantastic origins to envision herself in formal release. The aesthetic practices of narrative and drawing in both form and process become discursive sites of selfhood wherein Jane negotiates the frustrated mediations between interior experience and external manifestation.

Following Mill's model of poetry, the novel as a form to create visibility without reliable, or realistic grounds maps Jane's fantasmatic struggle into form. In the drawings' translation between internal dynamic to external form something is lost. As Jane conceives of it, the faded afterimage that appears on the page—like all that must be cut from her infinite tale between her inward ear and the novel—call attention to the interstitial lacunae between psychic life and aesthetic form. Rather than read this textual process in a paranoid way, suspiciously ferreting out meaning, I read both Jane's drawings and her interior tale as discursive sites of reparative recovery within the meshes of the novel's structure. Embedded in her writing, these sites emphasize the crucial aspects of Jane's selfhood that resist language. Though the narrative itself denotes a transition into the realm of the symbolic, Jane's aesthetic activities, emerging as they

do from intersubjectivity, signal a persistent interior process that desires the infinite over delimitations.

In this way, Jane's drawing and writing evoke Kristeva's conception of the *chora*, the psychic space that retains the vestiges of pre-verbal and thus pre-symbolic psychic life. In *The Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) Kristeva defines the *chora* as "indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation" (29). In Jane's continual attention to her interiority, she gestures to a space that like the *chora* is a source for the enigmatic visions, images, feelings, and responses that evade complete verbal or formal translation—whether as the pale portrait or the withheld inward tale. The conception of a psychic dynamic that evades the complete translation of the self into the terms of the symbolic not only offers a site of resistance, but, more importantly, prizes the internal experience of selfhood, even when it remains enigmatic. In Kristeva's siting of the *chora* as "underlying the written," another method of spatialized relations come into play within the text's becoming. Unlike Sedgwick's "beside" with its "spacious agnosticism" that permits a variety of productive relations, the *chora* demands a native palimpsest position to the text. Yet, "beside," the palimpsest's continual revision, like the *chora*'s ephemerality, obviates Sedgwick's concern that a spatialization of depth implies fictive reductions in the name of origin and telos. In the continuous and temporary visions that appear to Jane's "spiritual eye" and echo in her "inward ear," these aesthetic forms emerge from an internal space that is "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (Kristeva 25-26). Within this mobile staging that enforces neither completion nor nomination, the germinations of both aesthetic form and selfhood come through release, neither static nor stable, into the mobile plenitude of interiority.

Jane's drawing, her longing for vision and mobility, and even the tale that kindles, swells, and troubles without ever marking the page, are in palimpsest relation to her novel, a layer beneath, beside, or within that is rhythmic, infinite, and irreducible. Linking Kristeva's work with that of Laplanche and Pontalis's notion of fantasy, the relations between the chora and the eventual text recall the provisional and conditional *mise-en-scène*—this swell and sweep of images and rhythms—that the fantasizing subject is caught prior to the regulation of the fantasmatic's narrative coherence.

In his discussion of Brontë's novels, Garrett Stewart sees a crucial difference between the internal dynamics that precede writing and the *chora*, recognizing that an "unconscious structured like language" is "far from the prelingual throbbing of Kristeva's primal semiotic" (247, 263). Despite Stewart's reading, Jane's tale—a tale that will be forever outside articulation because of its infinite length and variation—exemplifies the essential residues of the chora that reside in all psychic understanding and aesthetic creation. While Jane evokes language in the mapping of her intersubjectival dialogue, according to Kristeva, this "discourse—all discourse—moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it" (26). Like the palimpsest's constant inscriptions and erasures, Jane's tale relies on the rhythms, enigmas, provisions, and ephemerality of the chora to sustain its potent reflection of her desires; and yet, it depends on both language and the chora, grating each space in Jane's text. Within the chora, fantasies—constructed as stories that satisfy without external narration, as visions imagined, as worlds made responsive—form a circuit of aesthetic work through the movements of preverbal psychic dynamics that allow for their continual revision without the necessity of definition. The relationship between discursive language and the chora lends Jane's tale, in Kristeva's words, "a typology" in that it contours her interior life and desires, but "never [gives]

it axiomatic form” (26). Within the flexible typology of her interiority—evoked in the impossible expanses of desire and running intersubjective dialogues—Jane’s active refiguring of herself releases itself from the requirements of conventional narratives. In their adjacency to moving and ephemeral states, the texts Jane produces, including her drawings and her autobiography, must always be read—reparatively—as incomplete. In their gestures toward the essential nonverbal valences of selfhood Jane’s drawings, like the life she composes into a story, defy the completion of an axiomatic form in order to represent her intersubjectivity.

The interior workings of the chora that appear on the page as “rupture and articulations (rhythm) [that] precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality” compel a reading of Jane’s selfhood as continually in the thrall of preverbal wellspring of being (26). Whether read as gaps, failures, approximations, or repressions, these gestures to the chora align themselves with moments of release as key to textual production. Like Kristeva’s sense of loss as the entrance to the realm of signs, Jane’s ability to narrate herself must register the loss that allows the self to emerge. Keeping the novel within the gravitational pull of Jane’s selfhood, this reading foregrounds writing as a phenomenological order of being that conjures language out of the preverbal recesses that push against the regulations of form. Bringing these sites to the surface realigns them less with mystical access to knowledge of being, but more as potent catalysts that animate aesthetic creation. Spaces of desire are constantly evoked alongside representations of aesthetic creation in this novel—not only as signs of the formation of Jane’s selfhood, but to further emphasize the lacunae that continually emerge via the paradox of self as both irreducible and ephemeral.

The intertextual relations in this moment when Jane paces the third floor force a headlong descent into the questions of self as character and other. Jane’s tale reworks Brontë’s morbid

guilt¹⁶ towards her obsession with Angria, raising it from an “infernal world below” to the sky above (398). This never-ending tale—in a new more pacific relation to self and reality—provides a sustaining plenitude for text of the novel in active contingency with a capacious imagination that allows for the possibilities of representation to persist. This passage regarding the infinite tale should not be seen as a repression of vital interiority in the text, but as a significant narrative break that harnesses the energy of release within discourse. In Jane’s famous invective regarding the rights of women, Virginia Woolf criticized Brontë’s voice for interrupting the narrative, “She left her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend to some personal grievance” (Woolf, *Room* ch4). While the substance of this passage is a groundbreaking proto-feminist social critique, structurally the confessional (it begins with a startling accusation—“Who blames me?”— before continuing in the present-tense) breaks the seamlessness of novelistic narration. Yet, in disrupting the temporal sequencing with this apostrophe, Jane appears to be recording feelings that endure in the continual present of psychic reality, neither memory nor conditional hope, but immediate feeling. Her interiority not only seems actively present, but further, this strange sensation remains fresh and broken off from the claim of temporality, marking the moment with the reparative discourse that activates the creation of her autobiography.

From the opening of the novel Jane projects herself into blanks of sky and page—spatially interrupting the texts for the sake of enigmatic aesthetic articulations of self—compelling a truth of being from the difficult translation into narrative form. While reading this never-ending tale as a meta-draft, and I do believe in some ways it is that, I hasten to situate the origin of the novel solely in this negated annunciation of fantasy. In these moments, though, Jane engages with the open-endedness of intersubjective dialogue, gesturing toward adjacent narrative

¹⁶ See Alexander’s introduction to Brontë’s *Juvenilia*.

spaces that speak in concert or underscore the process by which writing can grant new representational potential to be seen as a subject. Jane's account of herself, rather than hew tightly to the historical models Peterson provides, engages with the necessary fictions that Judith Butler recognizes in narrative self-reference. Throughout the novel the reader must engage with Jane's "enigmatic articulations" that constitute her "truth of being." In this way, one must read her story as prioritizing its aesthetic mode to reach an ethical accord with her visibility as a subject. Butler's work bestows a tangible power on these inarticulatable moments as necessary to understand fully Jane's subjectivity. Readers must attend to these lacunae that rupture the surface in the text as signaling interior plenitude, a private reserve of being that resists static nomination. Like Mill's poetic confession that requires the reader to engage with another's interior symbology, Butler demands an ethical reading of selfhood that honors this approximate account of internal experience. In this way, her call for the ethical relations within the autobiography reflects an aesthetically based phenomenology of being that considers—like John Plotz's call for the visibility of a self without reliable grounding—the primacy of the open-ended and enigmatic articulations of intersubjectival dialogue. The aesthetic process that can account for the truth of the person without adhering to external demands forces the recognition of release as a vital dynamic within interiority. The emblematic lack that these "pale portraits" signify for Jane recalls Butler's insistent attention to the breaks, stoppages, failures, and evasions when considering the self. In this way, Jane's aesthetic work in these drawings or in authoring her inwardly told tale characterize Butler's conception of the enigmatic—yet crucial—truth of a person.¹⁷ These unnarrated spaces are essential sites for Jane to commune, question, and speak truthfully about her feelings toward herself, her life.

¹⁷ See discussion of Butler in Chapter 1.

The phenomenological process of narrative in *Jane Eyre*—what is lifted from the palimpsest of interiority to be stitched into a life story—forwards the notion of an aesthetic release as the site of agency for a subject’s own becoming and relationality to the external world. What Butler suggests as the locations of a more ethically responsible—and aesthetically conjured—truth of a self that exists beyond the page represents the aesthetic excesses that empower Jane’s ultimate transcendence over external circumstance. Just as Mill’s conception of poetry offers the intimate confession of feeling to feeling, the narrative links Jane Eyre to *Jane Eyre*, reparatively offering herself a self rendered in the life, fire, feeling of interior desires. In this moment, Jane’s imagined but unwritten take of her life—which as fantasy would for Laplanche and Pontalis represent the origin of the self—undermines the not just the claims of *Jane Eyre* as an autobiography in denying a representation of her interiority. It further destabilizes the conventions of life-writing—bound up in the modes of socially acceptable representation—and provides a model of release elaborated later in *Villette*.

Lucy Snowe as Text

In the previous chapter, I explore Jane Eyre's struggles for visibility against formal conventions that demand coherence to normative subjectivity. However, when turning to *Villette*, active refiguring of interior life through aesthetic process manifests in a far more radical approach to Lucy Snowe's self-representation. On the surface, Lucy, the narrator/protagonist, tells her story of lonely isolation as a young woman who moves to the Continent to find work and experiences both love and loss while there. While her attachments to Graham Bretton and later M. Paul Emmanuel frustrate the marriage plot, her evasive and enigmatic mode of telling a life story reveals a more complex examination of the affective and aesthetic forces that shape selfhood as a narrative phenomenon. Reading of the novel along social and historical rubrics alone runs the risk of enforcing reductive or pathologizing understandings of Lucy Snowe's relations to herself and others. Rather, I argue that critical interventions must attend closer attention to how form composes both a self and a narrative that flourish in radical interiority and aesthetic phenomenology. In eschewing the normalizing demands of character development, Lucy Snowe abandons stable relationality in favor of a complex intersubjective discourse. Merging the currents of psychic activity and writing, the novel becomes the matrix for self-interpretation. In this view, discursive production (including sites of narrative rupture and suture) makes specific claims of creating and sustaining the affects of self-care that form Lucy's experience, but do not register in normative relationality.

In making more radical claims for self-representation, *Villette* actively thwarts the formal conventions Jane struggled against in order to ground the novel within the intimacy and estrangement of intersubjective dialogue. As opposed to Jane's desire to be seen, Lucy prefers inscrutability: she professes to "a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than

irritated by misconstruction; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored” (111). Lucy’s own complex relation between herself and others disrupts stable narrative representation. As Garret Stewart notes, she elaborates her narrative persona by “positing a signified (but undefined) self hovering somewhere between the signifying ‘I’ and the momentarily embodied” textual presence (254). Stewart’s parse between the manifold layers composing Lucy—the undefined self, the speaking “I” and the embodiment on the page—place the novel’s system of signification and articulation squarely within Lucy’s own arcane interior relations. This multiplied narrative persona gives Lucy the space to hide in the plain sight of her narration, foiling Mill’s concept of poetry as making dialogic intersubjectivity visible in linguistic approximation. Authorized by Lucy’s radical interiority, the novel moves toward a fluctuating representation of self as aesthetic discourse. Pushing against positivist representation, Lucy exceeds temporal, spatial, and psychic bounds: her “writerly” self follows a subjective—poetic—accounting for personal history. Forging sites of rupture in the text, Lucy’s aesthetic self-interpretation is figured as continually present on the page.

Collapsing character and narrative, *Villette*’s divergence from convention mirrors the enigmatic and idiosyncratic experience of its narrator/protagonist. Lucy’s ability to baffle reader relations suggests a “too vertiginous embrace of modernity and its defamiliarizing perspectives” that Amanda Anderson cites as a pervasive Victorian fear (35-36). Brontë’s final novel harnesses this subjective instability to work against inherited forms, social norms, and cultural knowledges. In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that Lucy consciously embraces the defamiliarized perspectives of her dislocated narrative persona to produce affective relations through the act of

writing. This estranging course of Lucy's narrative compels such anxious scrutiny of the novel's many enigmas. In his essay, "The Affective Worlds of *Villette*," John Hughes warns:

To seek to discuss the novel's construction, for instance, in more comprehensively detailed terms, is to find oneself confronted by the necessity of accounting for the kinds of provocation, refusal, or contempt that seem evident in its many ostensible narrative defects or excesses—for instance, the text's hasty and foreshortened treatment of plot, its repeated implausibilities and coincidences, its arbitrary, disintegrated, extemporized phases of narration, its gaps and enigmas, the sheer extendedness of its wandering, abandoned, destitute, disorientated, or surreal intervals, its gothic elements, its banal and dismissive resolution of the narrative of the ghostly nun, its exploration of altered, delirious, grief-stricken, and disintegrated states of mind, its misleading use of narrative cues, its broadcasting of divergent and unsynthesized elements within a sentence or paragraph, and so on. 716

In many ways, Hughes's own description mirrors what he calls "the sheer extendedness of its wandering, abandoned, destitute, disorientated, or surreal intervals" of the novel itself. His critical stance, asserted by his view of its "many ostensible narrative defects or excesses" as hasty, implausible, arbitrary, misleading and so on, speaks to the its failure to conform to any number of established positivist schemas of narratology, psychology, or history. And yet his description—evocative, rich, and probably far less damning of the novel's quality than its diction implies—fortifies the limits of such approaches that search out and demand psychic and narrative integrity as representational requirements. Rather, I am struck by the passage's commonality with Judith Butler's ethical call in *Giving an Account of Oneself* to attend to "moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness—in enigmatic articulations that cannot be easily translated into narrative form."¹⁸ Where Butler finds ethical clarity, Hughes sees obstacles. His dismissal of these congruent aspects of accounting for the self, positions his reading as

¹⁸ See my discussion of this idea in Chapter One.

attempting to ferret out coherence in the disorientation and intimate estrangement that constitutes “the truth of a person.”

Rather than seeing these narrative aspects as obstacles or as invitations for paranoid or suspicious readings to find meaning for the novel’s divergences, I see them as discursive markers of what Stewart calls “a valence of subjective in process” (254). Self-interpretation through evocative imagery, poetic rumination, and idiomatic syntax heightens the novel’s sense as an intimate and deeply personal reflection of a self that refuses to conform to the standards of a subject. Thinking of Lucy’s representation as “in process”—and its rendering of a “writerly” self occurring in a psychic present—accounts for the moments of intersubjective activity—including changing affects, continuous introspective flux, and absorbing fantasy that frustrate readerly identification. The novel affects intersubjectivity as a plentitude through evasion and enigma, positioning Lucy’s active discourse as a confluence of self-interpretation and aesthetic creation that exceeds bounded depiction. Her agency over the vast field of interior discourse allows the novel to become the matrix for managing interior experience, external events, affective relations, and patterns of chronology.

In “Still Life: Suspended Animation in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*” (2012), Elisha Cohn states that “the novel focuses its claims about aesthetics—about imagination and representation—in scenes of withdrawal from social activity and self-cultivation” (Cohn 843). As so much narrative-making is the critical ethos of the novel, its aesthetic ethos works in evocative languages of elegy and metaphor to defy the cultivation of a reliable subjectivity visibly conforming to the Victorian standards of moral perfectionism. Lucy replicates this desire to remain unknown (or at least pleasingly misunderstood) through discourse that thwarts clear and direct meaning. Recounting her life in the novel eschews the truthful explanations of an

intimate confession; rather, her narration heightens estrangement through insisting on an idiom of a private intersubjective conversation with key information held in abeyance as if already well-known. As an act of discourse, it both tracks the process of Lucy's self-interpretation through life events while still complicating the function of a first-person account to communicate authentic interior experience. While Lucy revels in the obscurity that Jane longed to overcome, she also exposes herself to understanding through the novel's text. Cohn elaborates that "finding value in [Lucy's] retreat, can explain the novel's interruptions of vigilant consciousness, its caginess about characters' identities, and its unresolved recalcitrance of tone" (Cohn 844). Lucy's withdrawal from the social allows for the manifestation of her imagination and its representations as a mode of being that claims authenticity in the subjective rendering of experience, idiomatic knowledge, and the obscurity of hermetic consciousness.

As a novel that revels in misleading, it grounds itself in representational paradox: Lucy's own aesthetic and affective demand to maintain a soothing misconception uncompromised by the reductions of normative coherence and easy legibility also allows her to narrate a version of the self responsive to her own desires. As opposed to understandings of Lucy's withdrawal as a psychic posture, in which obscurity attends to her acceptance of her own repressive tendencies,¹⁹ I propose that her enigmatic prose account of her life reflects a very active and idiosyncratic form of self-care. Lucy works within Anderson's reading of the feminine ideal as a detached "sphere of intimacy and solicitude: a place where one could fully be oneself, a place would be fully known and cared for" (Anderson 57). However, in Lucy's evasions, she pushes that care to

¹⁹ As a representative example, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar claim that "Locked into herself, defeated from the start Lucy Snowe is tormented by the realization that she has bought survival at the price of never fully existing, escaped pain by retreating behind a dull, grave camouflage" (400).

the hermetic extreme—embracing the de-familiarizing perspectives of ecstatic and visionary solitude to create and tend to a self that exceeds normative representational bounds and socially confined narrative roles and trajectories. She subverts the social vision others have of her, going as far as admitting her own complicity with this frustrated view, as long as she can sustain her own self-representation’s potential to exceed or find release from the social register’s claims on knowing her. The intimate estrangement one feels while reading her account suggests that she cultivates the dialogic nature of the self—becoming both writer and reader—to elaborate and satisfy a variety of affective desires, including contradictory longings for companionship and solitude. In the comfortable companionship of writing, as a generous process of charting her interior vicissitudes, Lucy forges her own singular connection to the world as an aesthetic subject through what Leo Bersani calls a “specific syntax of being.”²⁰ She embraces a way of understanding and expressing herself that effloresces in the aesthetic possibilities of relations that are not easily parsed in the external rubrics of positivist realities or identities. Lucy does not take the rhetorical posture of pure escapist fantasy, reinventing her life wholesale. Rather through her writing she is able to create a self that possesses hope, offers companionship, and retains “sunny imagination” in her lonely circumstance.

Her phenomenological subjectivity—remaining active in enigma and open-endedness—allows for more complex elaborations of how psychic embodiment works with and resists translation into narrative form. Lucy’s destabilized and fragmented vision of self that Stewart notices models a layered signifying persona that eschews the need for psychic integrity to foreground narrative integrity:

²⁰ See my discussion of Bersani’s “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject” in Chapter One.

Besides, I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. 85

Lucy schematizes her two lives roughly along the lines of fantasy and reality, prioritizing the “strange necromantic joys of fancy” as sustaining the “limited” life of reality. The inversion of this paradigm—it is not the bare minimum creature comforts that allow for escape into joys of fantasy, but the opposite—places more emphasis on her “life of thought” as the primary site of Lucy’s existence than her social presence. The decentered divisions of selfhood that Lucy perceives not only precede the different “Lucys” Stewart sees as composing the text, but undermine the assumption that the text’s verisimilitude serves the goals of Victorian realism. Lucy’s form of life-writing as evoked in this passage finds its source in imagination and serves to extend those joys, rather than situating Lucy within a positivist social and historical panorama. Further, the narrative blurs the divide between these two lives, just as *Jane Eyre* also made the boundary between fantasy and reality porous. The course of the novel tracks these two lives simultaneously, interpolating Lucy as a narrative persona through both the events of reality and her various psychic postures of engagement and avoidance.

The portrait of the self schematized by this model not only grants Lucy ultimate representational agency, but also sustains Lucy’s active refiguring of interiority, her social circumstance, and narrative course. Perhaps the demand to see both lives simultaneously, and often in a paradigm that seems strange, causes the obvious frustrations Hughes and other readers have with the novel. The blur between the world of thought and the world of reality—in which neither mode maintains complete interpretive authority or sole claims of understanding—requires both surface and depth readings of Lucy’s characterization. Allowing her two perhaps

contradictory lives, the gaps, evasions, and enigmas this bifocal view engenders its own form of representational clarity. Following Butler, one must not expect Lucy's representation to register the normative standards of socially visible subjects. As opposed to repressions and evasions, Lucy does not hide in the folds of these discursive tendencies. As the connective syntax, grammar, and diction of the text, She is seen as clearly in the ellipses and unsynthesized sentences as in her declarations.

As narrative phenomenon, Lucy finds release from the representation of social norms through the discursive plentitude that exists in in writing. Cohn situates Lucy's antisocial turn in relation to her passive stasis register to her ambivalence toward narrative:

Associated with death and annihilation, these pleasures thus occupy divergent temporalities—the brevity of a daydream that offers the rewards of rest and the immeasurable amplitude of a subterranean life turned inward with no imaginable social future. Intensity of feeling without self-reflection, will, or action comes out of a socially constrained position of passivity, aligning Lucy's stillness with the narrative's own evasion of its own plottedness. 844-845

Cohn identifies moments of inert, yet intense, emotional experience as privileging the “nonpractice” of more passive states—including reverie, drowsiness and trance—to offer a pleasurable release from the need to maintain a “morally vigilant individuation or social agency” or “coherence of the self” (846, 854). Unlike Cohn, I see Lucy's lack of social vigilance and the production of an inscrutable self in her solitary life of thought as a site of great self-reflection and activity. Though the intimacy with which it occurs does not register in socially policed notions of consciousness, the representation of Lucy's self-reflection exceeds the normative narration of interior life and allows her to imagine her idiosyncratic intersubjective life beyond the conscriptions of the claustrophobic and banal social world. The immeasurable amplitudes of interiority offer her a more intimate sense of self-knowledge, affective resonances, and aesthetic

agency than any “social future” can provide. I read the divergent temporalities of thought and reality not as constraining Lucy into stillness, but rather as placing her in an active discursive relation to the origins of narrative in Laplanche and Pontalis’ vertiginous stream of interior images. Her necromantic fancies speak to the novel’s central epistemological ambivalence between modes of living. Within the world of thoughts, Lucy extends her existence in an ambiguous state between fantasies or in a reality that defies the tidy boundaries of life and death. I argue that her two lives recalibrate Lucy’s own belief that “passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I *could* feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future—such a future as mine—to be dead” (122). Reviving the past through both memory and fantasy to access withheld affects points to a mobile conception of temporal bounds within Lucy’s primary life of thought. Simultaneously blurring the past, present, and future into a discourse organized not by fact but through feeling, as Cohn says, Lucy animates the players in her narrative as selves that defy mortal delimitation (Cohn 850). Existing as narrative phenomena and discursive embodiment allows figures such as Miss Marchmont, M. Paul, and even Lucy herself to continue beyond the living realms of reality. Her standard evasions of plottedness that fail to confirm M. Paul’s fate later in the novel do more than just pull the novel from the shadows of a revived past, a return of the repressed, and a memory relived; it becomes the impetus for Lucy to cultivate her own endless inwardly-told tale to keep her continuous company in her solitude.

Cohn, though, warns against translating “Lucy’s antisociality...into a form of engagement,” further remarking that it “should not be explained by accounts of the Victorian novel and novel reading that stress the textual production of cultural agency” (Cohn 845-846). The textual production of cultural agency seems far from Lucy’s intention, as her continued

withdrawal and solace in misrecognition seem to eschew the kind of social visibility and mobility Jane Eyre craved. And yet, Lucy's desire for release from normative convention only further emphasizes her desire for representational agency. Plotting against both narrative and social convention, Lucy's life story disrupts the expectations or reliable narration of a realistic Victorian protagonist. She charts her life within the instability of social and perceptual limbo—untethered to structures of time and space, unresolved in terms of her relations to others, and ambivalent to ameliorative moral perfectionism. In this way, self-representation mirrors her individual interior experience of life as understood through discursive correspondences. For these reasons, the novel frustrates readers by brazenly defying conventional reliability in its disclosure of events and characters, most notably the lingering questions of Lucy's tragic past and the possible death of her fiancée at sea that bookend the text. Building off Anderson's reading of detachment in *Villette* and Elisha Cohn's use of diminished consciousness in the novel, I push their more historically-grounded claims toward a more psychoanalytically concerned narratology that explores Lucy's selfhood as determined by her active charting of her own intersubjectivity.

Throughout the novel, Lucy narrates moments of release that explore the complex models of discourse she uses as both a means of self-interpretation and self-representation. This aesthetic course is flexible enough to incorporate a variety of modes of conceiving of the self in language and the various psychic postures Lucy takes. The scene wherein Lucy faints after her confession during the vacation establishes one instance of how she grapples with language to render interior experience:

If the storm had lulled a little at sunset, it made up now for lost time. Strong and horizontal thundered the current of the wind from north-west to south-east; it brought rain like spray, and sometimes a sharp hail, like shot: it was cold and

pierced me to the vitals. I bent my head to meet it, but it beat me back. My heart did not fail at all in this conflict; I only wished that I had wings and could ascend the gale, spread and repose my pinions on its strength, career in its course, sweep where it swept. ... Instead of sinking on the steps as I intended, I seemed to pitch headlong down an abyss. I remember no more.

...

Where my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell. Whatever she saw, or wherever she travelled in her trance on that strange night she kept her own secret; never whispering a word to Memory, and baffling imagination by an indissoluble silence. 185-189

With its dramatic evocation of the storm's power and the futility of Lucy's wish for wings to ascend the gale, this passage recalls Brontë's own entry in the "Roe Head Journal" where a tempest occasions her "trance-portation" to Angria. The intersubjective dynamic of that early journal serves as a shadow text for this passage in her final novel. However, instead of discovering herself within the rich landscapes of her imagination, Lucy does not experience the revelations of a visionary state. Rather, her "soul" retains a standoffish silence when reunited with Lucy's embodied consciousness, alienating the personified affects and psychic dynamics that populate Lucy's selfhood. Entrenching the intersubjectival divisions—even to the point of characterizing them—Lucy desires dialogue between self and soul, so to speak, but finds aspects of herself preferring the same secrecy she relishes in public.

Cohn comments that this scene "initially seems like an utter blank, [but] it provides the occasion... for lyrical language that suspends the progress of the plot" (Cohn 849). While it suspends plot, this lyrical language furthers Lucy's own self-interpretation, representing the complexity of her intersubjective life through elaborated interior relations and speculative inquiry. Even with its evasions, this lyricism becomes the only possible mode for accounting for the psychic character on which so much of the narrative depends. This scene illustrates how

Lucy's active self-interpretation exists in sites released from demands of ontic knowledge and positivist identity, forcing the reader to reconsider and inquire her expectations of Lucy, just as this experience requires Lucy's own active refiguring of herself. In the realm of lyrical language, Lucy does not cease to exist but rather expands in metaphoric ecstasies. Of her unconscious soul she imagines:

She may have gone upward, and come in sight of her eternal home, hoping for leave to rest now, and deeming that her painful union with matter was at last dissolved. While she so deemed, an angel may have warned her away from heaven's threshold, and, guiding her weeping down, have bound her, once more, all shuddering and unwilling, to that poor frame, cold and wasted, of whose companionship she was grown more than weary. 189

While in this scene Lucy does not profess the seamlessness between reality and fantasy that allowed Brontë's easy migration to Angria, her speculation elaborates a space of aesthetic agency and creation that fills the blank of consciousness. The model of the Roe Head Journal troubles Cohn's reading of trance as an ethos of withdrawal that suspends plot, just as in this scene the production of lyrical language furthers Lucy's representation. I push Cohn's assertion that feeling picks up in these blanks of consciousness to argue that these lyrical releases are quite consciously rendered to create and sustain affect. In doing so, plot and representation are placed squarely within Lucy's elaboration of her self-interpretation. These sites of discursive possibility allow her to narrate feelings and relations that have no imaginable social future and envision a poetic self without otherwise reliable grounding. By allowing these blanks of consciousness and knowledge to remain, Lucy not only forestalls plot to sustain affect, but also refigures the demands of representation through discursive release. Like her prioritized life of thoughts, Lucy narrates the complex interior relations that strain against the bounds of circumscribed subjectivity over the sake of plot. In her active discourse she foregrounds writing as self-

interpretation over plot. Charting the complicated field of intersubjective life, she engages with the loss of consciousness as a means to recover a self as writing.

Throughout the novel Lucy anthropomorphizes interior phenomenon and affective states, creating a multi-player interior drama that enacts the various interconnections between her oft contradictory desires: to remain inscrutable, yet understand herself; to interpret herself, while replacing fact with lyricism. Joining, her soul, Memory, and other interior personae, Reason commands strict dominance over Lucy's mode of affective representation. Through intersubjectival dialogue she battles with Reason: "'But if I feel, may I *never* express?' ... '*Never!*' declared Reason" (259). Reason's prohibition against Lucy's affective expression finds relief with the succor of Imagination. She elaborates the conflict between the two interior figures:

This hag, this Reason, would not let me look up, or smile, or hope: she could not rest unless I were altogether crushed, cowed, broken-in, and broken-down. According to her, I was born only to work for a piece of bread, to await the pains of death, and steadily through all life to despond. Reason might be right; yet no wonder we are glad at times to defy her, to rush from under her rod and give a truant hour to Imagination—*her* soft, bright foe, *our* sweet Help, our divine Hope. We shall and must break bounds at intervals, despite the terrible revenge that awaits our return. (259)

Continually under the sway of Reason's harsh dictates or Imagination's solace, Lucy's interactions with these internal performers come to mirror the contradictory social postures and discursive maneuvers Lucy employs. This hag Reason spurns all but the most Puritanical self-abnegation, rationalizing a life of despondence and displeasure as Lucy's predestination, just as her life of reality supplied the meagerest rations of food, shelter, and work. Imagination, rather, not only brings Hope of required escape from Reason's stern hyper-vigilance and demands for

self-sacrifice, but further allows an outlet for Lucy to express herself through feeling. Conflating reason and knowledge, Imagination and feeling, the push and pull evidenced in Lucy's discourse between these two worlds of reality and thought further undermines Reason and the facts of reality as the modes of Lucy's preferred representation. Existing in Kristeva's level of imagination, the novel pushes the affective and representational claims of reimagining selfhood through the loss of a realistic self.

Lucy's fainting spell only illustrates one of the many instances where she negotiates understanding and representing selfhood through the complex valences of interiority and obscurity. In these moments of pause or unknowingness, Lucy employs a variety of discursive methods toward figuring out her intersubjective life, which register as poetic evasion, unreliable narration, and textual editing. Lucy's emergence as an adult at the start of Chapter Four indulges lyric evocation and metaphor and marks a sharp departure from the previous chapters, detaching the later novel's *Jane Eyre*-like domestic exposition from the more enigmatic account of her life alone that comprises the remainder of the text. After a brief prologue wherein Lucy witnesses life in the town of Bretton with her godmother whose son Graham playfully engages with another ward named Polly, Lucy emerges from the wings to narrate her tumultuous childhood. Yet, instead of detailing the events that leave her poor and alone, by enumerating the fate of her parents or other kinfolk and the specific events that transpire, she invites the reader into her own interior dialogue through an extended metaphor:

I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass—the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you

will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?

Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen overboard, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time—a long time—of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. 39

The imagery of ships at sea and stormy demise in this scene is the first occurrence of this leitmotif in the novel. It belongs to another register of what she refers to as a “family of presentiments” that color her life and in their repetition connect her early tragedy with her adult reunion with the Brettons in *Villette* and the novel’s open-ended conclusion (406).²¹ In this way, Lucy’s rhetorical maneuvers must be attended to as modes of an active poetics of self-understanding and refiguring, not merely the facticity of events alone. In Lucy’s vertiginous metaphor she merges fluidly with various antecedents. Like Brontë’s letter to Smith where she is both the transubstantiated raven and the flooded world it scans for safe harbor, Lucy is both the boat and passenger, both “stretched on the cushioned deck” and “fallen overboard,” both sailed by steersman and one of the crew casting tackling. The reader cannot place Lucy in any one stable position except as that of the syntactical matrix in which events takes place as lyric discourse: the girl, the boat, its crew, the storm all aspects of a metamorphosed Lucy herself. The spatially dispersed and chronologically sketchy episode creates a vision of Lucy and her correspondence to events that is always shifting. While this evocative passage shoulders the

²¹ It is worth noting here that the recurrent images and events that compose this “family of presentiments” resembles Leo Bersani’s belief that “We are born into various families of singularity that connect us to all the forms that have, as it were, always anticipated our coming, our presence” (Bersani 168).

burden of transitioning young Lucy from her childhood experience with her godmother to a lonely young adulthood searching for necessary employment, the actual events that take place are elided in fantastic reverie.

Dashing any sunny dreams the reader may imagine for her, Lucy interrupts her reverie to query the reader about the relation of one's own experience to normative demands and expectations. Her question signals the imperative of singularity of Lucy's experience, for no matter what occurred, the course of her life departs from how childhood is "supposed to pass." How it departs remains uncertain, and is tempting to read this passage under the sign of trauma and repression; but thinking of Lucy as a writer—one who recounts her own story for both aesthetic and affective correspondences within herself and the world—offers different ways to read this passage as at play in the unlimited field of discourse. In the question, she positions both self-conception and the narrative of events in a shifting relation to the conditional. For a moment she basks in the warmth of provisional happiness, only to place yet another condition that pushes her deeper into murky metaphorical waters. And yet, the condition of normativity for Lucy seems the most tenuous: Lucy's question hinges the passage; what follows swings further away from social normality. In this distance from what is "supposed to pass" for others, what occurs in her own life, and further how she renders the events that create difference, Lucy opens the space of the metaphor in various directions, continually repositioning herself and forever drowning in conditions that never come to pass.

By leaving events circumspect with little narrative management, she perhaps urges the suspicious—and very specific—reading of tragedy of shipwreck as the cause of Lucy's future

loneliness and economic insecurity.²² Yet, as Cohn says, lyrical release suspends plot, giving little veracity to any claims that this metaphor is anything but a poetic interlude left to evoke, but not define tragedy. The phrase “I even know” that punctuates the description seems to perform the work of convincing Lucy herself. Unlike more conscious or embodied declarations of “I felt,” or “I remember,” or even “there was,” her knowledge of the storm belongs not to an ontic realm, but to a phenomenological aesthetic experience made mobile and self-reflective in language. Dismissing the authority of her account of the shipwreck by acknowledging how little she knows of the event, Lucy’s account undermines the demands of personal history, favoring a psycho-aesthetic experience of self-interpretation. The over-emphasis on knowledge here, buoying in a storm of conditional imagination and metaphorical screening, becomes the life-saver cast out of the drowning girl’s reach and left to float away in futility. Just as it was for Brontë, all Lucy has left to grasp—what becomes her life-giving hope and motive—is writing. Treading in the stream of interior images, she crafts a discourse in the half-light of her own imaginary understanding in order to survive. The unfixed metaphoric antecedents destabilize both the actuality of an event and the knowledge of it, not foreclosing experience as stable history, but opening up possible meanings, affects, and experiences *ad infinitum*.

²² Later, Lucy throws this speculative reading into doubt when she admits to Ginevra Fawnshawe while crossing the Channel that “I explained that my *fondness* for a sea-voyage had yet to undergo the test of experience; I had never made one” (60). If one is to take Lucy’s metaphor at the start of chapter as fact, then it merely casts her narration as even more unreliable, and by extension undermines any and all information she reveals to other characters and the reader. To pin-point the death of her family and the cause of her strife so securely within the shipwreck narrative would then make it the only thing she does not lie about and would place it in an unlikely and singular position, as opposed to being one of the many aspects of her life refracted by the vertiginous and shifting perspectives that account for her representational agency.

Lucy's tenuous relation to real events is only important insofar as her loss of distinct knowledge opens up a site of self-interpretation through lyric discourse. Instead of reading this moment as an explication of Lucy's repression of trauma and an invitation to speculate on gruesome possibilities in her past (orphaned in a shipwreck!), I turn away from models of depth psychology to see how the evasions produce the lyric language that attends to Lucy's affective life. She relays the structures of relations in a crucial moment—the closest given history of the protagonist's origin—in the creative languages of metaphor to emphasize how her unfixed self-knowledge fosters active self-interpretation.²³ Released from the formal demands of linear character development, Lucy embraces the aesthetic agency that nurtures her in the wake of the social abandonment she describes. Because of her own uneasy feelings about making herself known, Lucy's narrative consciously reimagines the traditions of the Victorian bildungsroman to create a new form of narrative representation. Elided in her rhetorical question are the typical *David Copperfield*-esque introductory details of a life story signaling a departure from normative trajectories of self-development.²⁴ Rather, she embraces metaphor and rhetorical inquiry to find agency over a more active model of self-representation that exists for herself and her affective purpose alone. In this extended metaphor, Lucy interpellates a reader to imagine a life that she cannot for herself. The power of speculation transforms Lucy's private quarter into a place of both intimacy and estrangement. Opening her personal history to interpretation allows her to return to a fund of aesthetic being that outpaces logic or normative accounts of life experience.

²³ Gilbert and Gubar equate this scene with trauma and Lucy's inability to come to terms with it, citing that "Instead of describing the actual events, for instance, Lucy frequently uses water imagery to express her feelings of anguish at these moments of suffering" (416).

²⁴ Or perhaps in keeping with her desire for soothing misconstruction, she does not imagine sharing such information, let alone finding an audience (any audience really) that would care to know how she was born.

The “other” reader may imagine both what is supposed to pass for Lucy and what actually came to be; however, the grounds for this conjecture continually erodes as Lucy continually shifts between different spatialized antecedents in a poetic evocation of unbounded time. Forced into this quarter (if only to fail for lack of information or share the fruits of imagination) emphasizes how the reader Lucy imagines possesses the hope and sympathy she desperately desires. Through her writing, she conjures this congenial companion who understands the idiosyncrasies of her interiority with a sense of respect, knowledge, and intimacy which she feels others cannot.

In this moment, the events of her life emerge fantastically, if tentatively, through the rendering of a discourse that compels psychic experience and unconscious mechanism into the service of her own individuating narrative syntax. Counter to the claims of an originary trauma, the shifty metaphor unfixes Lucy from scenes of origin, from a familial antecedent that could be used to construe a normative subject position. Instead she gives her interior unfixity over to discursive play, granting words and images the province of her own origin—an origin of being that is distinctly formal, poetic, and aesthetic. Not just any words, though, but a slippery metaphorical apostrophe that not only distances Lucy and her experience from legibility, but obscures her to the point of a poetic evocation—the lyrical release of self. I connect Lucy’s own relation to her history and the lyricism with which she understands or reimagines it with Leo Bersani’s notion of the aesthetic subject. In “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject,” he links selfhood and the work of art or formal creation through fantasy as the “major site of our connectedness to the world” (Bersani 170). The work of art:

represents the terms in which the world inheres in the fantasizing subject, terms that can change as our position in the world changes. An undifferentiated unconscious lends itself to diverse representations of the interface between the moving subject and a world whose relational map is itself continuously modified by the moves of all the units—including the human units—that constitute it. 170

Looking at this passage as a mode of fantasy—an interior vision recorded on the page, the metaphor of the shipwreck registers both a possible event and Lucy’s reaction to it. As fluid and mobile, writing as a mode of being transforms Lucy’s discourse into a means of managing affect and relationality through the text. Thus, whereas Stewart looks to the representation of selfhood in *Villette* in terms of “bounded subjectivity,” Bersani sees a subject that “exceeds” it. This desire to imagine forges the aesthetic relations that maintain these mobile, pacific correspondences between self and the world. For Lucy, the act of writing not only indexes an existence, but opens her subjectivity to act discursively out of bounds. Bersani’s model of fantasy “as a contingent positioning” to the world eschews formulations of the inner/outer in order to activate a relational position—like Sedgwick’s powerful “beside” discussed earlier in relation to *Jane Eyre*. Lucy emerges in the texts through correspondences between fantasy and reality, rather than in an isolating division of the two. Rather than limiting individuality, Bersani’s understanding of fantasy as a threshold positioning an unbounded self allows it to exceed the limitations of a psychologically defined subject through continually shifting correspondences, rather than over-determined appropriations or projections, to a co-extensive reality.

For Bersani, fantasy does not echo a fixed and determined origin, but allows for the continual revision of the subject as contingent to and partially constituent of a shifting connection to a reality that persists autonomously alongside (and without negating) the self. Many read this radical structure of this mini narration in relation to the novel’s end, where a bereft Lucy re-imagines the past as her future, registers an event contemporaneous to her writing, or foretells what is to come. Her dismissal of ontic knowledge or positivist description keeps the

multiple temporalities active in her discourse: is Lucy merely a victim of an ironic fate, an oracle burdened with prophecy in the guise of retrospection? As a discursive mark, this passage transforms a narrative transition into poetic suture allowing for past, present, and future to coexist within the imaginative plentitude. Her knowledge is continually worried down by the instability of her fragmented speech, with its shifting parts of being continually searching out possible discursive correspondence in the world. Lucy's realm is the phenomenological wherein being becomes the process of narrating—the continually discursive present raising a murky past within the meshes of a speculative future. Held in the conditional of the metaphor, lyrical discourse replaces narrative specificity with empowering language as a vehicle for Lucy to reimagine her relation to her own life experience.

These two moments, releasing Lucy from the demands of realistic coherence, extend representation outside the realms of reason and knowledge. Allowing her room to speculate, reimagine, and interpret her intersubjective life, Lucy's poetic evocation pushes her selfhood beyond neat discursive edges. Standing on the threshold between her two lives, Lucy's intimate estrangement with herself empowers the losses that characterize the limits of self-understanding. Lucy's account, grounded on a sense of loss and tragedy—the linked events that ravaged her of a normal life and that destroyed the possibility of a happy future with Paul Emmanuel—connects the aesthetic work of its creation as a novel with her ability to imagine and understand her life psychically. Further, though, it demands a new conception of the subject as both an actor in the narrative and as its authorizing mode, Lucy does not merely lose loved ones in the novel, but writes to the edges of grief, rendering formally the psychic presence of “the hiatus, blank, or spacing that constitutes death.”

“I love Memory to-night,” she said: “I prize her as my best friend. She is just now giving me a deep delight: she is bringing back to my heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities—not mere empty ideas, but what were once realities, and that I long have thought decayed, dissolved, mixed in with grave-mould. I possess just now the hours, the thoughts, the hopes of my youth. I renew the love of my life—its only love—almost its only affection; for I am not a particularly good woman: I am not amiable. Yet I have had my feelings, strong and concentrated; and these feelings had their object; which, in its single self, was dear to me, as to the majority of men and women, are all the unnumbered points on which they dissipate their regard. While I loved, and while I was loved, what an existence I enjoyed! What a glorious year I can recall—how bright it comes back to me!” 44

Garret Stewart argues that these words spoken to Lucy Snowe by her elderly invalid employer Miss Marchmont function as the beginning of an exchange that mirrors on a smaller scale the relations between reader and writer that constitute Charlotte Brontë’s final novel *Villette* (1853). He claims that in this scene “you as the reader are, to assume Lucy’s position as auditor of a tragic female narrative (Miss Marchmont’s tale of lost love) and then to extrapolate from it to the affective nature of your own continuing stance toward the rest of Lucy’s story” (250). Listening to Miss Marchmont’s story of the “twelve months of bliss” with her beloved Frank only “to undergo thirty years of sorrow” after his tragic death (44), reflects the reader’s “position [to Lucy] as importunate addressee of a woman’s sad looking back” (250). Yet Stewart fails to account for the affective pleasures of delight and hope that kindles in the older woman as she tells her young paid companion this story of her life. Retrospection itself is not a terror, but rather a welcomed and intimate friend able to bring an embodied sense of warmth and delight that re-vivifies the ideas of the past into realities. Memory not only restructures time, but grants agency over a past “thought decayed, dissolved, mixed in with grave-mould,” and allows Miss Marchmont to “possess...the hours, the thoughts, the hopes of my youth” in the “just now” of the present. Remembering and then telling the tragic narrative of lost love and a lonely future

becomes the conduit not just for happy reverie, but for a transformation of the past into an account marshaled by the agency of one's own affects instead of the expected feelings of pathos. Mrs. Marchmont passes soon after, but not before professing that "still I am happy" (47).

Stewart places emphasis on this scene, as a rubric for understanding the novel's structure:

When such a state of mind is apostrophized like a second person, like a reader, you realize how often your own reading is figured in simply so that Lucy—according to the therapeutic move of the entire autobiographical retrospect—may easily enter into dialogue with her own conflicting urges. 254

The "therapeutic move" of retrospection that allows Lucy to understand the conflicting affects of pleasure and despair through discursive dialogue structure the novel as more than just a simple account. By engaging memory and fantasy as active phenomena in the narrative, Lucy brings the past into a psychic present, charging her narrative with a reparative force in which writing becomes the means not only to relive the past, but also to situate herself within it as yet another actor. Like Stewart, who sees the exchange between the two women as constituting the continuing stance of the reader in the novel, I, too see the older woman as something of a "monitory figure" (to use Gilbert and Gubar's terms) within the text. While the conditions of her loneliness brought on by the death of Frank may determine the remainder of her days, she does not live them in the despair of affective flattening. Rather, it is her loneliness in the present that opens her up to the warmth, pleasure, and delight she finds in restructuring reality through memory.²⁵ The loss of another that constitutes a loss of the self that allows her to write.

²⁵In Rachel Carson's "The Glass Essay," 1994, she confronts the loss of a lover—the patriarchally named Law—through the lens of reading Emily Bronte during a visit to the moors to visit her elderly mother.

Perhaps the hardest thing about losing a lover is

Throughout much of *Villette*, Lucy's position to the past seems as unfixed as the unstable personal chronology she supplies. Yet, one parenthetical statement pinpoints the novel's point of view as retrospect "for I speak of a time gone by: my hair, which, till a late period, withstood the frosts of time, lies now, at last white, under a white cap, like snow beneath snow" (50). Measured not by the length of time but through the whitening hair as a metonym for an embodied psychology and herself, Lucy's relationship between past the present registers through the fading lusters. Like Mrs. Marchmont, she remembers and tells her own story as refracted in the warm light and cold touch of her own gems of the past. While Miss Marchmont is a monitory figure for Lucy, modeling her narration on the older woman's. With Lucy's refusal to complete her narrative and her desire for imagination or lyrical release to overtake it, she reimagines ways to represent and activate affective life. Hence while she learns to make memory her companion, as Miss Marchmont did, her refusal to finish the conversation the novel starts, releases her

to watch the year repeat its days.
It is as if I could dip my hand down

into time and scoop up
blue and green lozenges of April heat
a year ago in another country.

I can feel that other day running underneath this one
like an old videotape—

Charlotte Bronte appears in the lyrical essay as the admonishing editor of her wild, beloved sister; and yet, I read the lines above as evoking the similar affective structures of time that organize the Miss Marchmont's position as textual guide to reading the novel. Illuminated in the half-life of mourning, Carson's memory transubstantiates time into a material that is porous fluid, penetrable—she can dip her hand into the past and fish out riches from its interiors. The second image—the tattered analogue strip of videotape—continually runs beneath each day, keeping its reserve of past recordings in palimpsest relation to present.

intersubjectivity from the demands of positivist knowledge and into the hopeful plenitude of interiority.

The loss Lucy grapples with in her writing connects the affective to the discursive. Both the articulation/audition relations and the conditional metaphors that structure her narrative recall Kristeva's conjuring of signs in the face of blankness:

Our gift of speech, of situating ourselves in time for an other, could exist nowhere except beyond an abyss. Speaking beings, from their ability to endure in time up to their enthusiastic, learned, or simply assuming constructions, demand a break, a renunciation, an unease at their foundations. 42

The novel—with its evasive language and uneasy narrative progress attends to the structural unease that permits Lucy's discourse. The abyss always exists just beyond the edges of her discourse, an edge that Lucy extends further by denying stable reality through lyrical languages. Though, the fundamental break in Lucy's speech act refuses to situate herself in time for the benefit of another; but rather, she places her discourse in the atemporal and de-spatialized dynamics of a personal history foregrounded in fantasy and expansive abandon into one's own self. By situating herself out of time, the abysses in this passages mark not just her distance from another, but also activate the shifting intersubjective perspectives that determine reader/writer relations as self-relation. Whereas Anderson claims "Not simply looking back over her life and describing it, Lucy seems always already to have constituted herself as an onlooker of her own existence" (Anderson 53), I argue that her position as onlooker does not place her at a remove from the novel, but rather interpellates her own position as reader within the active play of self-representation. As both reader and writer, Lucy becomes enmeshed in the discursive and aesthetic work, which, like the posteriori work of fantasy, persists every syntactical structure of the novel. Loss—both relational and vocal—opens the void to yield the speech that models

Lucy's complex dialogic interiority. With both writing and reading serving self-understanding, Lucy's release from the circumspection of others models her narrative against inherited forms and vocabularies that offer empathic understandings—though not complete knowledge—of her life as a mode of writerly discourse.

Like Stewart's understanding of the novel as a "site of writing," the text of the novel demands Lucy's authorship beyond an easy conflation of the first-person narrator and writer. By continually undermining bounded representation, Lucy's characterization continually breaks down into discourse, equating self-representation with phenomenological aesthetic creation. As this site of writing that indexes the active experience of selfhood, Lucy releases the representation of herself from both narrative telos and normative demands of a subject.²⁶ Just as loss for Brontë and Jane allowed them to imagine a self through writing, it too shapes the creation of Lucy's narrative and its variety of formal, social, and interpersonal dynamics. It opens the space to understand the affective valence in writing her story. Rather than an aesthetics of unconscious withdrawal, Lucy's conscious release from the demands of social subjectivity manifests in poetic evocations of loss. To bring the wellspring of signs that representation plays out, repeats, or reconceives in the language of the fictional world into to closer consequence to the text itself.

The act of writing in *Villette*, I argue, is an even more pressing manifestation of a "life" than it is in *Jane Eyre*, whose progress from orphan to wealthy wife and mother coincides with the normative expectations of subjecthood with greater ease. It is through writing—in telling herself that story that is also her life—that Lucy exists. Her enigmatic articulations speak more

²⁶ Perhaps this is why, in lieu of the novel *Lucy Snowe*, Brontë chose to title after the more spatially diffuse and heterogeneous space of a city.

directly to the novel's ethos as representing the self as a narrative phenomenon rendered through both *form* and *process*. Lucy embraces release to craft a narrative that in its evasions, enigmas, and poetic language shifts Peterson's "self-interpretation" to what Amanda Anderson calls "a self-imposed therapeutic process" through self-representation (Anderson 48). Yet, the key question that I am addressing lingers: why does a woman who not only prizes her solitude but further courts misrepresentation write a narrative account of her life? Despite Lucy's guardedness, real feeling, traumas, and loss rise to the surface for the reader. Rather than suspiciously consider the keys to the text within what is not revealed, the answer to this question is the text itself. Reimagining herself as a narrative figure, allows Lucy a discursive plentitude commensurate to the exploration of an unbounded and complex intersubjectivity. Her release into that stream of images in the company of a wide array of psychic figures takes the cast of a letter to herself. It further grants her a sympathetic intimacy with the model reader, molded and drawn out to elicit the affective response Lucy craves. Through the estrangement of writing, the elusive heroine not only actively refigures herself but fashions the perfect interlocutor for her self-interpretation.

Villette also includes moments where Lucy's writing no longer suspends plot, but becomes it. Her letters to Graham Bretton not only model a writing process, but make the affective intentions of writing clear to the reader. These letters not only signify her desire for intimacy, companionship, and understanding with her reunited friend, they also illustrate how Lucy employ's writing to establish and sustain affect in her own life. Rather than drown in a bleak existence, her correspondence with Graham shows how discursive exchange with a sympathetic reader kindles hope. The initial letter that Graham writes produces in Lucy that kind of affective pleasures that usually only exist in her life of thought: "I experienced a happy

feeling—a glad emotion which went warm to my heart, and ran lively through all my veins. For once a hope was realized. I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image of the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures, and on which humanity starves but cannot live” (270). Even before reading it, the letter transubstantiates imaginary shadows into solid objects of reality. By reifying barmecide hope and joy, Graham's letter to Lucy opens her up the possibility that her life may contain more than perpetual loneliness and the limited necessities of survival. This first letter signals how dialogic writing functions as the point of inflection between fantasy and reality.

While the content of neither Graham's nor Lucy's letter are replicated in any great detail (which may be telling of how banally collegial his letters are), Lucy elaborates her own process of writing them in great detail:

Does the reader, remembering what was said some pages back, care to ask how I answered these letters: whether under the dry, stinting check of Reason, or according to the full, liberal impulse of Feeling?

To speak truth, I compromised matters; I served two masters: I bowed down in the houses of Rimmon, and lifted the heart at another shrine. I wrote to these letters two answers—one for my own relief, the other for Graham's perusal.

To begin with: Feeling and I turned Reason out of doors, drew against her bar and bolt, then we sat down, spread our paper, dipped in the ink an eager pen, and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart. When we had done—when two sheets were covered with the language of a strongly-adherent affection, a rooted and active gratitude—(once, for all, in this parenthesis, I disclaim, with the utmost scorn, every sneaking suspicion of what are called “warmer feelings:” women do not entertain these “warmer feelings” where, from the commencement, through the whole progress of an acquaintance, they have never once been cheated of the conviction that, to do so would be to commit a mortal absurdity: nobody ever launches into Love unless he has seen or dreamed the rising of Hope's star over Love's troubled waters)—when, then, I had given expression to a closely-clinging and deeply-honouring attachment—an attachment that wanted to attract to itself and take to its own lot all that was painful in the destiny of its object; that would, if it could, have absorbed and conducted away all storms and lightnings from an existence viewed with a

passion of solicitude—then, just at that moment, the doors of my heart would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right. 286-287

Her laborious letters to him exist in two forms; the first as unrelenting outpourings of feeling and desirous of attachment, deemed too much to share, and the more tidy sanitized well-wishes and casual updates more befitting Lucy's own wish to maintain distance. Lucy's rhetorical question grounds her correspondence within the old-hat antagonisms between Reason and Feeling, as full, liberal, impulsive affect becomes aligned with the Imagination, as impossible under the dry, stinting monitor of reality. In serving two masters, Lucy continues to interpellate her discursive persona between the lives of thought and reality. The two letters produced satisfy Reason's vigilance over her public performance, while the second for her own relief becomes the outlet of true authentic feeling, Lucy through force of habit relegates to her solitude. The intimacy of this letter of feeling and relief kindles affect within the intersubjective register, signaling the congruency between writing's release and her own play of interior desires. The fluidity with which her affections spill across pages of text speaks Lucy's desire for release through writing. Though she has bolted the door against it to commune with Feeling, Reason finds a way to intrude, qualifying Lucy's gratitude and affection as not the warmer feelings one can only entertain when there is any realistic hope of reciprocation. However, Reason's overly emphatic protest only serves to reinforce the need to manage the warmer feelings that exist in the discursive production.

Lucy's desire for attachment recalls Mill's poetic impetus—to find itself in another object, even though it could produce pain if unrequited. The care that Lucy desires to offer Graham in these letters—strong enough to quell the haunting tempests of her past—becomes the

care she wishes to receive from him in return. In modeling sympathetic correspondence in this private letter on the intersubjective dynamics of poetic feeling, she undermines Reason's intrusion to state in her own obscured verbosity the desire for pleasurable and responsive companionship that extends beyond her own interiority. Reason's violent rending erasure of discourse—of letters that if once paper and ink, only exist, as all of Lucy's correspondence, in shadowy elision—recalls the brutal editorial check of her fantastic reverie when first spotting Continental Europe aboard *The Vivid*.²⁷ The second letter, the one signed, sealed, and delivered, must be surmised as written in dry prose, stinting on the full liberal impulse of Feeling. While Lucy's desire to remain inscrutable ultimately approves of this chaste missive, its ultimate destiny in reality does not deny Lucy the pleasures of affection or the power of discourse both to indulge feeling and manage it. These doubled letters exist in a palimpsest relation: the narrative of inner life as the underlying drafts of process, revision, and erasure that remain unseen below the presentation of self to others. Following the best articulated model of writing in the text, Lucy's letters to Graham, the novel volleys between the narrative restrictions of one who thinks it

²⁷ The impetus to destroy the letters penned by feeling mirror her editorial aside after describing her first visionary encounter with the Continent aboard the aptly named ship *The Vivid*. Lucy commands the reader to “Cancel the whole of that, if you please, reader—or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral—an alliterative, text-hand copy—*Day-dreams are delusions of the demon*” (63). Following her enchanting description of Europe, she reins in her own aesthetic release, asking the reader to cancel the description in rigid self-correction, only to ignore the command for the purposes of moralistic pedagogy. Lucy's tempest within not only recasts her experience of the pleasant vision as mere delusion, but further makes for her own stormy passage across the page. Reconfiguring intersubjectival dialogue as reading relations, Lucy's internal tempest becomes discursive palimpsest, indexing the multiple active correspondences between herself and the world. Instead of the wholesale erasure of the happiness and tranquility she found in her imaginative prowess, Lucy accretes additional discursive sites in the space of the single page through her dictation of imaginative handwritten marginalia. She multiplies discursive sites to destabilize representation but further interpolates writing into a complex and expansive array of affective postures and discursive productions.

best to remain unknown and one who feels compelled to provide an honest outpouring of feeling and experience. Lucy, like Jane, is both encoder and decoder of the text. Discursive evasions, contradictions speak to a complex version of interiority interpellated by writing, that allows Lucy to express while remain hidden, be known but only to the one who can know.

Their letters—written, read, doubled, destroyed, rewritten, ritualistically buried, and mysteriously returned²⁸—remain active within and out of the bounds of the text, mirroring the extended discursive phenomenon that grants Lucy’s self-understanding and affective inner life. Her method of writing the letters—to appease both Feeling and Reason, reveling in the pleasure while adhering to Puritanical decorum—mirrors the same desire to extend affect that she felt upon receiving the letter. Throughout the novel, Lucy strictly manages not only her outward appearance, but strives to keep her interior in check. Her treatment of the letter—holding it to be read until she can savor it alone, or as M. Paul says, forestalling the pleasures as he “used to save a peach whose bloom was very ripe” (273)—serves to extend desire, allowing it to live beyond dashed hopes. Authorial control, whether in her correspondence with Graham or in the evasive structure of the narrative, becomes the only means for Lucy to transform “the transitory rain-pool, holding in its hollow one draught” into “the perennial spring yielding the supply of seasons” (258). By harnessing the plentitude of infinite discursive play within the text in

²⁸ One of the novel’s lesser mysteries—or errors in continuity—is Lucy’s later assessment of Graham’s letters. She states, “I read them in after years; they were kind letters enough—pleasing letters, because composed by one well pleased; in the two last there were three or four closing lines half-gay, half-tender, ‘by *feeling* touched, but not subdued.’ Time, dear reader, mellowed them to a beverage of this mild quality; but when I first tasted their elixir, fresh from the fount so honoured, it seemed juice of a divine vintage: a draught which Hebe might fill, and the very gods approve” (287). While her admission slightly softens the blow that her heartened and belabored correspondence came to naught, what remains interesting is her possession of these letters years later, after she had supposedly buried them beneath the tree at Mme. Beck’s school in the chapter in “A Burial” (332-333). Did they rise supernaturally like the ghostly nun seemingly does? Their mysterious return to Lucy remains unresolved.

moments of release and delay, Lucy comes as close as possible to making her own writing conjure the perennial spring of hope. In serving two masters with two letters, she creates a site of correspondence between her two lives. Her interpellation as a site of inflection within discursive production not only removes the antagonism between Reason and Feeling, but situates the power of writing to manage, create, and sustain affect within Lucy's control as both reader and writer.

Just as Brontë's own relational desires found satisfaction in the correspondence with the different men she held in her affection, Lucy's letters become the vehicle to sustain and kindle warmth and hope.²⁹ When Lucy's correspondence with Graham peters off, she continues to find pleasure in her romantic attachment to M. Paul forged in part through his frequent letters during his time abroad. These letters are not marked by any of the anxious production and violent rending that characterized her earlier postal affections. Rather, she describes the years during her separation from M. Paul as "the three happiest years of my life" (552) because:

By every vessel he wrote; he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude. He wrote because he liked to write; he did not abridge, because he cared not to abridge. He sat down, he took pen and paper, because he loved Lucy and had much to say to her; because he was faithful and thoughtful, because he was tender and true. ... his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed. 553

These real, frequent, loving, and expansive letters not only nurture the mutual love Lucy and M. Paul share, but again mediate affection through discursive production and correspondence. M. Paul writes "because he loved Lucy" and, while Lucy "thought I loved him when he went away," because of his dedicated communication "I love him now in another degree: he is more my own" (553). In M. Paul becoming more Lucy's own, their loving correspondence transcends bounded

²⁹ See Helen M. Cooper's 2004 introduction to the Penguin edition of *Villette* (xvi-xvii).

subjectivity. This free circumlocution does more than create connection, but allows Lucy to achieve “fusional passion” through discursive phenomena.³⁰ These letters from across the ocean do not fade into the banal sweetness of Graham’s correspondence, but, in their “full-hearted plentitude,” become the true response to Lucy’s unabridged pages of “full, liberal impulse of Feeling.” Like Mill’s feeling confessing itself to itself, Lucy’s and M. Paul’s correspondence kindles the intimacy of understanding and mutual viability. While her letters to Graham grant insight into the discursive process that models the composition of the novel, the correspondence between Lucy and M. Paul models the novel’s affective demands on discourse: in sustained writing, she finds her desire for understanding nourished by the “living water” of a “perennial spring.”

However, the pleasure of this correspondence ends abruptly and enigmatically in the novel’s concluding pages where M. Paul’s return ship befalls tragedy. Recalling the lyrical release of Lucy’s fainting fit and metaphorical drowning, the tempestuous end denies the clarity of plot progress and narrative closure, and rather regresses to a disembodied discourse seemingly evacuated of Lucy herself. Like the final moment of *Jane Eyre*, where the novel’s scope zooms out to emphasize St. John River’s fate as a dénouement of exemplary Christian life, Lucy’s narrative perspective encompasses a larger temporal and atmospheric purview:

The sun passes the equinox; the days shorten, the leaves grow sere; but—he is coming.

³⁰ Kucich argues that “Bronte’s eroticizing of repressive solitude is most fully expressed in the heightened inwardness of her reticent protagonist-narrators” who refuse “direct, fusional passion” out of which comes the production of “endless narrative texture of contradictory and unstable introspection” (TK). However, in the contained discourse of their letters, Lucy does achieve both fusional passion and self-abandon to the impulses of feeling. It is perhaps because this exchange is so anomalous and contradictory that the content of the letters and Lucy’s writing of them remains almost un-narrated save in this brief retrospective description.

Frosts appear at night; November has sent his fogs in advance; the wind takes its autumn moan; but—he is coming. 554

Narrating in the present tense, Lucy spans months in the course of a couple of sentences, moving from the autumnal equinox to the wintry conditions of November. Each seasonal change becomes a reminder of M. Paul's return. Her disrupted refrain "but—he is coming" draws the atmospheric events together in Kristeva's "strange concatenations" that in their repetition attempt to self-manage time and affect through an excessive production of new languages and poetics (Kristeva 42). The continual movement of time registered by the changing meteorological events overshadows Lucy's embodied experience; in these moments her subjective self-abandon expands into the world around her. The promise of his homecoming pushes Lucy's subjectivity toward uncontrollable relationality. As the novel moves away from objectivity—the reality of paper and ink letters that for the first time sustains Lucy—she alone must tend to an increasingly one-sided and vertiginous discourse to keep the perennial spring alive within herself.

Without the constant correspondence in full unchecked letters, her release from bounded representation corresponds with her lack of dialogic discourse in the wake of M. Paul's silence. Her monologic imagination unfurls outward, projecting herself through paranoid scrutiny of the world. She reads the "signs of the sky" as she has "noted them ever since childhood" and in their ominous portents begs, "God watch that sail! Oh! guard it!" (555). As the novel progresses and discursive present rises and catches up to the temporal present, Lucy exerts less control over language: reading the inscrutable signs of the sky, she responds in present tense exclamations that seemingly place M. Paul's ship before her very eyes, eliding both time and space. These spatial and temporal disruptions manifest in brusque disruption and emphatic apostrophe that

quite literally dash narrative bounds and plot coherence against the rough syntax, shifting perspectives, circuitous metaphor and transient subject positions:

The wind shifts to the west. Peace, peace, Banshee—"keening" at every window! It will rise—it will swell—it shrieks out long: wander as I may through the house this night, I cannot lull the blast. The advancing hours make it strong: by midnight, all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild south-west storm. That storm roared frenzied, for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder—the tremor of whose plumes was storm. Peace, be still! Oh! a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered—not uttered till; when the hush came, some could not feel it: till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some! 555

In one last burst of lyrical release, Lucy attains Jane's limitless vision, seeing the entire breadth of the Atlantic as clearly as the storm at her window. Collapsing her fears with the grief of thousands, Lucy magnifies her own mourning to the point of unraveling the plot at its ends. Extrapolating her own lament onto others, Lucy releases her own affective position from a single bounded subjectivity, evading the closure that demands definitive pronouncement of M. Paul's death. Rather, she returns to reading the sky: transposing light into blankness of the "Black Sun's" melancholic mourning. Seemingly ended the story in the scattered narrative wreckage of paranoid fragmentation, the linguistic disruptions and enigmatic open-endedness of this section suggests a vast affective longing. Lucy expands her purview to cover the world and numerous subjectivities to recover the lost dialogue with M. Paul. Finding no distinct response within the world to ground her feeling, her monologue slips away into the vertiginous and shifting perspectives of vast subjective un-differentiation. Interpellating and estranging the reader simultaneously, Lucy's enigmatic voice and evasive report seems to recast writer/reader relations

into a more complex form of intersubjectival dialogue that allows affective extension beyond representational and temporal bounds.

With the return of the nautical *mise-en-scène* and vague narration of events, Stewart sees the scene of M. Paul's supposed death as "[repeating] the originary trauma" that ushered Lucy into adulthood in Chapter Four (253). His elaboration of these two drownings equates the stagy metaphorical transition from the Bretton sequence as an "extravagant suppression of mourning" that returns to structure the narrative through recurrent rupture (or hiatus) and suture (264). This tidy threading of the past into the future, while casting the pall of repressed trauma over the entire plot, engages the shifting relations to time that situate Lucy outside of stable chronology. In composing a discursive space to mirror the continuing and mobile dynamics of interiority, Lucy realigns time to mirror her own experience. This narrative weaving as a reparative means to understand her affective life allows Lucy to situate herself within a responsive world of discourse. These enigmatic repetitions engage the therapeutic aspect of retrospection as a mobile aesthetic that need not overzealously attend to the conventional linear chronology or authorize her account with a coherent and legible subjectivity. Within the discourse of her intersubjective life, Lucy exerts the temporal control of Bersani's aesthetic subject where:

present and past variations on any mode of being permanently persist because they *are not fully*; to remember events is to recognize ourselves in their imaginary presence. From this perspective, the past is what has passed from the phenomenological to the virtuality of the imaginary. The past's disappearance as events is the condition of a new permanence, the permanent persistence of possibility. 147

Bersani allows for the idea of psychic time—that of memory, fantasy, creative work—to coexist with real time; however, in situating subjectivity as an aesthetic phenomenon, he allows the "the permanent persistence of possibility" to continue in virtuality. These two bookending

metaphorical wreckages, while seeming to signify repetitious deathly events, bring the past and present together in new imaginative correspondences to temporality.³¹ In this atemporal imaginative plenitude, Lucy may return to the events of her entire life story with reparative creative energies. Her family's death and the death of M. Paul persist not as traumas continually surfacing in a repressive ebb-and-flow, but as sites of discursive possibility that can be rewritten, like the drafts of her letters to Graham, through recognizing herself in their imaginative presence. This "permanent persistence of possibility" authorizes Lucy's refusal to give her subjective account over to ontic knowledge or narrative closure and allows M. Paul to live, perhaps not in reality but within the discursive imaginative space of Lucy's life of thought.

The final chapter begins with the pleasurable evocation of M. Paul's sustaining love through correspondence, only to dash the possibilities of those future pleasures with his death. Having only letters—words, that while existing objectively in pen and paper, filled with ephemeral, immaterial meanings that have no social viability—Lucy's relationship with M. Paul

³¹ Lucy's narrative activates memory in the service of prophesy: a prophetic impulse bookends the text; and yet only serves to emphasize how much Lucy collapses retrospection with narrative projection to extend selfhood beyond temporal bounds. From the first paragraph, where she believes Louisa Bretton "plainly saw events coming, whose very shadow I scarce guessed; yet of which the faint suspicion sufficed to impart unsettled sadness, and made me glad to change scene and society" to the final paragraph which begins "Man cannot prophesy. Love is no oracle. Fear sometimes imagines a vain thing" (8, 552). The conflict between Louisa Bretton's prophetic capacity and the generalized disavowal of it as superstition or fantasy, places the novel in an uneasy space of expectation and paranoid thinking. In an endnote to "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading," Sedgwick relates "Timothy Gould's interpretation (in a personal communication, 1994) of Emily Dickinson's poem that begins "'Hope' is the thing with feathers—/ That perches in the soul—" (116, poem no. 254). Gould suggests that the symptoms of fluttering hope are rather like those of posttraumatic stress disorder, with the difference that the apparently absent cause of the perturbation lies in the future, rather than in the past." (151). Instead of using his interpretation as a diagnostic for Lucy's mental life, I am drawn to how the novel's beginning and end speak to the fluttering uneasiness of transgressing the stable temporal bounds of the past and the future that Lucy invokes to narrate her life.

fails to satisfy the set termination of the marriage plot. For this reason, John Hughes considers the novel “A profound artistic investigation of the unconscious conditions, habits, logic, and tendencies of a radical and intolerable lovelessness” (711-712). These charges come to the novel for many reasons, but most obviously from the combination of a possibly unreliable narrator and an enigmatic narrative that does not find its conclusion in the protagonist’s happy union. And yet, to thematize, the novel broadly speaks to the over-determination of the marriage plot as the arbiter of successful positive relationality. Hughes’ remarks make visible the blind eye turned toward various pleasures existing beyond positivist formal and social convention.³² The affective cloud that hangs over *Villette*—the lovelessness, estrangement, and repression that it is often charged with languishing—is less symptomatic of Lucy’s affects, and more so representative of a social normativity policing feeling and relations.

However, just because Lucy’s and M. Paul’s narrative fate does not end in marriage, this does not mean Lucy lived completely and intolerably without love. This radical and intolerable lovelessness is not only undermined by the scores of readers who become Lucy’s companions and do, perhaps, fall in love with her and her cagy ways, but further speaks to a reductive model of criticism of this novel that Eve Sedgwick warns against: there is a “condescension that’s often implicit in such approaches (‘I’m the shrink, the expert, and I know more about this character

³² One need only turn to Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy’s majority opinion in *Obergefell v Hodges*, the case that legalized same sex marriage, to see how endemic conforming to social convention and structures becomes the only way to validate affective relationality even today. Kennedy writes, “Marriage responds to the universal fear that a lonely person might call out only to find no one there. It offers the hope of companionship and understanding and assurance that while both still live there will be someone to care for the other” (14). In this antiquated and conservative stance, only marriage validates understanding, assurance, and care, despite the fact that marriage, beyond its romantic myth, does not guarantee any affective response, but merely social viability and visibility.

than she ever can'), or even the moralism ... ('She pathetically stays in her own safe place and can't reach out toward authentic intersubjectivity')."³³ Sedgwick criticizes the position that Lucy cannot possess an authentic intersubjectivity and the varied affective life it provides because she does not reach out in a lonely call for another. Obviating depth psychology and its reliance on the repression of traumatic events to structure the text (personal correspondence, February 4, 2008). I argue against these pathologizing claims as the discursive origin of the text. Such over-determined readings easily dismiss the nuance in Lucy's shifting affective positions during the novel's conclusion, rather than see her in an active struggle for discursive self-interpretation. I argue that *Villette* is less about tragedy and more concerned with hope, less focused on plot progress and more on representing Lucy as her own companion.

In conclusion, I would like to proffer an alternate reading that sustains affective hope through discursive release. With both her origin and her fate in question, as well as the status of multiple familial, social, and romantic relations, the novel's end reveals Lucy's performance of life-writing as a screen for how composition itself—the rhetorical postures she takes, the investment in creative languages, and the palimpsest process of writing—is not only the subject, of the novel, but the means to draw and sustain affective energies from her experience. In the novel's final moments, Lucy reins narrative control if only to extend herself as discourse ad infinitum. Breaking off just short of acknowledging his death, Lucy ends by saying:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. 555

In the narrative fumes of her affective labor, Lucy pronounces the novel's end—enough has been said and no more shall do. And yet this pause—registering finality not as definite closure but a temporary interlude—allows Lucy the time and space to conjure a responsive companion. Lucy conjures another with a sunnier disposition and an imagination from the linguistic ether of signs. It is for this reader to picture closure in the vein of the marriage plot, satisfying the demands of convention while failing to acknowledge the sole validity of that trajectory. Cohn sees release of consciousness in the conclusion's "nonindividualized" feeling of a non-specific audience and the numerous linguistic evasions as maintaining "for one last moment [that] reverie is reading" (Cohn 857). While Cohn argues that affect picks up where consciousness ends, I argue that these lyrical releases are more than just detached reveries, but quite consciously rendered to create and extension of affect sustained by the discursive process. Lucy writes in these blanks as sites of possibility to engage with and narrate (even through intentional disruptions and pauses) intersubjective dynamics that struggle against subjective and formal bounds to create or prolong affect. Lucy's denial of ontic and omniscient knowledge in the text keeps it open to the phenomenon of affective and fantastic shifting that defines one's own relation to the world.

Stewart comments that "In Paul Emmanuel's absence, she has, after all, nothing left to embrace, and so in writing she labors to stave off death's contamination, both its grief and its guilt, both mourning and melancholy at once" (265). Lucy continues to write in order to assuage her own grief, but also to find something to embrace. Stewart reads the conclusion as Lucy "[rewriting] her loss as a continuing eros of the will" to survive; and yet, survival and will only come from an embrace of discourse that releases her from not only these narratives of grief, but also from the life of reality (264). At last, Lucy has only her writing and her reading upon the threshold of fantasy that ultimately connects her to the world and allows a sense of hope, like her

own being, to exceed socially legible subjectivity in aesthetic flourish. Stewart's reading posits that writing cannot be for Lucy what it is for her author, "life giving hope and motive." However, considering Lucy as both writer and reader—the encoder and decoder of her life experience—this apostrophe forms another subject position in order to interpret herself as able to feel the delight, rapture, and wonder that no social future will provide her. While reading does in fact become reverie it is less the unconscious dream, but textual work fantasy. In these consciously included blanks, Lucy purposefully forestalls the disappointment of a wish unfulfilled and yet stands in the threshold of discursive release. *Villette*, in the end, satisfies itself in the affective charges circulating through the open discursive systems of Lucy's own intersubjective life.

My reading, relying as it does on the melancholic and lonely dynamics as structuring the narrative ultimately reanimates them in the spirit of Melanie Klein's reparative impulse. In her final work "On the Sense of Loneliness" (1963/1984), Klein does not merely discuss "the objective situation of being deprived of external companionship" but "the inner sense of loneliness," stemming from "a ubiquitous yearning for an unattainable perfect internal state" (300). It is this sense of loneliness—the quest for a perfect internal state that Lucy perhaps found in the barely narrated three years of happiness in correspondence with M. Paul—that defines the ethos of *Villette*. Just as Miss Marchmont prizes Memory and her ability to narrate her own love story to Lucy, Klein asserts that "However gratifying it is in later life to express thoughts and feelings to a congenial person, there remains an unsatisfied longing for an understanding without words" (Klein 301). This longing for "understanding without words" recalls Mill's intimate intersubjective confessions; and yet, in poetry's estranging approximations in language, "thoughts and feelings" grow alienatingly distant. While Klein stresses that loneliness—and its assuaging companionship—occurs within an internal state, Lucy's production of an endless

narrative texture requires discourse for self-interpretation. Her impetus to remain inscrutable that frustrates her representation throughout the novel—and that engenders the narrative flux and turmoil that Kucich sees—signals Lucy's desire for a correspondent to provide hope and comfort. However, these shifting words that Lucy relies upon arise from the abyss of loss; in Stewart's belief that writing staves off grief, her engagement with the realm of signs can be seen as delaying the potential for pain—or the possession of that “unattainable perfect internal state” or self-companionship. In this way, Lucy's discourse becomes a vehicle for hope—keeping the possibility for perfect responsive companionship in one's self and the world active. In continuing to yearn by spinning endless discourse, Lucy forestalls closure and the potential for grief. Writing is Lucy's companion when her hair is as white as snow upon Snowe, giving her the ability to conjure another in possession of the imagination and knowledge that signals her loneliness may come, at some point, to an end. Her plot evasions, narrative unreliability, and temporal and spatial unfixity within the discursive not only create sites of release from formal convention, but build in moments where language stops and perfect, life-saving understanding may occur.

In this Kleinian reading, positioning Lucy as author asserts *Villette* as a matrix of self-care, to assuage the internal loneliness that marks a life full of loss, tragedy, and willful social alienation. While Lucy gives Mrs. Marchmont care, she actually becomes a model for the kind of relationship to one's own past that Lucy employs in her narrative. However, Lucy steps beyond the pathos of Miss Marchmont's tragic affair with Frank to engage narrativity without closure as a means to care for herself. During a school field trip before his departure, Paul Emmanuel complains of “the mechanical labour” and having “to stoop and sit still” to record the wonderful stories he tells his students (431). He jokingly suggests that “I could dictate it, though, with

pleasure, to an amanuensis who suited me. Would Mademoiselle Lucy write for me if I asked her?" (431). After she demurs, he insists, "Try some day" (431). This moment of discursive relationality between two so well suited to one another is often overlooked, but I assert it activates the previous model of narrativity that Miss Marchmont offered to Lucy and pushes it toward the radical claims of writing and feeling the novel espouses. To think of *Villette* as Lucy's serious attempt to be M. Paul's amanuensis goes far to explain the conclusion and how she grapples with her inability to finish his story. As Stewart says, the "inference [of M. Paul's death] becomes a reenactment, in extremis, of the narrative act itself: a structuring of response even in the absence of event" (252). Her paranoid desire to witness his death never truly materializes, giving Lucy no dictating companion to grant her the final words. With her inability to narrate his end, she releases the narrative into an imaginative plenitude of another to supply closure.

Whereas dialogic structures seem to compose the novel—both Lucy as amanuensis and the interpellation of another reader (a "you" outside Lucy's intersubjectivity)—I place the other within his layered structure of Lucy's intersubjective narrative persona. In "On the Edge: Grief," Judith Butler radically reconfigures relationality:

If I lose you, under the conditions in which who I am is bound up with you, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself, and this life unbearable. Who "am" I, without you? I was not just over here, and you over there, but the "I" was in the crossing, there with you, but also here. n.p.

Butler's reading establishes the loss of another as constituting the loss of the stability for one's self. Klein's unsatisfied longing for perfect internal companionship haunts Butler's grief-stricken conditions of loss: both desire responsive connection that challenges the stability of positivist delimitation of self and other. In this way, Lucy's loss opens up herself to Butler's crossing

between the “I”s, relieving Lucy of the spatial division of irreducibly alien subjectivities and of the ontological boundedness of a single subject. In place of the rigid and defined positions where I am is “over here, and you over there,” Butler sees a movement, a relational phenomenology that evades fixity, that overtakes the novel’s entire narrative world—not only Lucy’s own self and story, but M. Paul’s (and everyone else’s) as well. As an aesthetic subject, Lucy persists throughout the syntax of the narrative, constantly managing, repeating, and reinventing her own story through the correspondences between her life of thought and life of reality. Butler’s radical grief moves Kristeva’s sense of loss from the realm of signs into the fundamental relations between subjects eroding the boundaries with the ethical call to live with and *in* another. This is why Lucy’s desire to be Paul’s amanuensis unconsciously manifests in her becoming her own. Discourse allows Lucy to persist not only outside of representational bounds, but also beyond temporal and spatial bounds. Lucy finds correspondence with M. Paul outside these strictures. His story as she knows it is her story. In the possessive discourse of mutual affection he becomes her own to the point of blurring correspondence their life experiences. His drowning is her drowning. Her continued life is his. Her life of thought brought to the page released from normative representation carries forth her necromantic fancy.

However, I want to steer away from projective models of relationality wherein Lucy *becomes* M. Paul and others through imaginative writing. Rather Butler’s idea of the crossing demands a subjective porosity—but not possession—between others. While it is easy to understand M. Paul as the lost “you,” this easily places the novel in the comfy normativity of grief narratives that falls short in light of the numerous losses and dislocations that structure the text. In trying to tell his story, Lucy really finds her own: her inability to narrate his end signifies release into discursive correspondence that continues beyond her diegetic farewell. With the

novel keeping its center within Lucy's intersubjective life, the lost other—whose crossing constitutes the “I”—is Lucy herself. I opened this chapter by positing that loss must precede the emergence of the self that Brontë gains through writing; Lucy's loss of self—whether to the past, her own inscrutable solitude, her own eventual death—compels the grief that demands discourse. The narrative unfixity and unconstrained subjectivity that marks Lucy's self-representation occurs in the fluid crossing between conscious subjectivity and the unrecovered self within. Lucy's narrative estrangement compels the one whose desire to understand without words to rise to the surface and lurk in the lyrical blanks. The radical narrative gesture Brontë makes in *Villette* is to situate Lucy's self and story in phenomenological correspondence with herself. Lucy finds solace in writing figured as self-confessing feeling to self. Centering the novel in this poetic intersubjectival dialogue, she attempts to replicate these interior dynamics on the page. This discursive correspondence between self and other, between Lucy's life of thought and life of reality releases her from one stable subject position or one coherent representation in order to sustain the hope of her own imagination. The novel eschews normative representation in its search for new languages that foster a self that in its individuation rallies against legible and non-phenomenological representation. Rendering self as discourse allows personal history and affective life to exist in the constant state of flux that compels endless discursive correspondence. Lucy breaks down bounded representation in order to extend an affective life that does not register in social and formal convention. These spaces of evasion and open-endedness in this last chapter and throughout the novel signal the sites of the understanding without words shared by Lucy and herself. What ultimately comes from this release of normative forms into idiosyncratic subjectivity represents the possibilities of transgressive self-knowledge that comes with “vertiginous embrace” of new forms and perspectives.

Self/Portrait:
Henry James's Immaterial *Portrait of a Lady*

In *Ways of Seeing* (1972) John Berger crystalizes the patriarchal gender dynamics inherent in vision, saying:

men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. 47

Despite his uncritical acceptance of distinct, stable gender binaries that give little sway to fluid spectrum of queer identities and gender performances, much of what Berger says holds true today. More specifically, it holds true for the gender dynamics most apparent in the works of Henry James for whom, just a generation or two preceding Berger, these inherited ideas were not only customary but received little criticism in his own day. In this chapter, I look at James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) through the lens of vision and action. Evoking his representation of Isabel as a visual portrait may suggest she will be a passive object of scrutiny; and yet, within a radically visionary interiority she is able to act out her process of self-actualization. Taking up the tensions latent in the visual and literary representation, I look at how her discursive self extends an aesthetic phenomenon across both mediums, ultimately moving her from an object of vision to one who clearly *sees* herself for herself.

In "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick maps the affective landscape of James's "absorbed

subjectivity” through a series of lexical pairings that occur throughout the prefaces to the New York Edition (40). Among them, she turns particular attention to the differentiation in the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) between the aesthetic forms of “picture” and “drama” for their “high instability and high mutual torsiveness” (46).³⁴ Sedgwick’s identification of the charged energies in these radically mutable and contiguously shifting concepts in James’s work distinguishes them as pressure points in his novelistic rhetoric. The function of picture and drama as rubrics for figuring, understanding, and relating to his own work is to modulate the fluctuating and twisting relations between interior consciousness and the external world. Sedgwick’s attention to physical forces replicated in the rhetorical relation emphasizes the effects of pressure in this mobile dynamic, forecasting the play between erosive energies and excessive release in James’s novels.

Sedgwick links two passages in the preface to delineate the relational dynamic between picture and drama. These differing perceptual modes engage one another in a tense manner strikingly similar to sibling rivalry:

the odd inveteracy with which picture, at almost any turn, is jealous of drama, and drama (though on the whole with a greater patience, I think) suspicious of picture. Between them, no doubt, they do much for the theme; yet each baffles insidiously the other’s ideal and eats round the edges of its position; each is too ready to say “I can take the thing for ‘done’ only when done in MY way.” (46)³⁵

In the preface, “picture” and “drama” possess a command of affect—jealousy and suspicion—that emphasizes the symptomatic differences that wear at the other until “the thing” can be taken

³⁴Discussions of “picture” and “drama” as rhetorical terms in James’s work can be traced back to Lubbock’s *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), where he extends their use further to discuss the work of authors such as Flaubert and Thackeray. In his 1934 introduction to *AN*, Blackmur dissects the terms in relation to James’s own discussions of the work, and since then Booth and others have weighed in on how the conceptions of “picture” and “drama” have been tools to understand structure, representation, and narrative perspective in James’s novels.

³⁵These passages appear on pages 298-300 in *The Art of the Novel*.

as “done.” The tensions with which James endows these phenomena expose the representational dynamic in his writing as grounded in discursive relation between forms. The aggression and pressures surging between drama and picture amount to a squabble in the sister arts: it is no small step to read this “my way or the highway” stand-off as, at base, one between the static visuality of the image and the momentum of narrative. Though James, the “master” novelist and erstwhile playwright, quickly takes drama’s side in the spat, noting that the subject is seen “to show its fullest worth” through the narration of the scene, he still sees each doing “much for the theme” (Sedgwick 46). The distinction he draws between these concepts speaks to his belief in a discursive mode of representation in which “the thing” itself emerges from tense compromises.

Despite any loyalties he may profess, James relishes this insidious baffling for the representational complexities it engenders. He admits that “Beautiful exceedingly, for that matter, [are] those occasions or parts of an occasion when the boundary line between picture and scene bears a little the weight of the double pressure” (qtd. in Sedgwick 46). The double weight of picture and drama on “the thing” goes further than merely distinguishing the benefits of these occasions. As James pushes and pulls the rhetoric of representation across different means of perception, the aesthetic forces create a beautiful excess that cannot be accounted for in the ontology of either form alone. I argue this dynamic of intrinsic excess produced from the tension between vision and narrative models the central conflict of representation in James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*. In the novel Isabel Archer is “the thing” that bears more than a little weight of these two modes of representation. The weighty rhetoric in the preface to *Wings* haunts the goals of the earlier work, which James articulates as:

Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness . . . and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to THAT—for the centre; put the heaviest weight into THAT scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself. (PL 10-11)

As James's subject, Isabel's consciousness is the "single small corner-stone" of the novel that bears the heavy burden of vexing conflict between picture and drama (8). In making her consciousness the novel's pressure point, James places her representation in tension between the titular portrait's traditional anonymity and specific individuality, initiating confrontation between objectification and interiority. I argue Isabel's relation to herself struggles against the forces of *misc-en-scène*, baffling the difficult interactions of image and narrative. Far from the fixed sticking point of the text, she troubles both the formal and social tableaux of the novel to emerge as an unfixed and formless beautiful excess.

Considering James's long engagement with the tropes of aesthetics to create conflict, character, and *mise-en-scène* that circulate around paintings, sculptures, collections, and artists, his literary project forwards an understanding of the self and its relation to the world that so beautifully exceeds the linguistic alone that it requires a contingent and potent visual imaginaire.³⁶ The distinct functions of picture and drama elaborated in the preface to *Wings* provide a structure for James to discuss the fraught representation of consciousness in *Portrait*. The novel exemplifies Leo Bersani's call to explore "how art can in effect position us as aesthetic rather than psychoanalytically defined subjects within the world" (164). Positioning Isabel as a subject squarely in the teeth of the aesthetic structures of vision and narration, these structures produce a tension between interior experience and exterior social forces (especially class and gender) that seek to frame her as an object, both a portrait and "a Lady." Following Bersani's concept, the representation of Isabel's consciousness—as emerging from the pressures

³⁶For further discussions of how James's use of "picture" and "drama" as rhetorical devices coincide with art and aesthetics in his novels, see Winner, Tintner, and Francescato, among others.

of picture and drama—is contingent on the formal relations of the novel (including spatial, visual, and narrative devices James employs) rather than psychic drives. Using this concept, I explore how Isabel’s interiority emerges in excess to her relations with a world that demands objectified representation. In this way, the force of sticking to Isabel’s relationship to herself as the center forecasts the narrative momentum toward her eventual release—“affronting her destiny” that demands her use-value in the economy of the object world (PL 8).

The title itself, with its telling correspondence to the long history of anonymous female subjects in the canon of painting, evokes the argument that James laid out in the preface to Wings, foreshadowing the tensions between image and scene as a powerful energy in the novel. It announces Isabel as a thing—a portrait—defined by the demands and desires of others. As Nancy Bentley, Michael Gorra, and others point out, Isabel’s body—beginning with her textual entrance and carried on throughout the novel—is elaborately rendered through a discourse of objectification, whether by the narrator in her initial appearance standing in the threshold at Gardencourt or in Ned Rosier’s vision of her later in the text as “framed in the gilded doorway . . . the picture of a gracious lady” (PL 310).³⁷ As Bentley comments in her essay on the novel’s translation into film: James’s “self-conscious attention to the medium” in the title “presents his readers with an implicit analogy, a sort of titular riddle; how is a novel—this novel, anyway—like a painted portrait?” (128). Bentley finds the insidious baffling that James

³⁷Bentley sketches a helpful thumbnail of gaze theory: “Scholars of the visual arts have argued for the importance of implicit gender difference--distinct male and female viewing positions--built into the structuring conventions of much Western painting and film. Traditional art, the argument goes, presumes male habits of sight that are active and self-contained. And while men's looking asserts a possession and mastery of visual objects, a woman's gaze is always occluded, circumscribed in some fashion by her subordinate position in society. Because she has internalized her role as an ornamental object, women rarely look at the world--hence at art--from the same active position as do men” (134).

describes in the preface to the later novel as characteristic of the narrative of *Portrait*. The novel engages an “implicit” questioning of the text’s own ontology, forcing readers to confront (and perhaps leave unsolved) the riddle that resides within the narrative portrait of Isabel Archer. The mystifications surrounding identity in the art-historical tradition of portraiture conflict with James’s professed aim of representing Isabel’s consciousness, preceding what Bentley sees as “a structuring tension” in Campion’s cinematic adaptation (141).

The tension between the novelistic phenomena of picture and drama in the preface is not only the double weight that Isabel comes to bear but furthers the central conflict that structures the narrative. Bentley’s reading of the film adaptation reminds us that the medium carries with it a history that reinforces the female body as an overt object for scrutiny. I suggest that it also may exist as a potent place of release to reimagine representations of female selfhood. Using film and aesthetic theory, I argue that this discursive tension between image and the text—like the double pressure that James notices between picture and drama—wears down the freighted boundary to open a complex representation of Isabel Archer’s consciousness. She marks that discursive occasion of release where the double weight of picture and scene gives way for her consciousness to exceed so beautifully. Placed at the center of the novelistic frame, the conflict between picture and drama engenders the riddle or structuring tension that Bentley notices, simultaneously baffling the coherence of representational tropes and social expectations. However, the structure of narrative progress is not as simple as it seems: Both film and the novel compel a sense of seamlessness for both character and action; and yet, what actually moves development forward is the illusion of seamlessness. In *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), Kaja Silverman’s Lacanian reading of cinematic signs turns its attention to the role of the suture in film’s discursive chain of signification. Since “cinematic coherence and plenitude emerge

through cuts and negations,” suture plays a key role in covering over these differences and voids with the illusion of wholeness (Silverman 205). And yet, the residue of these cuts persists even in the reparative maneuver of the suture; in this way, the creation of “cinematic signification depends entirely upon the moment of unpleasure in which the viewing subject perceives that it is lacking something” (Silverman 204). Through the process of cuts and sutures, the lack creates desire for meaning: “We must be shown only enough to know that there is more, and to want that ‘more’ to be disclosed” (Silverman 205). It is this sense of desire for discursive plenitude that informs the structuring tension Bentley recognizes in both James’s novel and *Campion*’s adaptation.

In using the idea of cinematic trajectory to understand the pictures and scenes that compose James’s novel, I also recognize the persistent desire that remains in its construction. I argue, that this desire extends from the tension of the static and dynamic representation of self and action within the text: More specifically, James, in placing the load of these tense interactions squarely on the back of Isabel, locates his own desire for discursive plenitude—an imaginary field of meaning that exceeds the expression of one signifying system alone, or any at all—in his representation of his “lady.” Both the immobile subject of a portrait and a woman whose motion is constrained by cultural context, Isabel not only confronts the tensions between expansive interior desire and limited social mobility, but also the tension between the two forms James invokes to capture her. Yet, in doing so, he sets the stage for the representation of her excessive interior life that dismantles stable ontologies to make space for a complex, idiosyncratic, and transgressive selfhood. In this way, he lays bare the voids that require suture for narrative coherence in order to push her toward a destiny (on that throughout the novel

affronts both formal structure and social construction) that exceeds in a discursive plenitude of meaning unbounded by the closed systems of signs, objects, and relations.

In emphasizing Isabel's representation as its subject, the novel interrogates the formal strategies that picture and drama use to portray selfhood. The title makes obvious her vulnerability to the objectifying dangers of the purely visual economy of pictorial forms, styles, artists, and well-known works of art in advance of the aesthetic rhetoric piled around her. The object world bears much of the load of signifying Isabel in the novel's aestheticized realm, from Madame Merle's assertion that "things" are the "expression of self," to Ralph Touchett comparing her to a "Titian, [received] by post, to hang on my wall," and most crucially in the control Isabel's husband Gilbert Osmond exerts over her (175, 63). Jonathan Freedman turns his attention to Osmond as a particularly insidious caricature of a dandy who sees his rich wife "as he views everyone in his narrow world, as an *objet d'art*, a potential 'figure in his collection'" (153). Aestheticism becomes a challenge that Isabel faces in her relations with Madame Merle, her cousin, and husband, with each, to varying degrees, only able to recognize her through the limited expression of objects.

Freedman contends that the novel frames this conflict between the material views of Aestheticism and the possibilities of Isabel's immaterial consciousness. He recognizes the irony that emerges in James's emphasis on the centrality of Isabel's consciousness in a novel that makes her so vulnerable to the possession of others. Yet, this irony is only a screen covering the behind-the-scenes mechanisms of representing consciousness. Bill Brown discusses "the indeterminate ontology" of consciousness in James's work claiming "the work of the mind as a great thing in excess of things, as it were, which can hardly be measured by any logic of

possession or possessive individualism” (137, 140-41). As opposed to the notion that a self can only be considered when reified and thus possessed, Isabel’s consciousness hovers in tension to the object world, as that “great thing in excess of things,” mirroring the intangible phenomenon that James considers as “beautifully exceeding” the stable ontologies of image and text.

Surrounded by characters that confine her through objectifying gazes and *mise-en-scène* that reifies her in aesthetic terms, Isabel’s portrait is not placed in the ideal light to reveal a true representation of herself but rather transforms her into an object. Her thwarted position stems from forces that precede even this specularization. Art historian Rosalind Krauss analyzes “visual form” as a “function” of “verticality,” using Gestalt theories to show how “fronto-parallel” orientation, of the kind between a viewer looking at a portrait on a wall, allows an object “to cohere, for it to organize itself as” legible (164). Krauss’s analysis examines verticality as a precondition for visual integrity to emphasize how orientation promotes an illusion of coherence. Isabel—framed in doorways, figured as a portrait from the beginning—is always “fronto-parallel” toward omnipresent viewers, whose point of view creates a projection legible to their desires. This flattening production of form, on one register, dovetails with the demands of a social tableau for a coherent representation of a subject. In effect, form produces the anonymous lady of the portrait making visibility contingent to the availability of others’ agency. The portrait as a form troubles James’s own program of placing the novel’s center in Isabel’s consciousness. Its vertical orientation redirects the subject away from her own relation to herself and toward the desires of others to possess, control, and use her. This conflict of representation stemming from a center that cannot hold unless reinforced by external objectification, provides the stress that makes Isabel’s subjectivity the eventual site of textual deconstruction.

These insistent formal and spatial relations also frame the vexed representation of Isabel's interior consciousness. At the start of the novel, she "carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world" (PL 41). The "great fund" of vitality at her core establishes the center of both herself and the novel as a relation between self-discovery and knowledge of the world. The spatial figuration of her interior life—voluminous amplitudes of desires, moving engagements—must be constrained to the shallow surface of a portrait, reconfiguring Isabel's fullness of being as the source of her affronting nature. Isabel's desire for movement between her own soul and the vibrations of the world structures this relation as the actualization of an interior life that stands in contradiction to the static and objectified portrait.

As she moves to Europe, acquires an unexpected fortune, and meets Osmond, Isabel internalizes his flattening structures of vision:

The desire for unlimited expansion had been succeeded in her soul by the sense that life was vacant without some private duty that might gather one's energies to a point. She had told Ralph she had "seen life" in a year or two and that she was already tired, not of the act of living, but of that of observing. . . . It simplified the situation at a stroke, it came down from above like the light of the stars, and it needed no explanation. (297)

Her previous "unlimited" desire to feel the commotion of the world for herself is foreshortened into the belief that she has already "seen life." After her travels she no longer possesses the previous depth of field. Rather, now vision, instead of "things," becomes the enervating and arbitrary restraint on the success of her "private duty" to support Osmond. With a single stroke, she feels life to be done, just as an artist completes the painting with a finalizing gesture. Nancy Bentley argues that in both the novel and the film, James and Campion stage these moments as rehearsals of Isabel's death, in keeping with realist tradition that will "often resolve vexing questions about a woman's subjectivity (what does she want? Is she free to act?) by locating a

social explanation—or at least a social closure—in her death” (141). This slow death grips her when Isabel realizes that the starlight Osmond provides is nothing more than a “dusk [that] at first was vague and thin,” only growing darker as he “[puts] the lights out one by one” (PL 356). Isabel’s relations with her husband enact a cruel dynamic of diminishing returns, with a masochistic edge wherein giving up is reconfigured as “giving,” and the internalization of deadening aesthetic vision supersedes infinite desires (297). The structures of objectifying vision collapse into patriarchal demands for self-abnegation, in which Isabel, like Rosier’s sold bibelots, only has value through exchange. As Isabel accepts a more delineated destiny, the pressure to affront it grows proportionally to her recognition that her fate is in conflict with her own consciousness. While the realist marriage plot is the vessel of social death in Bentley’s reading, its dissolution in the later parts of the book restages a metaphoric death as release into Jamesian beautiful excess.

This reification of Isabel into a thing—not as a means of self-expression but for the use of others—seems to violate James’s original goals, yet this contradiction stems from his own conflicted conception of his character. Prior to her existence in the text, as James recollects in the preface, he envisions the character of Isabel as having been “placed in the imagination that detains it, preserves, protects, enjoys it, conscious of its presence in the dusky, crowded, heterogeneous back-shop of the mind very much as a wary dealer in precious odds and ends” (8). Initially, James too reduces Isabel into an *objet d’art*, holding her in the ontological limbo of a backroom cluttered with other “odds and ends.” Here, James ironically mirrors Touchett, as Freedman contends:

Isabel transcends all the mental structures Ralph erects to define her, all the images he conjures up to describe her. But he is not able to sustain this vision of Isabel for long. Soon, he subtly but unmistakably metamorphoses her into that which he had previously claimed she transcended—a work of art. (154)

Ralph's vision of Isabel evokes Brown's remark that James is "eager to describe the physical object world yet eager to chart a kind of consciousness that transcends it" (141). James, too, wishes Isabel could transcend all mental structures and evade the delimitations of self imposed on her by the perceptions of others (including himself). Seemingly at odds with his aim to portray Isabel's consciousness as the novel's center, James's desire that her consciousness might live beyond the frame further foregrounds this tense conflict.

As opposed to the idea of Isabel as a mental **tchotchke**, James recognizes her in a remark made by Turgenev where the Russian novelist said that a novel began not with the germ of the plot but with the vivid image of a single character (4). James sees Isabel in Turgenev's "intensity of suggestion that may reside in the stray figure, the unattached character, the *image en disponibilité*" (5). This notion of Isabel's "availability" positions her in advance of the plot.³⁸

For, as James recounts Turgenev's thoughts, he saw these disponibles

as subject to the chances, the complications of existence, and saw them vividly, but then had to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves. (5)

The idea that the movements of other characters and the events of the plot proceed from Isabel's "being" calls into question her conceptual function and effect before James brought her out in "the most useful and favourable" sense for his novel. Hovering between idea and object, Isabel seemingly hangs caught in tension between two very different conceptions of her subjecthood—as the central consciousness and then as the produced image.

³⁸Of course, the chronology of Isabel's origin bears the strain of James's retrospection in the prefaces. He narrates her trajectory in reverse, so that a defined character becomes stray image. However, this mobility Isabel possesses in the preface--across temporal and formal states--only emphasizes her transcendence of such structures.

As an *image en disponibilité*, Isabel forces a disjunction between her intangible interiority and the external relations that “bring [her] out.” This view of her as available, a concept or phenomena existing in advance of the text, vexes the seamlessness of her representation as emerging concomitant to the formal structure of the novel—the plot and her position to other characters. It opens her presence to the kind of interrogation Bentley sees as implicit in the text: Who is this stray figure who excites James, if she is only made visible through external forms? Perhaps Isabel’s affront to her destiny is the result of a spatialized patriarchal system that cannot sustain the coherence of its significations with a female subject at its center. And yet, what is to be her destiny: the social expectation or self-actualization? Isabel strains to transcend the mental structures only to fall victim to the limited understanding of object and form. However, James’s conception of Isabel in the preface remains an enigmatically potent way to rethink how her fated release stems from the formal tensions produced by “doing” her.

James remarks that Isabel embodies how this disponible image “[appears] more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould” (PL 7). Nonetheless, to think of his protagonist only in such a simplifying and sentimental cliché of individuality—the one who broke the mold—obviates what Isabel’s “latent extravagance” invokes. While Turgenev’s term speaks to Isabel’s availability in being placed in a novelistic situation—much as James envisions her as an object waiting in the heterogeneous back-shop of the mind—it also recalls her potential as a figure to exceed beautifully as a fund from which James could draw to fulfill possibilities other than those this narrative provides. Her availability for representation makes her vulnerable to the manipulations of others in the text, but it also grants James the occasion to draw out the benefit of picture and drama. Throughout the novel James invokes Isabel through depth as opposed to the surface area that bears the strain of picture

and drama. The phrases that render her interiority spatially (e.g., “Deep in her soul—it was the deepest thing there,” or “Deep in her soul—deeper than any appetite”) not only reinforce the leitmotif of depth as signifying Isabel’s consciousness, but the repetitive insistence—in both comparative and superlative degrees—further represents the presence of vitality, conviction, and faith in herself (PL 56, 466). Depth not only figures Isabel’s subjectivity as inwardly sourced, but it also runs counter to the externally directed forces that nullify her agency to act beyond superficial relations. Frustrating the surface reading of fronto-parallel orientation, depth and its recesses break down the gaze that Krauss queries. She interrogates surface orientation as seeking

to summon, again and again, if not the completeness, the formal coherence, and the verticality of the visual. How does the fetish act if not to veil, through masquerade, all threats to this wholeness? And what is fundamental to the operations of the veil if not its fronto-parallel orientation to the upright body?
(206)

Krauss’s view of the verticality of the veil aligns the illusion of wholeness that Touchett and Osmond project onto Isabel with the fetish, as a mask obscuring their vision of her consciousness. More important, this veil replicates the flattened surface of an image, obscuring insight into Isabel’s consciousness.

Isabel’s fullness, extravagance, and depth of character threaten to burst these formal bounds, marking the intersection of forms as the crucial—and yet ambiguous—space of her consciousness. The “latent extravagance” of Isabel’s availability and excessiveness recalls the kind of signification that Roland Barthes describes as “the third meaning.” In his essay of that name, Barthes noticed that certain stills from the films of Sergei Eisenstein possess another level of meaning beyond the merely informational or even symbolic. He recognizes in these stray moments stopped from the persistent thrall of the moving image what he describes as an obtuse meaning: something “‘in excess,’ as a supplement my intellection cannot quite absorb, a

meaning both persistent and fugitive, apparent and evasive”; and as “greater than the pure perpendicular, the trenchant, legal upright of the narrative. It seems to me to open the field of meaning totally, i.e. infinitely” (Responsibility 44). While elusive, contradictory, and outside language, the third meaning “possesses a theoretical individuality” that permits only “a poetic apprehension” (43). Barthes’s “third meaning” recognizes the residue of other significations latent in the still and made available to perception only when disengaged from diegetic time. The still hovers between static picture and moving scene, related to each but contending with the double pressure of both forms, opening the single frame up to the beautiful excess of the third meaning.

These imbued fragments—infinately inscrutable—command an understanding that is only subjective interpretation: the meaning lingers, ever desirable, but never settles into clear fact, objective being. This other meaning is obtuse because it remains available to an infinite structure of signification. The motion picture film holds to its illusion of being complete, flattening alternative potentialities in the production of legibility. It leeches the possibility of other meaning just as Osmond drains Isabel of her desires for “unlimited expansion.” Barthes explicates this active and unbounded reading of the arrested image as occurring during the passage of another time—a non-diegetic time—that he describes elsewhere as akin (fittingly for the discussion of a novel) “to [reading] while looking up from your book” (Rustle 29). What Barthes’s theories bring to the text is a method of understanding the structuring tensions of narrative that Bentley noticed, embracing subversive possibility through a sustained subjective interrogation of Isabel’s representation. The third meaning occurs in this formal tension, hovering between James’s picture and scene, and opens an excess of significance within the text.

In their shared theoretical individuality and poetic apprehension Barthes's third meaning has kinship with James's "*image en disponibilité*." The connection is apparent in James's description of Isabel in the preface:

My dim first move toward "The Portrait," which was exactly my grasp of a single character—an acquisition I had made, moreover, after a fashion not here to be retraced. Enough that I was, as seemed to me, in complete possession of it, that I had been so for a long time, that this had made it familiar and yet had not blurred its charm, and that, all urgently, all tormentingly, I saw it in motion and, so to speak, in transit. This amounts to saying that I saw it as bent upon its fate—some fate or other; WHICH, among the possibilities, being precisely the question. Thus I had my vivid individual—vivid, so strangely, in spite of being still at large, not confined by the conditions, not engaged in the tangle, to which we look for much of the impress that constitutes an identity. (PL 7-8)

In this passage Isabel is a single unit in the novel's structure—like the single cinematic frame in the construction of a film—and the central concept that flows across its entirety. James's description of his "possession" of her shares resonance with Barthes's reading Eisenstein's shot of Ivan the Terrible's face through the arrested shower of gold. While this notion may appear contradictory—Isabel is "in transit" yet in focus, whereas Barthes sees the obtuse in still images—both recognize a figure "disponible" to the infinite play of meaning. Isabel remains strangely "vivid . . . in spite of being still at large, not confined by the conditions, not engaged in the tangle" that impresses and constitute identity (PL 7-8). The film still for Barthes beguiles because it too remains "available to be filled with meaning" while "[maintaining] itself in a state of perpetual erethism" (Responsibility 56). It is this erethism, meaningful excitement, or formal baffling that keeps Isabel poetically "vivid" and in possession of the "theoretical individuality" that urgently torments James well after he limits her to a single fate among her many narrative possibilities.

The lens of Barthes's third meaning helps to restore Isabel to *image en disponibilité*: her availability subverts the text through its interrogation of her representation. With latent excess

that strains the legal upright narrative, she troubles the narrative forces that attempt a fixed linear trajectory. Exceeding the bounds of each contingent register of “picture” and “drama,” she, like Barthes’s still, becomes the single figure with the potential to restructure the text. Despite James’s realism—socially and psychologically—and his exacting novelistic architecture, there are moments when Isabel “hovers, inextinguishable”—a portrait of that stray figure who pre-exists in possibility before the plot (PL 11). In these moments—partially broken off from and yet still within the confines of the narrative—Isabel’s consciousness becomes available to a representational agency that subverts objectifying gazes. James ruptures narrative in staging scenes where Isabel’s “absorbed subjectivity” grasps a poetic apprehension of herself in excess of the representations charted by external forces. The most famous occasion of picture and scene’s double pressure opening Isabel’s consciousness to the excess of her “inward life” is the “landmark” scene of “extraordinary meditative vigil” after realizing Osmond’s deceptions (14).

In his preface, James refers to the success of this scene in terms strikingly similar to the tensions Barthes sees inherent in the film still:

Reduced to its essence, it is but the vigil of searching criticism; but it throws the action further forward than twenty “incidents” might have done. It was designed to have all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture. She sits up, by her dying fire, far into the night, under the spell of recognitions on which she finds the last sharpness suddenly wait. It is a representation simply of her motionlessly SEEING, and an attempt withal to make the mere still lucidity of her act as “interesting” as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate. (PL 14-15)

Like the still that holds other “films” in possibility, Isabel’s physical stasis contains some “twenty” unseen and unwritten incidents suggested in the “extraordinary activity” of being “assailed by visions” (364). James’s construction of exterior stillness belying interior expansion corresponds to the tension between picture and drama. It further echoes the discursive

possibilities of the film still's "palimpsest relation" to the film as a "second text whose existence never exceeds the fragment" (Barthes, Responsibility 61). The narrative of these incidents, like the still's second text, never exceeds the bounds of Isabel's consciousness. Yet, in this crucial scene, "designed to have all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture," James stages the formal issue occasioned by the double pressure of picture and drama as the latent narrative potential enclosed in a still moment.

To return Bentley's implicit riddle of the text, this moment of stasis is enforced by a standstill between the representational forces of both image and text: Isabel now fixed as a figure rendered in oils and circumscribed by a frame; and yet, expansive and searching in her own interiority. Plumbing the depths of herself, Isabel's vigil resembles a phenomenon that Richard L. Stein describes in *The Ritual of Interpretation* (1975): "the contemplation of art under the guidance of literature is endowed with an almost magical power to transform the being of the spectator...to experience the contemplation of art as an all-consuming act, one that can involve a fundamental reorientation of the self" (Stein 12). In a flash of metatextuality, Isabel internalizes the transformative powers of art and literature working in concert, at last gains understanding via a reorientation of herself as an aesthetic phenomenon. In this way, she avails herself to "a momentary but total aesthetic environment" where she can coalesce the way she sees herself and is seen by others with the searching interior life where she "can achieve wholeness of being" (Stein 18). Within this indeterminate space between word and picture, she discovers how selfhood gains meaning not through stable representation alone, but through phenomenological self-interpretation. In this scene, James captures the beautiful excess as Isabel emerges from the static portrait of the title and into the amplitudes of inward vision. Her "motionless seeing"—hovering between posed composition and self-reflection—moves her wholly into an immaterial

state of being. In conflating image and text, James seizes the opportunity to render his image of Isabel's consciousness *as available* to herself in a visionary state exceeding the fetish of legible representation. Here, the portrait rendered by the artist's hand, so far symbolic of Isabel's objectification, gestures toward an index of individuality beyond the novelistic frame. The reemergence of Isabel's consciousness in such a pivotal moment engenders a structural transgression, restoring her as an affronting vision to codified patriarchal gazes. As soon as she embraces her own assailing visions, she cannot stop them. In these moments, Isabel's visions skid against the narrative of her expected destiny and toward an unknown path within.

Freedman reads this scene of Isabel's release from the mystifying objectification of selfhood as a victory over those who wish to treat her as if she truly were a Titian sent by post. He states: "[u]nlike Osmond, Isabel achieves a moment of her own vision experienced in, of, and for itself . . . that is fully detached from the world of objects but that helps her to understand that nature of that world" (163). The visionary aspect of this scene draws Isabel closer in relation to her own immaterial consciousness and away from understanding through a circuitry of things. With Isabel's moment of introspection rendered as still as a portrait, James presages the famous scene in Wings wherein he places a self-aware consciousness in a relational paradigm between art object and viewer. Yet, unlike Milly Theale who must be confronted by the Bronzino portrait to understand her own mortality, Isabel's twilight meditation is "detached from the world of objects" and thus becomes completely figured as intersubjectival. This communion with the self not as object but as interior phenomenology reveals to her, at last, a visionary understanding of her world. She recognizes in herself what fascinated James—"she was, after all, herself—she couldn't help that" (357). Vision is freeing for Isabel as a site of self-reflection while vision itself is freed from the demand to possess. In detaching herself from the world of objects, she is able to

transcend her situation—not by “[effacing] herself” as she had when she first met Osmond, but by at last availing herself to her own consciousness (357). Collapsing vision and insight, subject and object, this scene is the climax of Isabel’s affront to her narrative destiny and a return to the strangely vivid figure-at-large of James’s preface. The astounding act of James’s portrait of Isabel Archer is how her eventual freedom complicates his own novelistic rhetoric by dismantling the “right” narrative relations to restore her “disponibilité.”

During her vigil, Isabel first conceives of consciousness through the weighted relations that smother her. The private duty that wedding Osmond provided—and that she welcomed for its simplification of life—came at the price of finding

the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and where it served to deepen the feeling of failure. (356)

The language in this scene—of the confining abjection of being buried alive—not only recalls the death that Bentley sees in the novel but also upends the vertical orientation that had made Isabel into the very portrait of a lady beheld by her observers. Narrowing her desire for unlimited expansiveness brought her “downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and . . . failure,” granting prescience to her cousin Ralph’s judgment that “You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue—to be sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly someone tosses up a faded rosebud—a missile that should never have reached you—and down you drop to the ground” (291). The “drop to the ground” and yet deeper into the earth’s soil not only denies Ralph seeing what Isabel would make with her life but also stymies her social transcendence with abject failure at the slightest touch by a decadent and enervated projectile. However, the

insistent downward and horizontal images are not entirely damning for Isabel—they also offer her an escape from her formal plight. The abject caused by the stress of the double weight of picture and drama also ruptures the freighted dynamics of objectifying gazes. In her reading of verticality and form, Krauss uses the “Centerfold” photographs by American artist Cindy Sherman, in which she photographs herself as various “Miss Lonelyhearts” characters in supine abjection across horizontal compositions that evoke the format of a pornographic centerfold.³⁹ Krauss reads these photographs as “an attack on form” (164). The horizontality created in many of Sherman’s photographs emerges from the artist positioning herself in a downward point of view from the camera. As Krauss says, “/Horizontality/ is thus not a matter of the horizon line but a function of the floor” (164). The photographs plumb “the domain of baseness . . . [showing] how the horizontalizing pull of gravity against the grain of verticality of form could produce a sense of the erosion of form from within.” Krauss invokes formlessness as a critique of the signifying structures that limit experience through the commodification of being. Isabel’s horizontality debases the objectifying verticality and allows her transcendence of the structures of vision, a formlessness concomitant to a disponible consciousness. Krauss’s view of Sherman’s attack on form further coincides with Barthes’s theories, with horizontality as a means to

³⁹Sherman’s photographs from the late seventies through today are well known for exploring the post-modern status of the image. In her groundbreaking series “Untitled Film Stills,” Sherman deconstructs boundary between still and moving images by photographing herself in various mise-en-scène, recalling moments from imaginary films. In each image, Sherman renders herself available to the signifiers of different situations and personas typical in various Hollywood genres, including film noir and melodrama. Krauss argues that the woman in the photograph, though Sherman herself, becomes the conduit of meaning, not in the way that an actress communicates through performance but rather as a product of the external significations associated through formal tropes of film. The repetition of the same subject rendered into new representations through purely visual functions makes the photographed woman—who is and is also not “Cindy Sherman”—as available to various external re-presentations as Isabel is. The “right relations” that bring out James’s character act in ways similar to the cinematic signifiers Sherman uses to convince the viewer she has produced a character as well.

transgress the rigid structures of an upright narrative. Together, Krauss and Barthes offer a lens to read Isabel's release from the external discourses binding her subjectivity.

The erosion into formlessness initiated in this scene continues until Isabel disappears from the novel's frame. After her vigil she begins a slow dispersal of the external armor of "things" that others took for her self. As she goes through Rome, visiting its monuments,

She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet still were upright; she dropped her secret sadness into the silence of lonely places, where its very modern quality detached itself and grew objective, so that as she sat in a sun-warmed angle on a winter's day, or stood in a mouldy church to which no one came, she could almost smile at it and think of its smallness. (430)

The "things" she visits here are crumbling yet upright, evoking Krauss's notion of the pull of gravity against the monumentality of the vertical, as if they too bear double weight and show the wear of constant contortions. Isabel endows these objects with the secret sadness of her consciousness, reversing the circuitry of selfhood that Madame Merle espouses. Freedman pinpoints this scene as reinstating the connection between Isabel and the world that she rescinded on meeting Osmond: "Rather than possessing a reifying vision . . . Isabel achieves at this moment a humanizing vision in which her individual 'sadness' and the sadness of the scene connect to form an image of commonality and community" (165). Effacing herself allows for disengagement from—rather than possession by—Osmond's visual economy. Dropping aspects of self into external things lightens Isabel's burden, redirecting her interior energies toward the movement of the world. Just as Sherman's photography erodes from within, so does Isabel. And yet it is not just through things that James figures her transcendence of these external forms: The erosion also allows Isabel to embrace Barthes's infinite field of meaning that exceeds the upright narrative.

Ironically, Isabel's visions often take the cast of the emerging technologies of photography and, especially, film that will collapse James's neat dichotomy of picture and scene. James describes Isabel's recognition that Osmond and Madame Merle may have been colluding all this time as a "thing [that] made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light," evoking the process of photography "making" an image through the use of a flash (PL 343). After this moment, Isabel's consciousness continues to grow in opposition to the tradition of easel painting that had stifled her representation, and she begins to see the world as "illuminated by lurid flashes" (464). This photographic consciousness disrupts the primacy of painted portraits as conduits of visual identity during her last encounter with Merle:

The effect was strange, for Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was like suddenly, and rather awfully, seeing a painted picture move. Isabel had been thinking all day of her falsity, her audacity, her ability, her probable suffering; and these dark things seemed to flash with a sudden light as she entered the room. (456)

The sudden terror of a painting endowed with motion evokes the essential uncanniness of film and other technological reproduction. Yet it is not the Gothic terror that brings this scene to prominence. The moving painting gestures toward film's promise of new representational possibilities occurring between the novel's writing and its revision. "The dark things" of the past are not only uncovered through the "flash" of "sudden light" but further forced into the representational service of depicting aspects of female life—adultery, betrayal, and out-of-wedlock birth—via new and possibly sympathetic terms. Garrett Stewart reads the "incongruous flux of black-and-white shots" that Campion uses as poetic and filmic disruptions, not only as a "technological throwback in the contemporary film's own terms but also as a distracting media forecast within the 1870s plot" (248). While distracting on film, he admits that it reflects "the very nature of the heroine's fantasy life . . . [as] ahead of her time and behind ours, lost in a

hinterland—a libidinal limbo—of mostly voiceless because historically unspeakable desires” (248). With Isabel’s consciousness modeling new methods of representation, she embodies a new critical position toward the representational structures thwarting her desires. Transgressing her expected destiny, new forms of vision signify the possibility of new ways to consider herself.

James frames Isabel’s last sequence in the novel—her return to Gardencourt to see Ralph on his deathbed—with two moments of visionary epiphany that, like her nighttime vigil, apply the pressures of picture and drama to give her occasion to exceed beautifully—and finally—from her vexed position. The first moment situates her consciousness in a visionary splendor that hijacks her own sense of narrative trajectory:

On her long journey from Rome her mind had been given up to vagueness; she was unable to question the future. She performed this journey with sightless eyes and took little pleasure in the countries she traversed, decked out though they were in the richest freshness of spring. Her thoughts followed their course through other countries—strange-looking, dimly-lighted, pathless lands, in which there was no change of seasons, but only, as it seemed, a perpetual dreariness of winter. She had plenty to think about; but it was neither reflexion nor conscious purpose that filled her mind. Disconnected visions passed through it, and sudden gleams of memory, of expectation. The past and the future came and went at their will, but she saw them only in fitful images, which rose and fell by a logic of their own. (PL 464-65)

Like Barthes’s “reading while looking up” from the book, Isabel’s vision is constructed as seeing without looking (Rustle 29). Her release from externalized aesthetic vision leads to a spontaneous restructuring of her life experience through interior images that appear by an unconscious agency. “Disconnected visions,” a stichomancy of film stills, thwart any “conscious purpose” or narrative coherence, and yet, in the liberation from thinking about a forward trajectory, Isabel does, in fact, move through the strange, pathless lands. Just as the third meaning restructures a film toward other possible texts, James formulates Isabel’s pliant interior vision as eschewing narrative goals of objectivity and mastery. He figures her consciousness as a

way to read herself as against—or as affronting—a life story demanded by patriarchal authorial agency.

After moving through a pathless land, drowning in the stream of images that has composed her life, Isabel finds her termination in visionary release. Bereft at the loss of Ralph, she must confront the possibilities of her life with Caspar Goodwood. In his kiss “like white lighting” Isabel experiences the embodied pressures that her vexed position bears (489). But that too gives way to a final transcendent erosion into formlessness:

So had she heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. But when darkness returned she was free. She never looked about her; she only darted from the spot. . . . In an extraordinarily short time—for the distance was considerable—she had moved through the darkness (for she saw nothing) and reached the door. Here only she paused. She looked all about her; she listened a little; then she put her hand on the latch. She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path. (489-90)

Goodwood’s kiss plunges Isabel deep into her own consciousness, into the “train of images” that precedes death and awakes unto an oblivion beyond the object world. Isabel’s metaphoric drowning, another horizontal rehearsed “death” that wears at her figuration, gives way to a final release. In the abundance of moving images, Isabel withdraws into herself and, without looking, finds the “very straight path” where she previously saw none. Bentley remarks that “In James’s revised ending, the kiss inaugurates a metaphorical flourish in which the interior landscape of Isabel’s desire is mapped onto larger plot conflicts” (138). Her interior landscape connects and resolves the larger plot conflicts through self-revelation, showing Isabel the course she knew she must take. Again, vision rendered as an interior experience takes precedence over the perception of the outside world. Isabel, seeing “nothing” of the world, finds a clearer understanding of her inner life. Where her straight path leads has been the subject of conjecture, but it matters little to the integrity of the novel or to the ultimate trajectory of the “life that would be her business for a

long time to come” (PL 466). This death, finally, amounts to her escape from the structures of objecthood enforced on her throughout the novel. Her potential for agency stems from her ability to defy the formal conventions used to define her. Here Isabel’s “latent extravagance” bursts at the seams between portrait and novel and, at last, makes her available to herself. This moment, her escape from the narrative frame shortly before the conclusion, returns her to an infinite state of potentiality, unlike, say, Madame Merle, ultimately damned to be so “complete,” as Ralph calls her (155).⁴⁰

Form as the means to represent consciousness remains contested throughout the novel, beginning with its title and extending beyond its conclusion into James’s retrospective preface. In the famed passage wherein Isabel disagrees with Madame Merle’s assertion that “things” express selfhood, the affronting young woman responds: “I don’t know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything’s on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one” (175). Isabel’s conception of the self—that no-thing expresses her—locates her consciousness in an ambiguous relation outside the ontological structures of form. She finds a freedom in negating the object world that suggests an immaterial self able to transcend the limitations of things. While she does not go so far as providing what she thinks the self is, her reticence speaks to a faith in it, despite having doubts about the success of her self-expression. While Isabel’s

⁴⁰ For a reading of this scene that imagines it in a far different way—in the final entrapment of Isabel with no way forward—see Stewart’s discussion of Campion’s film alongside James’s novel (248-50).

uncertainty may appear similar to the beautiful difficulty that James finds in representing his protagonist, her statement positing the self's problematic intangibility runs counter not only to Madame Merle's positivist materiality but to the representational aims James enumerates in the preface.

James borrows George Eliot's phrase of the "frail vessel" to describe the weak container meant to hold Isabel's consciousness—and those of other women who "insist on mattering" (PL 9). In formal terms, the vessel's shapely boundaries, like the portrait of the title, form another representational matrix invoking Isabel's view of the limiting barriers of things. According to Sharon Cameron, "the integrity of [Isabel's] consciousness, its ethical wholeness or intactness, defined by its containment in . . . [James's] metaphor of the 'frailty of the vessel' is . . . in the novel as a whole broken down or violated" (63). While Cameron's reading argues that consciousness need not possess an autonomous integrity to exist, she still suggests that this violation is "disturbing," if not for the fact of it, but that it "is contested years later by James in the Preface" (63). She questions James's reconsideration as instantiating that "consciousness . . . can achieve transcendent status," even when this fact is "contradicted by the representation in the novel that follows" (62). However, I argue that Cameron undervalues the dynamic of release represented through Isabel's consciousness and, further, that despite her qualms, James presents a less stable position than first appears.

The preface to *Portrait* brims with descriptions of a "beautifully exceeding" release that amplifies the tension surrounding Isabel's representation. While James may maintain that he is "in complete possession" of Isabel's consciousness at the center of the novel, perhaps all is not what it seems to the Master. Her elusive constitution haunts him when he returns to the novel for the New York Edition. The retrospective vision of the prefaces, in effect, completes the arc of

Isabel's trajectory. James returns her to that state of pre-existence, to the free-floating aesthetic conception that makes her available as the original seed of the novel's creation. While the author is reticent to retrace that "dim first move toward" her, finding the suggestion of plotting "the growth of one's imagination" as "monstrous," he suggests that Isabel's origins mirror her eventual release (8).

Far from explicitly mapping out his imaginative enterprise, James instead sets the scene of the novel's genesis. He envisions his rooms in Venice on Riva Schiavoni when he began to write *Portrait*:

the waterside life, the wondrous lagoon spread before me, and the ceaseless human chatter of Venice came in at my windows, to which I seem to myself to have been constantly driven, in the fruitless fidget of composition, as if to see whether, out in the blue channel, the ship of some right suggestion, of some better phrase, of the next happy twist of my subject, the next true touch for my canvas, mightn't come into sight. (3)

Outside his rooms, tense with fidgeting, life moves ceaselessly. The movement of the Riva Schiavoni (unlike the confined flow within Madame Merle's notion of the self) resolves James's excess drive with its promise. One can almost see Isabel floating into view along the channel as "the ship of some right suggestion," leaving her origins enigmatic and available to conjecture. Of course, the true "touch" for his canvas is an apt way to describe the enterprise of sticking Isabel's consciousness in the center surrounded by the right relations, but that single touch here is contradicted by the idea of Venice's mobile plentitude. James recollects his "wonderment" of this scene and realizes "that they express, under this appeal, only too much—more than, in the given case, one has use for" (4). The scene of Isabel's origin not only mirrors the ambiguous relation of the self to the material world but further bulges with "the latent extravagance" that fascinates James while posing a challenge to his representational faculties.

As the *image en disponibilité*, Isabel is not only the stray vessel of suggestion but the force that strains its hold. In the preface James hints at the power of Isabel to resist his professed possession of her. Undermining his own purchase over his imagination, he confesses that:

As for the origin of one's wind-blown germs themselves, who shall say, as you ask, where THEY come from? We have to go too far back, too far behind, to say. Isn't it all we can say that they come from every quarter of heaven, that they are THERE at almost any turn of the road? They accumulate, and we are always picking them over, selecting among them. They are the breath of life—by which I mean that life, in its own way, breathes them upon us. They are so, in a manner prescribed and imposed—floated into our minds by the current of life. (5)

In opposition to the structuring tension that Isabel is in the novel, here, in the preface, she exists in the liberating terms evoked in James's imagery. Unlike the frail vessel, or other formal ontology, Isabel exceeds form to embrace the phenomenology of *image en disponibilité*—the stray, wind-blown germ of the novel floating easily on the water, carried along by the breath of life. No longer the static portrait feeling the forces of the frames around her, Isabel's release frees her from the burdens of objectivity and avails her weightless on the stream of consciousness.

His evocation of Isabel in the preface resembles Susan Howe's recent poetic riff on the life of Minny Temple, the real life inspiration for Isabel's sister in arms Milly Theale, the tragically doomed protagonist of *The Wings of the Dove*. In *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (2014), Howe muses on the possible afterlives allowed both Temple and her fictional doppelganger through the precision of James's language:

A teal is small wild fresh-water fowl. Its flesh is food for hunters. But James seeded the word with the spectral grapheme *h* and the plant, "wrapped in the dignity of art," has grown so that when I read *T h e a l e* on the page and say it aloud to myself, this aspirate puff of breath co-implicates his fictional birdwoman with wealth, theatricality, and death. 55

Like a teal, Milly is flesh for the fortune hunter-lovers Kate Croy and Merton Densher; but Isabel is also hunted but the opportunistic Madame Merle and reptilian dandy Gilbert Osmond.

However, my attention goes to “spectral grapheme h” compelling “the breath of life” on which the wind-blown germs of James’s imagination fly. Howe goes on to say, “Theale leads to the limit of breath. The grapheme *h*, breath’s last letter remnant, hangs suspended somewhere in ether like an Absalom by his hair” (Howe 56). Like Bentley’s reading of Isabel’s life as a series of narratively staged death reenactments, James’s breath of life is arrested in the images of Isabel, arrested like Absalom in the tree, at the moment in which she knows how direct is the path set before her. But rather than just expire at the novel’s end, regardless of speculating where this path of life will take her, Isabel lingers on the spectral breezes when James returns to the novel year later. Carried further by the discursive edges of the breath (of life, of desire, of imagination), James evocation of Isabel in the preface grants her the space beyond the novel where she may stay alight like one with the wings of the dove.

Unlike dove that flies way to be at rest, Isabel’s presence remains well after she is released from the narrative frame, lingering at the threshold of the text as she once did in the door of Gardencourt. Bearing the double weight of picture and scene, Isabel, unlike Barthes’s filmic still, never “[attains] that spasm of the signified which usually causes the subject to sink voluptuously into the peace of nomination” (Responsibility 56). James’s revelatory diction herds her toward objectivity before finally relinquishing her at the narrative’s conclusion, allowing her to hover somewhere between the conception of a consciousness and a representation in language. Rather than sinking peacefully into static nomination, Isabel’s selfhood remains at large. The weight and pressure evoked in James’s preface to *The Wings of the Dove* bear the lexical fruit inherent in the terms—stress, tension, erosion, torsion—that activate my reading. These terms imply a slow build of possibly damaging forces across various registers—visual, social, formal—that finally disassemble in Isabel’s release. Her trajectory from “*image en disponibilité*” to a

“portrait of a lady” ultimately ends in the preface with her return to a state of availability, escalating in force throughout the novel toward Isabel’s “beautifully exceeding” apotheosis

His/Story

Significant Form and Radical Interiority in Woolf's *Jacob's Room*

About five years after Virginia Woolf first imagined the novel that would become *Jacob's Room* (1922), her first experimental modernist novel, the central question of that text still remains crucial: How are human relations structured by the impossibility of ever knowing another completely? In a key passage of her essay "On Being Ill" (1925/1926), Woolf crystalizes an answer to this question by turning inward to examine the self. She delineates her stance on relationality by invoking the language of metaphor:

That illusion of a world so shaped that it echoes every groan, of human beings so tied together by common needs and fears that a twitch at one wrist jerks another, where however strange your experience other people have had it too, where however far you travel in your own mind someone has been there before you—is all an illusion. We do not know our own souls,⁴¹ let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest, tangled, pathless, in each; a snow field where even the print of birds' feet is unknown. Here we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable. 11-12

In this passage, Woolf replaces "the illusion of a world" structured by sympathetic connection with one ringed by the unknown. She dispels with the chain reaction of responsive relations—you groan and the whole world twitches and jerks with you—and instead invokes selfhood as "the virgin forest" or unmarked "snowfield." These metaphors of inscrutable interiority not only spatialize selfhood, but gives shape to the unknown. These conceptual figures force the reader to

⁴¹ Molly Hite questions Woolf's use of the word "soul" throughout her writings, finding it "anachronistic except as a metaphor for the more rarefied sorts of bodily sensations" (Hite). For my purposes, the metaphysical and poetic qualities of the word seeming fitting, though in this essay I will use the term "self" to designate a commensurate idea.

confront the manner in which “We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others.” In doing so, Woolf forecloses interpersonal intimacy to create spaces for a phenomenological selfhood at the arcane frontier of being. In refuting the belief that “however strange your experience other people have had it too, where however far you travel in your own mind someone has been there before you” she emphasizes the unique individuation of selves through sympathy-diminishing distance. In other words, the impossibility of sympathy allows infinite self-exploration. In this way, she paradoxically encloses the self or soul within the individual interior experience, while simultaneously opening it up as a vista radically inviolate and unique.

In this passage, sympathy enforces delimiting energies in attempts at mastering knowledge of the self. In her work on sympathy and the nineteenth-century British novel, Rae Greiner recognizes it as the “special ability to cultivate our identification with others through feeling what they feel and knowing what they know, or what they are thinking about” (Greiner 291). In addition to the useful definition, she looks to Wayne C. Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) to provide a helpful sketch of how sympathy functions after the end of the Victorian Era:

By the time we get to modernism, in other words, the novel’s sympathy-generating machinery has traded total knowledge for radical unknowing, figured as that “sense of distance” necessary to “artistic experience”: omniscient “seeing into” from some outside position gives way to the “deep plunges of modern inside views” (324). Modernist not-knowing, the ironic effect of “deep” immersion in a character’s consciousness, dispenses with the middle-man and exposes the fraud at the heart of omniscience, or at least in the naïve confidence that similitude and proximity engender sympathy best. 292

Woolf’s belief that “always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable” seemingly conforms to this Modernist turn. The passage from “On Being Ill” evokes Booth’s “sense of distance” and “artistic experience” as a mode of understanding, while spatializing interiority to accommodate “‘deep’ immersion.” Woolf’s insistence on going alone undermines the goal of sympathy, as formulated by her Victorian

predecessors, while in keeping with the affective shifts and narrative innovations of Modernism. In creating a distance that challenges the ability to identify and recognize the feelings and knowledge of others, Woolf proposes a new relational model that is embedded in her metaphor. Against a positivist model, she does not dismiss that which cannot be proven as nonexistent; rather, she gives “radical unknowing” a form integral to selfhood.

While Greiner’s work contends with the positivist stability of a realist subject position where “seeing into” engenders ethical sympathy, she recognizes the “ironic effect” that occurs when modernism changes this model. “Plunging...inside” opens up the phenomenological plenitudes of interior life, creating a relational distance through individual self-reflection that diminishes the capacity of knowledge. Thwarting the sympathy produced through narrative omniscience in the nineteenth century requires a paradoxical relational spatiality: wherein introspective self-exploration makes intimate “strange” and new vistas, it also creates a deeper sympathetic remove from others. In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf puts this phenomenon of relationality rather bluntly: “Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole—they see all sorts of things—they see themselves....” (29). Here, the elderly woman’s urge for sympathy creates, at best, self-reflection, or, at worst, narcissistic fictioneering. Beneath Woolf’s belief in “On Being III” that we cannot fully apprehend our own selves, let alone others, lurks the implication of reflexive causality that the novel makes explicit. The more we traverse our own selfhood (“they see themselves”), the less we can be known by others, except as an abstracted mass mistakenly taken as complete. Woolf’s notion that the wholly individual and new experiences revealed through self-knowledge fortifies interiority, not as a hermetic stasis, but rather as an expanding phenomenology. The urge to sympathize, while faulty and intolerable, can then be understood as

a product of similar order to the ever attenuated and unsatisfied desire to know one's self. In this way, Woolf confounds this view of Modernist sympathy not by showing its fraud, but by not fully removing its desirous tendencies. Underlying this statement is the ethical call to consider the epistemological limitations imposed by individuated selfhood—as both interpersonal and intersubjective constructions of knowledge that must remain at-large. In the tenuous grasp of understanding one's self, let alone another, she allows radical interiority to persist as phenomenology.

Making the “radical unknowing” that Greiner describes palpable through metaphor, Woolf calls attention to the aesthetic formulation that precedes self-reflection. The occluded vision of the “virgin forest” and cold comfort of the “snowfield” assert the self as never entirely vanquished by the external forces that seek to know and shape it. Denied the survey of sympathy's reductive demands, these topographical images invite a reading of one's own mind as holding in potentiality ever farther lands containing ever stranger experiences. In lieu of sympathetic knowledge, Woolf use poetics and aesthetic understanding to forward a view of reality and human relations that retains this phenomenological nature of the “radically unknown” self. The use of metaphor—natural, almost in the Romantic vein—to explain the inexplicable (or at least unsympathetic), recalls her discussion of Greek poetry in “On Not Knowing Greek” (1925), another famous essay that boldly and productively discusses her experience with incomprehension. There she says, “There is an ambiguity which is the mark of the highest poetry; we cannot know exactly what it means” (CR, 32). In making the self a forest or blank snowfield, she turns to a poetics of ambiguity to compel meaning whose truth evades exact definition. Instead of disavowing the presence of that which cannot be apprehended by another,

Woolf attends ethical responsibility to it through aesthetic practice. In this way, she channels Sophocles' use of poetics:

By the bold and running use of metaphor he will amplify and give us, not the thing itself, but the reverberation and reflection which, taken into his mind, the thing has made; close enough to the original to illustrate it, remote enough to heighten, enlarge, and make splendid. 32

The virgin forest, the unmarked snowfield come “close enough” to recall radical interiority—giving it a name and sense of experiential knowledge; and yet, in the distance between the images and their antecedents, Woolf heightens, enlarges, and makes splendid the necessary confrontation with this interior unknown. While stretching like the gessoed surface of blank canvas, Woolf's interior snowfield is no place for discursive plentitude: no imprimatur, not even the trace of the birds, marks a complete trail across the self. In rendering this enigmatic space poetically, Woolf gives this unknown aspect of self a form, allowing it to shape of human experience and its relations. Like Paul Cézanne's *L'Estaque, Melting Snow* (1871), where what seems to be a violently blank space rending the dark sky and hills, is, in fact, the shard of snowy white that gives the painting its title, Woolf's own snowfield is what her brother-in-law Clive Bell would call a “significant form” in his study of Cézanne and his fellow French Post-Impressionists. Not only recalling its ties to plastic reality, both Woolf's and Cézanne's snowfields also evoke a responsibility to “the reverberation and reflection... [that] the thing has made.” The lasting impression—the radical unknowability of self for Woolf, the threatening forces of nature for Cezanne—carry a deeper reverberation in the reflecting mind for having been confronted with its representation outside of its distinct temporal moment.⁴² That original

⁴² In “An Essay on Aesthetics” (1909), art historian Roger Fry, a friend of Woolf and a supporter of Bell's “significant form,” discusses this phenomenon by saying:

affecting “thing”—made so vague and yet so axiomatic in Woolf’s prose—retains its significance in metaphor, even when (or perhaps because) it looms beyond its exact certainty. Straddling epistemology and poetry in these two essays, Woolf emphasizes the affective and ethical understanding of the unknown aspects of selfhood through this model of aesthetic language and understanding.

In this chapter, by focusing on the representation of interior life in her novel *Jacob’s Room* I continue the discussion of Virginia Woolf’s use of aesthetics as a way to reach an ethical understanding of selfhood. Following the metaphoric formulations in “On Being Ill,” I offer a mode of looking at Jacob Flanders as the subject of the novel by focusing on how his “incomplete” representation is constructed through negative spaces to depict the “significant form” of radical interiority. While not detracting from previous scholarship that, in lieu of an identifiable protagonist, claims World War I as the novel’s subject and promotes the elegiac reading that follows suit, I focus on the forms of unknowability as reflecting Woolf’s larger understanding of the self that continues in her diaries, critical writing and other fiction. To track how this phenomenological and at-large vision of selfhood is produced by aesthetic experience, I will turn to Bell’s aesthetic ideas as diverging from what I call “sympathetic form”—the narrative conventions and devices that Woolf details in her essay “Modern Fiction” (1919/1921) that emphasize material representations and knowledge. These “sympathetic forms” that always

Between... [actual life and imaginative life] there is this great distinction, that in the actual life the processes of natural selection have brought it about that the instinctive reaction, such, for instance, as flight from danger, shall be the important part of the whole process, and it is towards this that the man bends his whole conscious endeavor. But in the imaginative life no such action is necessary, and, therefore, the whole consciousness may be focused upon the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience. Np

seek, to use Woolf's words, to accompany and understand engender the "intolerable" demand to sum up a life, to go always to the end: a marriage, a memorial, a happily ever after. Her writing reflects this same view of interpersonal relations she articulates in "On Being Ill": *Jacob's Room* does not end with a scene of Jacob's tragic demise in the war, but rather, in keeping with a novel in which the subject defies identification, Woolf denies sympathetic relations to Jacob. These blank spaces that she leaves un-narrated symbolize the phenomenological and constant presence of unknowable terrains of selfhood that resist representation in language.

The day after my birthday; in fact I'm 38. Well, I've no doubt I'm a great deal happier than I was at 28; happier today than I was yesterday having this afternoon arrived at some idea of a new form for a novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another—as in *An Unwritten Novel* [sic]—only not for 10 pages but 200 or so—doesn't that give the lightness and looseness I want: doesn't that get closer & yet keep form & speed, & enclose everything, everything? 13

In this diary entry from Monday, January 26, 1920, Virginia Woolf forwards the idea for "a new form for a novel" that would become *Jacob's Room*. She hopes that its "lightness and looseness" would precipitate that "one thing should open out of another" until the narrative gets "closer" to "[enclosing] everything, everything." And yet, the specifics of its subject matter—much like the protagonist Jacob Flanders in the finished novel—appear absent: She gives no indication here that the work will be an elegy, confronting the ghosts of World War I. Furthermore, she does not claim her intent to tackle the bildungsroman, though she will deconstruct its conventions to critique the nationalist narrative that seeks to memorialize those dead in the wake of imperialist politics. *Jacob's Room*, however, will turn out to be both eulogy and opprobrium. Her initial focus on form here remains significant, signaling the expansion of her literary experimentation as a critical tool in the representation of what will become her subject.

In the same entry, Woolf queries how the structure of this new form of novel endeavors to speak to the truth of human experience. While she still has yet to disclose the subject hiding in the fire's light, she sketches the possibility she envisions:

My doubt is how far it will enclose the human heart— Am I sufficiently mistress of my dialogue to net it there? For I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time; no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, the humor, everything as bright as fire in the mist. 13-14

Her hesitation concerning mastery over her vision suggests how crucial expansiveness—the “everything, everything”—is to both the subject and her formal experimentation. In fact, her doubts inflect the intention of getting “closer” to the truth: “how far” the novel will go remains an active question in her mind, signaling the discursive tension between the significance of her representation and the capacity for sympathy. In the face of this challenge, Woolf ventures toward a paradoxical representation to “net” the “human heart” in language. Through this “entirely different approach,” she strives for a “lightness” and “looseness” in her netting, eschewing the distracting narrative “scaffolding” and “bricks.” Doing away with the supportive structures undermines the traditional concept of literary characterization, as if to ensure the capacious netting of her “approach.” In this way, Woolf’s language will simultaneously apprehend “the heart, the passion, the humor,” while maintaining a critical distance without reductive sympathetic demands. Her subject will emerge “bright as fire” but also remain “in the mist.” In this nebulous half-light of the human soul, Woolf imagines that without the customary support of novelistic tradition, she may plumb “crepuscular” depths to envision the self that flees into the twilight, escaping the capture of the material world.

Woolf’s plan for *Jacob’s Room* echoes the aesthetic theories of her brother-in-law Clive Bell. In his book *Art* (1914), Bell forwards the idea of “significant form,” as the way in which the representation of objects through “lines and colours combined in a particular way, [and as]

certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions” (Bell 3).⁴³ While vague about the affective texture of “aesthetic emotion,” Bell articulates the relations compelled by the work of art: “Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life” (Bell 9). Through this act of transforming the known world into representative form, these objects gain ontological and affective significance not immediately accessible in the jumble of everyday experience. Stripped of the “scaffolding and bricks”, the subject emerges from the shadows of its function to become the medium through “which we catch a sense of ultimate reality” (Bell 20-21). Bell’s “ultimate reality” is both isolated and abstracted, removed from its context for the sake representational unity alone. While in Bell’s view this freedom from the “stream of life” engenders a truth, it sits in an uneasy relationship to Woolf’s own desire to use the aesthetic forms of language to “net” the “human heart.” However, her critical essays and diaries often echo Bell’s aesthetic theories showing how she takes his theories and utilizes them to fit her own humanist concerns. In her essay “Significant Form in *Jacob’s Room*: Ekphrasis and Elegy,” Kathleen Wall focuses on how she sees Woolf using “significant form” to create the elegiac momentum of *Jacob’s Room*; however, in her essay she also makes a compelling case for Woolf as “[interrogating] Bell’s ideas about the distinction between art and life” (283). It is this second aspect of her argument—the relationship between art and life—that coincides with my own reparative reading of the novel. In

⁴³ In *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism, and the Politics of the Visual*, Jane Goldman traces another mode of connection between Bell’s formalism and Woolf’s fiction. Focusing on the historical materialist underpinnings of her political engagement, she argues the visionary experiences of the “Post-Impressionist” exhibition of 1920 and the solar eclipse of 1927 are no mere moments of spiritual and aesthetic epiphany, but tied directly to a “re-visioning” of feminist experience within her historical context.

acknowledging the dissonance between Woolf's engaged and political ethos and Bell's disinterested formalism, Wall helps to articulate the way in which the affective energies of "significant form" manifest in tracing the reality of lived experience. Including the ideas of significant form within a discussion of her novels necessitates a recognition of a tacit "argument" between Woolf's notion and what Bell sees as art's "task" (284). This "argument" regarding art and life that Woolf engages allows for a recognition of her literary works as expanding the idea of "significant form" by engaging with life itself, a reality that exists in the stream of life, wars, and other human interests (Wall 284). In this way, Woolf expands an ethical and affective understanding to aesthetics that Bell leaves unacknowledged in his writings. By eliminating the conflict between art and life, Woolf offers a vantage into the inner life as understood aesthetically. Using ekphrastic language and other means to explore latent visual corollaries, she delineates the phenomenological aspects of the self that social materialist lenses may not register.

In representing "the heart, the passion, the humor, everything as bright as fire in the mist," Woolf insists that her experimental portrayal of Jacob Flanders will give him significance which conventional representation would otherwise obscure. In this way, she frames the emergence of her protagonist through a complex tableaux that contrasts how Bell's significant form and more "sympathetic forms" moderate narrative expectation. The opening of the novel foregrounds how all vision is in some way aesthetic vision. Before directing the reader toward the protagonist that the novel will follow, Woolf begins in medias res with his mother Betty Flanders composing a letter with the enigmatic lines "there was nothing for it but to leave" (3). Overcome with sadness in relating these events to Captain Barfoot, the widowed mother's eyes fill with tears that transform the picturesque seascape before her:

The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun. She

winked quickly. Accidents were awful things. She winked again. The mast was straight; the waves were regular; the lighthouse was upright. 3

Viscerally collapsing vision and affect, this disturbed representation of the Cornwall coast with its quivering bay, wobbling lighthouse, and bending mast would, perhaps, if painted evoke Mrs. Flanders' sadness. Her perspective holds back the significance of these forms: they would not refer back to the "ultimate reality" of Bell's disinterested formalism, but only portray her own human interests. In other words, the bay, the lighthouse, the yacht instead of transcending the stream of life are suspended in the stream of her tears. However, Mrs. Flanders also simultaneously holds sympathy at bay. The ambiguous leave-taking mentioned in the letter and the detached allusion to Jacob's father's accidental death not only inaugurate the novel's impending sense of mournful absence, but further destabilize the descriptive facts of Jacob's background in favor of subjective impression. In letting Betty's vision speak for the circumstances in which Jacob grows up, Woolf surveys a discursive terrain that attenuates her ambivalence toward both sympathy and aesthetic significance.

In contrast to Betty Flanders, amateur plein-air painter Charles Steele possesses a more distanced point of view. Placing the figure of Mrs. Flanders as one among the other objects along the coast, he is cofounded by the mother's movements for their disruption to his composition's formal unity. Attempting to capture her before she leaves, "He struck the canvas a hasty violet-black dab. For the landscape needed it. It was too pale—greys flowing into lavenders, and one star or a white gull suspended just so—too pale as usual" (4). Reducing Betty Flanders to a "violet-black" stroke of paint, Steele places her disinterestedly among the sea, star, and birds merely for her formal necessity. For him, the coast does not shiver with sadness, nor does he wish to violate the purity of his vision with the manipulations of affect. In this way, Wall sees

Steele's painting as "[suggesting] a vision of the work of art that bears a considerable resemblance to that which Clive Bell articulated" (Wall 281). However, throughout the opening episode of the text, Woolf seemingly challenges Bell's formalism and its removal of human affect from the domain of vision. While Steele's vision may lay claim to objective reality, throughout this section it is subordinated to other models of aesthetic vision that reimagine or reflect the states of mind of other characters. With these two aestheticized points of view competing from the start of the text, Woolf presents a nuanced account of the argument between art and life that Wall notices. While Betty's vision is overcome by emotion, it also pulls against the urge to create sympathy by only providing inexact and incomplete hints. Steele's view, however, as the surrogate for Bell's aesthetics, remains cold to the lived experience of others that would shape sympathetic attachment. In this way, Woolf questions the division between art and life that will provide the ethical urgency for her depiction of Jacob.

When the novel's protagonist appears at last as a curious young boy skimming tide-pools and collecting a crab in his toy pail, he provides yet another perspective that plays off the differences of Mrs. Flanders and Steele. Jacob interprets his surroundings in a mix of child-like scrutiny and wonderment:

A large black woman was sitting on the sand. He ran towards her.

"Nanny! Nanny!" he cried, sobbing the words out on the crest of each gasping breath.

The waves came round her. She was a rock. She was covered with the seaweed which pops when it is pressed. He was lost. 6

Negotiating the beach, Jacob transforms a rocky outcropping for his Nanny before realizing that his own unreliable vision has not only tricked him, but also made his surroundings unfamiliar. While still emphasizing the roles of his own creative and interpretive capacity, the imagination that refigures the world into a reflection of familiar objects and experiences is undercut by a

“reality,” calling into question the objectivity of his perspective. Like his mother’s tear-distorted view, Jacob engages his subjectivity to compose his own set of spatial relations; and yet, the persistence of objectivity fractures his point and view and makes the world itself disorienting and threatening. Between Steele's composition and the challenged posed by lighthouses that waver and rocky outcroppings that resemble nannies, the opening vignette swarms with forms both significant and sympathetic, vision both disengaged from human experience and distinctly modeled by it.

These different modes of seeing manifest in what Edward L. Bishop calls a “syntactic blurring” that “is deliberate” on Woolf’s part. This blur—on the level of discourse—creates a churning surface that Jacob punctures to claim his significance as both an object—and more crucially—as the protagonist of the novel. Like Charles Steele, Betty Flanders, and Jacob himself, the narrator continually vacillates between different modes of vision. She initially constructs the scene of Jacob’s emergence in a manner that both distances him as subject of the novel and smudges out his own specificity as a character. She begins by burying Jacob within a choppy grammatical landscape that recalls the rugged stones and crashing sea: “Rough with crinkled limpet shells and sparsely strewn with locks of dry seaweed, a small boy has to stretch his legs far apart, and indeed feel rather heroic, before he gets to the top” (9). The narrator, like Steele, resembles Bell and his aesthetic theories. Her description of a tide pool finds its power in its formal unity, unimpinged by the sympathetic attachment or the dryness of mere descriptive report. Reaching Jacob, the use of the indefinite article and the modal verb lifts the vision above the stream of life. She constructs the sentence to erase Jacob himself as its necessary subject, focusing instead on the generality of both the action and the small boy that would have to do it.

His eventual surfacing relies on both Bell's objectivity and Woolf's insight to liberate him from the narrative grip:

The fringe of yellow-brown seaweed flutters, and out pushes and opal-shelled crab—

“Oh, a huge crab,” Jacob murmured—
and begins his journey on weakly legs on the sandy bottom. 9

The long dashes affect a smashing through of the narrator's observations with Jacob's own. This narrative deconstruction establishes his emerging selfhood as irrepressible formal significance, fracturing discourse to carve a space for radical interior life. The splintering of the text exposes the implicit dialectical structure: the hushed utterance creates tension between Jacob as the narrative's focus and the narrator's attempts to bury him in shifting between voice and vision.

In his essay “The Subject in Jacob's Room,” Bishop points out that “Jacob emerges from the rock, is made as if he were part of it, and (as several critics have remarked) he never fully becomes separate from his environment” (Bishop 149). Woolf's emphasized interpolation of Jacob as part of the coast itself—the rock, as Bishop notes, but also his “crested” breath—only adds as significance not normally associated with a boy's spotting a crab in a tide pool. In doing so, however, he shatters the visionary unity of the narrator's point of view in a manner that is neither formally disinterested, nor completely overdetermined by sympathetic narrative convention. In this liminal netting, Jacob asserts the presence of his selfhood without granting the level of insight that Woolf offered in Mrs. Flanders' teary tableau. Throughout the novel, the narrator will bury Jacob through similar syntactic maneuvers, attempting to create the sense of a novel haunted by the loss of its subject well before his eventual death. Bishop refers to the opening that survives in original draft where Jacob commands attention of the seascape that will come to overwhelm him in the finished novel. He notes that:

This is the sort of scene we recognize: the hero coming to consciousness of his separateness, embarking on the voyage of life; all the trappings are there—the "waves creaming up to him" (MS I 2), the lighthouse singling him out, the magic hour of midnight. Here surely is a character to whom we would attribute causality. But Woolf chose to suppress all this. 150

In Woolf's decision to undercut recognizable convention, however, she turns away from the sympathetic forms and toward the more experimental idea she outlines in her diary. Gone are the picturesque "trappings"—the "scaffolding" and "bricks"—that "would" seem to "attribute causality" that is completely enmeshed within the normative expectations of a subject. With this suppression, Woolf reveals the perspectives that both determine and entrap sympathetic identification within narrative form. Instead, she supplies competing forms of vision that create the narrative fracture through which Jacob emerges from being one of many to being significant as himself.

Upon resuming her sentence after Jacob's intrusion—paying no attention to his discursive outburst, the narrator turns her full attention to the crab "[beginning] his journey on weakly legs." In doing so, Jacob's diminutive legs that once stretched far to mount the rock in mock-heroic fashion now dissolve into the weak limbs of the crustacean: the narrator erases the beginning of the boy's own "voyage of life" just, as Bishop notes, Woolf's own revision does. Wrestling back her hold over the text, the narrator's syntactic ambiguity once more marginalizes the young boy and prioritizes the primacy of the narrator's vision. It becomes apparent that even she could not see Jacob, but only herself: He was just a small boy darting among the rocks, the sea, the crab—the objects read through her subjectivity. It is not then that Jacob is gone, but that in looking for him she is blind to all but herself. Despite identifying the groping eyes we turn toward others, the narrator still metaphorically, if haphazardly, covers over the marks that Jacob

leaves on his trail. In doing so, she has the ironic effect of emphasizing Jacob's presence as activating the negative spaces of narrative interstices.

Yet the challenge posed by Jacob's brief entry into the swarm of competing visions destabilizes the narrative terrain. Like the incessant ocean eroding the coast into shape, Jacob is continually made and unmade—accreted into form, worn into negative space—through the double tonguing of the narrator.⁴⁴ In her essay "*Jacob's Room* as Comedy: Woolf's Parodic *Bildungsroman*" Judy Little says, "There are in a sense two narrators, or one narrator who insists on giving us a twofold vision of Jacob, a vision that shows the conventional pattern which he 'should' follow, and almost simultaneously points out that he is not following the pattern" (Little 114). In this moment, one voice blurs him into the coastal landscape (in a manner similar to Steele's Bell-like vision of Mrs. Flanders and the coast), while the other establishes his presence in the text by acquiescing to his speech (even noticing that he murmurs). Yet neither of these narrative points of view covers Jacob's perspective: The crab, not Jacob, is granted the conventional entrance into a narrative of life. Woolf's revision of the text seems to underscore Little's claims: Denying what Bishop sees as the expected scene of the protagonist's emergence, Woolf relies on the power of convention to throw a premature pall over Jacob. Placed in the

⁴⁴ Many assume that the construction of the narrator through gender and age ("ten years' seniority and a difference of sex") approximates Woolf herself, and often read the novel through the assumption that the narrator reflects the transparent thoughts and perspective of the author herself (98). However, the narrator's position in the scramble for vision in the opening scene interpellates her as yet another actor in the text. Just as Woolf expressed her own doubts in achieving her initial idea for the novel—not to mention the radical changes revealed in the manuscript, the narrator's role in the text emblemizes the residual problems Woolf found in narrative convention. As locus of different critical views, Woolf opens the possibility that the narrator contributes to the formal structures she is critiquing in the novel. As Judy Little points out the narrator does not represent a stable point of view, is sometimes unreliable, and at times her performative breaks with convention seem, conversely, to reinforce their efficacy.

intersection of these patterns, Jacob is, in effect, drawn and quartered in the crosshairs of the narrator's vacillation between inherited convention and resistant individuation.

The narrator's ambiguous relation to Jacob from the start compels the multiple ways in which objective reality and aesthetic vision place representation in a discursive contact zone. The jumbled introductory phrases, generalizing grammatical syntax, and shifting perspectives problematize the spatial relations implicit in the formation of a literary protagonist. In another moment on the beach, the narrator's uncanny dislocation of space and time serves to diminish Jacob as an individual with agency:

There he stood. His face composed itself. He was about to roar when, lying among the black sticks and straw under the cliff, he saw a whole skull—perhaps a cow's skull, a skull, perhaps, with the teeth in it. Sobbing, but absent-mindedly, he ran farther and farther away until he held the skull in his arms. 6

The narrator renders Jacob as passive, with no connection between his physical embodiment and his psychology: His face moves without his control; he sobs obliviously. Drawn to the bleached skull, he counterintuitively runs “farther and farther away,” rather than towards, in order to grasp it. The narrator's spatial disturbance not only serves to create distance between the reader and Jacob's interiority, but also exaggeratedly points out the problems of linear narrative convention. The casual disconnect between Jacob and his actions and between himself and the reader is mapped out in the spaces of the text that emphasize how, as Little puts it, his life “becomes emblematic of all lives to the extent that they do not fit expected patterns” (109). Running against the grain of the expected pattern and narrative convention, Jacob escapes the competing visions in the opening of the text. Unable to capture Jacob's interior life, Woolf charts ambiguous spatial relations throughout the text that trouble his trajectory and blur his connections to other figures and even the reader herself. Jacob's misdirected hunt for the skull

signifies his indirect path; and yet, it will somehow draw the reader closer to the unfamiliar vistas of interior life.

In considering the process of vision latent in the “finished” works of art, Bell’s theories make initial gestures toward Woolf’s experimental style. Although his insistence of “pure form” does not address the messiness of life, her writing renders the idiosyncrasies, ambivalences, and contradictions of human experience active on the page. In this way, Wall’s argument about the distinction between the in-laws approaches to art and life emphasizes Woolf’s urge to represent the role of process in her discourse. As such, Bishop comments that Woolf’s experimental portrayal of her protagonist makes the reader a witness to “the narrator writing, or trying to write, Jacob’s history” (Bishop 167). She sifts his emergence through a discursive method that vitalizes the uncertain narrative relations that continually compose and remake the self. In her diaries and essays, Woolf’s sustained query of interiority’s unknown vistas proposes selfhood as phenomenological form; this process of representation creates an urgent humanist texture that otherwise does not coincide with Bell’s disinterested inquiry of significant form. On September 28, 1926, she took to her diary while on a break from writing *To the Lighthouse* to describe the experience of her “glooms” and what it revealed to her about the nature of selfhood:

These 9 weeks give one a plunge into deep waters; which is a little alarming, but full of interest. All the rest of the year one’s (I daresay rightly) curbing & controlling this odd immeasurable soul. When it expands, though one is frightened & bored & gloomy, it is as I say to myself, awfully queer. There is an edge to it which I feel of great importance, once in a way. One goes down into the well & nothing protects one from the assault of the truth. Down there I cant [sic] read or write; I exist however. I am. Then I ask myself what am I? & and get a closer though less flattering answer than I should on the surface—where to tell the truth, I get more praise than is right. 112

Rather than turning to medical or psychological discourse for insight, Woolf plumbs self-reflection through searching intersubjective dialogue. In the depths of her plunge, Woolf confronts her “odd immeasurable soul” without the “curbing” and “controlling” of everyday life. As it “expands” she envisions a self “closer” to “the assault of the truth” and less distorted by the negotiations of social relations. In her experience of her own radical interiority (“awfully queer,” in her own words), she discovers that “I exist however. I am.” Flourishing in the depths of the unknown, “truth” becomes both intimate and strange. Stripped of the flattering praise, she encounters the “great importance” of the dialectic between ontology and query—“I am. Then I ask what am I?” Grounding radical interiority in constant subjective self-exploration, her approach to self-knowledge in this entry bears resemblance to Bell’s “mysterious” aesthetic feeling. Lifting Woolf’s metaphysical experience of her own stream of consciousness into (rather than above) the stream of life compels aesthetic formulation to articulate the self and its relations. Instead of leaving this truth to drown in isolation from society, Woolf renders the significance of the phenomenological formlessness of radical interiority through a poetics of ambiguity and paradox. The structure of her personal philosophy reflects upon the approach she employs in her fiction: Prizing the selfhood that expands beyond the “curbing” and “controlling” mechanisms of everyday life she echoes her desire to envision Jacob without narrative “scaffolding” and “bricks.”

In her essay “Virginia Woolf’s Two Bodies,” Molly Hite explores the paradoxical status of the self—as both embodied and metaphysical—in Woolf’s fiction and criticism. While Hite focuses on Woolf’s critique of the reductive “societal consequences” that come with trying to fit expansive female erotics and subjectivity within patriarchal narrative conventions such as the marriage plot, her notion of Woolf’s “visionary body” also haunts her intentions for Jacob

Flanders (Hite).⁴⁵ Hite notices that in much of Woolf's writing "the bodies allowed the most unrestricted experience of ecstasies and raptures (as well as of loss and horror) are bodies of a different order than those seen in the mirror" (Hite). In escaping delimiting social embodiments, these "visionary bodies" are granted an "unrestricted experience" that recalls both the expansive interiors she discusses in "On Being III" and also the "lightness and looseness" of Jacob's crepuscular emergence. While Hite moves toward a social materialist critique where "the visionary body is not just limited, but in the final analysis constituted, by requirements of social coherence and intelligibility," her analysis also gives way to a discussion of Woolf's consideration of selfhood's phenomenological and metaphysical aspects. Furthermore, it suggests the need to investigate her formal strategy to render selfhood—even for male characters—as pushing against, and at times exceeding, social construction, narrative convention, and epistemological limitations.

In this diary entry "unrestricted experience" shoulders the significance of selfhood: the truth of selfhood that occurs in the depths of Woolf's reflection seems of the same order as Hite's visionary body. As opposed to the curbing and controlling of the world of man's activity, there are aspects of the self that exist in this other aesthetic realm, that perhaps cannot easily be recognized until other human interests are arrested. While Hite's argument focuses on the two bodies in relation to the representation of socially and historically embodied female experience, Woolf's apprehension of interiority also depends on giving a form to this "immeasurable" and paradoxical concept of being. It is the same visionary "truth" of her interior experience that also forces the radical formal break with literary convention in her fiction. In this way, her

⁴⁵ In "Jacob's Room as Comedy: Woolf's Parodic Bildungsroman" (1981), Little invokes aspects of parody and satire in the novel as a way to activate Jacob as a cypher for feminist critique of patriarchy.

experimental language and syntax compels meaning through metaphoric figuration, structural ambiguity, and paradoxical representation. Woolf actively deconstructs the bildungsroman to carve sites of representational possibility for the ephemeral and unquantifiable self and its relations. Her representation of Jacob Flanders—both ambiguous and manifest—models both her philosophy of visionary selfhood held in tension with social and historical embodiment and also her experiments to make language a free-floating net to represent this “unrestricted experience.” Building off Hite’s ideas, I show how these metaphysical valences of interiority have a larger critical claim than just the portrayal of female subjectivity; rather, Woolf mobilizes it for a broader analysis of how she considers “the self” or “the soul” as challenges to both social and aesthetic forms.

As Hite suggests, Woolf’s fiction continually grapples with the tense symbiosis between the “visionary body”—dim like Jacob’s crepuscular mists and deep like the revelatory waters of Woolf herself—and the social body—the one that she famously said requires “money and a room of one’s own” (*Room* 67). How to represent this experience of life in language compels the critique of late-Victorian and Edwardian realism in her essay “Modern Fiction” (1919/1921). Embodied by the legacies of Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, Hite argues against the “materialism” of their fiction that responds to the demands of society with over-determined sympathetic forms that feign mastery over the infinite knowledge of life (MF 151). Her assessment of these “materialist” novelists recalls Bell’s own critique of what he calls “Descriptive Painting”: the “pictures that interest us and excite our admiration, but do not move us as works of art” (6). Like the “materialist” novel whose design cannot hold vision, in these paintings:

forms are used not as objects of emotion, but as means of suggesting emotion or conveying information. Portraits of psychological and historical value,

topographical works, pictures that tell stories and suggest situations, illustrations of all sorts, belong to this class. 6

Both Bell and Woolf query forms of representation that seek to engender feeling more than exhibit the conventional technical proficiency to “[convey] information,” “tell stories,” or “suggest situations.” The immediacy both Woolf and Bell strive for in their representation—embodying, not just describing, experience—speaks to their shared desire for formal experimentation as a means to get at “the ultimate reality.” Rather than facing the “assaulting” truth of visionary reality, these authors are stuck in the grip of “some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love, interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole” (153). The demands of this tyrant—in other words, the worn-out mannerist conventions that support the taste for realist verisimilitude—are the same “scaffolding” and “bricks” Woolf dispenses with in her own form of modern fiction. For Woolf, these forms—following the conventional narrative arc of the marriage/romance plot, populating the novel with obvious protagonists and stock figures—function as mere material construction. Rather, she urges further development of the novel by eliminating the “required” mechanics of realism that she sees as explaining away “real life” and its ambiguous relations in excessive descriptive detail.

Woolf’s criticism demands a reevaluation of forms that strive for only for material, descriptive realism. The powerful, paradoxical truth she encountered in her diary entry seems lacking in their novels:

Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds.153

Publically airing desires akin to those she expressed in her diary, Woolf sees the novelistic tradition that fetishizes verisimilitude as ultimately “ill-fitting” and unable to contain “life or spirit, truth or reality.” Finding the three-Decker form of “two and thirty chapters” unable to “resemble the vision in our minds,” the essay expands her case for a “new form or the novel.” The “lightness and looseness” she proposes for *Jacob’s Room* is an attempt to hold on to the “the essential thing” that has moved off from the tight constraints of her predecessors. Read in the light of Bell’s theories, Woolf seems to call for a novelistic version of the visionary purity of significant form. She famously critiques realism’s reductive relativism as forcing a remove from the “essential” thing. She commands writers and readers alike to “Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ‘like this’” (154). Woolf attends to what she sees as the responsibility of “Modern Fiction” to invent new forms and deconstruct conventions so that writing continues to register the phenomenological experience in ways that respond the changing world and shifting modes of being. In this way, she, much like both Bronte and James before, is also in a process of actively negotiating with inherited vocabularies and forms to develop new means of representing the self.

She supposes that “if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention” (153). Rather than the “curbing” and “controlling” “scaffolding” and “bricks” of accepted literary conventions, she espouses a form of fiction that brings life and its representation closer. Collapsing lived experience and aesthetic creation, she locates the origins of fiction in the “ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (MF 154). She stresses the importance of considering how in every moment:

The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant

shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there. 154

Turning against the conventions that stress material accounting of the external world, the work of fiction would be more receptive to the “incessant shower of innumerable atoms” and understand how these “myriad impressions” take the form of “the life of Monday or Tuesday.” For Woolf, fiction should not stand apart from life, but actively query its visionary mystery—how a Monday or a Tuesday is shaped, how one’s consciousness emerges from life’s changes, rhythms, and movements. She makes clear that modern fiction must follow and respond to life and not strive to capture and create it in the realist trappings of sympathetic form and convention. Language must attend to how life shapes itself and not impose an artificial order on these “innumerable atoms” and “myriad impressions.”

To bring life out from the materialist trappings in order to burn bright as fire in the mist, Woolf wishes the writer to:

record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small. 155

The act of writing becomes the act of living: recording “the atoms as they fall upon the mind” does not occur at a remove, but concomitant to the experience of it. In grasping at the large ideas over the minute detail, Woolf’s aesthetic vision embraces disconnections and incoherence, in lieu of order and over-determination. In this way, Woolf’s mobile composition of life in modern fiction follows the stream of consciousness toward the unknown and unexpected implicit in the phenomenology of lived experience. Without any distinct and stable structures to define representation, she deconstructs the conventional narrative into a shower of atoms and

impressions loosely composed by affective drives and the desire for significant form. In this way, Woolf's radical formal break is a startling contribution to the understanding of interior life: penetrating consciousness exposes its continuous composition that makes complete knowledge of the self an impossibility.

Woolf's phenomenological approach to the composition of modern fiction—attending to the constant vicissitudes of daily life that form moments of being from unexpected accretions—bears similarity to the ideas in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You" (1997/2003). Sedgwick's essay looks at the disquieting effects of suspicious reading as a symptom of the desire to expose meaning and create knowledge. This form of reading "is characterized by placing, in practice, an extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge per se—knowledge in the form of exposure" (Sedgwick 138). The tyrannical grip of materialist fiction that wishes to make life "like this" by fitting it into a rubric of "two and thirty chapters" is, in some ways, a straw-man used by Woolf as a means to critique methods of knowledge production. What she really confronts are the mystifying epistemologies that prop up constructed and artificial verisimilitude as the "exposed" truth which erase more idiosyncratic and non-positivist modes of selfhood. Woolf's abhorrence of sympathy—the intolerability of always being accompanied, always being understood—stems from a critique of its desire for mastery over the phenomenological by creating proximity and stabilizing omniscience. From the paranoid or suspicious point of view, elegiac readings of *Jacob's Room* misidentify the lack of sympathetic identification—the inability to see into the minds of others—with loss, rather than seeing Jacob when he is present. As Sedgwick says, "to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall

ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise” (146). Reparative reading does not reinforce the misleading epistemology that collapses what (or who) is not completely known into what (or who) is lost or never exists. Held continually at bay within the forest or far afield, the self (or in the case of the novel, Jacob) is an inexhaustible fund of strange and new experience that requires acknowledging the presence of surprising or enigmatic knowledge. For Sedgwick reparative reading’s abeyance of master knowledge “inaugurates ethical possibility” (137). In this way, the unknown vistas of radical interiority must not only be included within any ethical relationality, but also create its crucial parameters. For Woolf, any self-knowledge courts the unknown; and further, what we do not know of others compels a shared responsibility—as opposed to mere sympathy—to the lives of others. As I will discuss in the rest of the chapter, insisting on the novel only as an elegy (instead of recognizing the elegiac impulse as one of many thematics the novel queries) over-determines the status of knowledge, instead of allowing for the reparative point of view in which unknown potentiality is intrinsic to the nature of interior life.

While elegiac tribute is fitting for a novel confronting the trauma of World War I, Jacob’s eventual death does not retroactively erase him from the text. He is less the victim of her attack on form than its beneficiary: she does not distort or subdue his life into a valorizing legend for imperialist politics. Woolf’s new mode of representation in *Jacob’s Room* inaugurates experimental form as the means to get a closer vision of the life of the self, human relations, and “reality.” Throughout the novel, Woolf toys with the tropes of the materialist novel she degrades in “Modern Fiction”: she draws on the expectations of their “sympathetic forms,” while her prose undercuts the conventions that would create identification with (and of) Jacob. In this way,

her experimental form not only asserts a new kind of subject, but forwards a new structure of representation that embraces the unknown as a palpable form. Woolf's deliberately unfixed and poetic representations of the self, through both vision and history, structure the text's complex relational discourse and compose its central images. Her experimental practice—the shifting points of view, the fracturing of narrative voice, and the ekphrastic rendering of subjective vision—makes porous structures that divide interior experience from the exterior world.

Following the formal view that served as impetus for the novel, I focus my attention to the way that her aesthetics, as envisioned through metaphor, poetic language, and idiosyncratic syntax, “makes splendid,” or at least visible, radical interiority as a significant form and object of ethical concern. The impressionistic episodes that comprise the novel and the enigmatic visual leitmotifs used to sign for Jacob render both that abrupt immediacy and thoughtful circumspection that shapes her discourse. Within this mobile net of aesthetic vision, she articulates the self as looping between individuating introspection and fragmented objectivity. In this way, she confronts Jacob as a subject whose ontological presence signs for the enigmatic virgin forests of the self. She molds this representation through elusive glimpses of his life as he grows up, goes to Cambridge, works in London, has affairs, travels, and ultimately dies without witness in the trenches of World War I. Instead of the scaffolding and bricks that could construct him as a sympathetic or knowable subject, other characters grant their unreliable and subjective insights into the man, or call out ceaselessly for his presence. Doing away with the narrative and character constructions that would pave through the forests and fields of selfhood seemingly gives the sense of her protagonist as absent from his own life story; and yet, instead of the accustomed conventions of the bildungsroman, she offers new forms to represent radical “unknowing” as a phenomenology. Despite her worries over netting the human heart, Woolf

keeps Jacob at-large as the means to rescue him from the sympathetic narratives that seek to memorialize and, by extension, serve the aims of Britain's patriarchal imperialism. While I accept and build off of the readings of *Jacob's Room* as a war elegy, I focus on it as a significant contribution to Woolf's philosophy of the self articulated in "On Being Ill."

This chapter shifts the focus away from loss and the suspicious reading it engenders and forwards a reparative reading the queries interiority and the ethical and aesthetic possibilities created at the edges of knowledge. Frustrating the narrative expectation of sympathy through these experimental forms, Woolf keeps Jacob both intimate and estranged to examine the paradoxical relations that contour individuated selfhood. Reparative readings of *Jacob's Room* allow for a recognition of how the aesthetic formulations in her novels can employ significant form to "net" the human heart, while granting space for the unknowable terrains of interiority. Ironically, attention to what Kathleen Wall calls the text's "Jacob-shaped hole" compels a reparative understanding of the text and its relational model by allowing the unknown to remain, instead of being patched over, exposed, or mastered by paranoid vision (286). I recognize *Jacob's Room* as asserting a much larger ethical model to grapple with radical interiority by making the reader inhabit the spaces of this essential unknown through aesthetic discourse and experiments with narrative convention. Bishop seems, partially, to insist on this line of paranoid thinking when he assesses that Woolf's method "far from creating character, seems to be going out of her way to *uncreate* character" (Bishop 151). He bases this supposition on the manner in which the novel violates the normative expectations of the novel in that "it is usual for a central character to be surrounded by minor characters less complex and dynamic" (Bishop 150). However, he finds that "the minor characters in *Jacob's Room* often have more interior life than

Jacob” (150). Bishop enforces a paranoid reading that insists on knowledge stemming from exposure as the only satisfactory way for Woolf to represent Jacob’s inner life.

Although Woolf does give us glimpses into the lives of others, none of these streams of consciousness course throughout the whole novel, nor do most register as any more than anecdotal.⁴⁶ Woolf’s ability to draw the interior life of minor characters with verisimilitude only makes her representation of Jacob’s interior life more significant in its experimentation. Holding Woolf’s discursive process of “creating” and “un-creating” a character against the precedent of convention, though, is far less compelling than investigating how she innovates the tradition of the bildungsroman to consider a searching and less stable notion of selfhood that characterizes modernism. In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf reimagines form to grant shape and volume to the unrestricted potentiality of selfhood through imagistic language, metaphoric rhetoric, shifting point of view, and idiosyncratic syntax. Far from “un-creating” a character she activates negative space—the silence, emptiness, and indeterminacy that seemingly appear as voids—as traces of inner life that escape the nets of positivist knowledge. In this way, Woolf figures Jacob’s radical interiority as the “significant form” that structures “everything, everything” to develop the understanding of selfhood she endeavors in the novel.

Woolf’s continual adjustment of her vision deconstructs narrative convention and representation, giving way to her experimental method. In this way, she brings the reader closer to confront Jacob through an “aesthetic vision” similar to an artist “[seeing] objects, not as means shrouded in associations, but as pure forms” (Bell 20). As Jane Marcus would say, all of Woolf’s

⁴⁶ For instance, the penetration into the mind of minor characters in this novel resembles similar moments in *Mrs. Dalloway* (for example the improbably named Scrope Purvis and his fleeting yet crucial assessment of Clarissa at the start of the novel); however, she does not sustain the level of insight that she does, say, in *The Waves*’ extended soliloquies.

texts are interactive in nature in that her form attempts to collapse engaged reading with the act of writing.⁴⁷ Her representation of Jacob through impressionist moments of ekphrasis and uncanny narrating voice forces the reader to take a position towards its subject that seeks to find the importance of the unknown. Yet, instead of seeing this search predetermined by the lost object, the discursive style of the text—episodic and with a seemingly at-large though limited third-person point of view—replicates the artist’s envisioning of the truth through “pure form.” This aesthetic representation makes visible the aspect of self that get mired in what Woolf famously called “the cotton-wool” of daily life (*Sketch* 72). However, what does Woolf grant significant form? As Bishop states, the novel seems to assert that “there is not a solid core of selfhood that can be captured” (166-7). The paradox of self’s axiomatic presence persisting without a “solid” or apprehendable substance requires a paradoxical language. Woolf’s desire to give the self a significant form without over-determining its material construction reflects back on her initial sketch of the diary in the novel. Far from a “solid core,” Jacob should remain crepuscular—the visionary instability of fire in the mist. The “lightness and looseness” of her language and her active scrutiny of her ability to “net” the heart releases the selfhood from the over-determination and external construction that limits its phenomenological potentiality. Both frustrating and desirable, this paradox propels a relationality that animates Bell’s “aesthetic feeling” with the ethical impetus to keep selfhood active, at large, and partially unknown. As this chapter will show, by reading Woolf’s construction of Jacob through a reparative lens, she transforms the inability to know another from loss into a “significant form.” Making her reader confront the epistemological limits that selfhood requires for its emergence compels an ethical understanding within the aesthetic representation of interior life.

⁴⁷ Seminar with Jane Marcus – Add to bib

Bishop sees the novel as moving against the grain of “the history of narrative in Western literature [that] is distinguished by an inward turn... [and] an increasing emphasis on rendering mental states” (Bishop “Subject” 152). While he sees Woolf as “bent on frustrating those automatic processes which cause a reader to identify with a character” by denying a clear representation of Jacob’s interiority, her method instantiates a central theme of the novel—the insurmountable fact that one can never completely know the experience of another (152). For Bishop, Woolf’s representation frustrates the process of identification; it urges readers toward a quest for Jacob and “at the same time ...[makes them] realize that it is misdirected” (166-7). In her essay, “Elegy and the Unknowable Mind in *Jacob’s Room*,” Linda Martin attributes this misdirected search at the heart of the text to Woolf “[taking] up the concept of irrevocable loss not merely as a subject but also as a guiding formal principle” (Martin 176). As both its central subject and guiding process, loss in the novel not only compounds the elegiac quality of the text that many critics have noticed, but further compels a complex system of reading relations. However errant the search for Jacob is, I argue that Jacob is not, in fact, lost: Despite his eventual death casting a pall over the text, what Bishop and Martin read as “loss” is the denial of sympathetic knowledge—sharing Jacob’s interior feelings concerning the events of his life. Throughout the novel, the narrator moderates these reader relations most often by shirking the duty of sympathetic omniscience and by actively turning away from the opportunity to bring the protagonist into focus. Instead of shaping the novel by hewing close to the accepted conventions and expectations of either the elegy, or the bildungsroman, Woolf refuses to narrate his life to its end. Her turning away has the ironic effect of producing images of Jacob’s potentiality: In a sense she keeps Jacob “alive” by attending to his “unknowable mind” as the significant form of the text. It is easy to see why the scholarship has focused on this aspect of the novel: the imagery

and structure that emphasize absence and the duty to eulogize makes Jacob a representative figure for the death of a generation in the war. Rather, my discussion moves in another direction: I see the war as one of many contexts (British history in *Orlando* and *Between the Acts*, domestic relations in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Years*, as examples) that occasion Woolf's philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic inquiry into the nature of the self.

Throughout the novel, Woolf constructs her representation of Jacob's life through an almost Cubist simultaneity—moments in which character and narrative are distilled into imagistic fragments that elude temporality and convey both distance and intimacy. The individual images that she offers as the trace of a life court a desire for intimacy that is continually thwarted by the impossibility of sympathetic knowledge. The central image of the novel is, of course, the titular room, as devoid of location as it is inhabitants. Its importance is declared by its uncanny reoccurrence throughout the text: Twice in the novel, Woolf describes it verbatim: “Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there” (38, 186). Whether the room is in Cambridge or in London, it remains the same: vacant and seemingly haunted by the absence of its occupant. The slight animation of inanimate objects only calls further attention to the fact that “no one” remains there—as if Jacob has just escaped, the reader missing out on the moment to apprehend him totally.

The passive emptiness of the room undercuts Jacob as the key figure of the young “distinguished-looking” Edwardian man who seemingly commands potentiality (61). In defiance of Edwardian society—typified by his Cambridge professor Mr. Plumer and his wife—that enforces a social script for Jacob, he claims “‘I am what I am, and intend to be it’ for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself” (34-35). Jacob's

potential—the “it” he intends to make and be—paired with the confidence of the narrative voice compels the question: Who is this man on which the form world depends? Unlike the “listless,” almost mournful stasis of his room, Jacob seems firm in his axiomatic identity as integral to the existence of the entire world. Further, the form that Jacob will make of and for himself echoes the forms of the “visionary body” that Hite discusses. What shape will Jacob take if not the one reflected by the social expectations of his time? Woolf denies the reader access to the self that exists for Jacob within his interior visions and pushes the possibility of his “unrestricted experience” off the page. And yet, in doing so, she creates the negative spaces in which this form of being may, in fact, persist without being “constituted” “by [the] requirements of social coherence and intelligibility” (Hite).

However, Bishop sees Woolf’s ultimate denial of what Jacob “intends to be” or what he even becomes—leaving him unattended and without witness after he departs for the war—as installed in the text before either this description of Jacob or the image of the empty room. He points out the symbolic allusion in his last name—Flanders—to the battlefields where he eventually dies already “tells the reader that Jacob is fore-doomed” (Bishop 154). Despite images of his potentiality, “He is dead before he is born into the text, his patronymic already a citation from the text of the First World War” (Bishop 154). Both *mise-en-scène* and characterization corroborate to deflate his great expectations by creating a sense of loss and withdrawing substance in favor of metaphysical possibility. And yet, this unresolved potential, even though it is cut short by the war, remains to haunt *Jacob’s Room* through these unrepressed imagistic leitmotifs of motion and possibility. Woolf uses these two images for different aesthetic functions to represent both Jacob and his selfhood as a persistent phenomenon that pushes against the convention of the elegy and the bildungsroman.

Kathleen Wall links the “text’s saturation with visual images that frequently seem almost ekphrastic” to artistic traditions, such as “the still life and impressionistic landscape,” that support her “elegiac purpose” (Wall 282, 283). She notices the multiple ways in which Jacob “is often articulated ... by empty rooms and empty shoes, closed doors and unknown thoughts” (Wall 286-7). Like Martin, she recognizes emptiness as signaling the metaphoric loss that reinforces the view of the novel as extended elegy. However compelling, this point of view leaves unattended many of Woolf’s complex representational nuances that bring Jacob out “as bright as fire in the mist.” I see both Jacob’s haunted room and inchoate form as circumscribing an aestheticized space that makes his radical interiority visibly present. The room appears as an ekphrastic exercise that easily signs for both plastic reality and aesthetic composition (think of Van Gogh’s *Bedroom in Arles* of 1888, for instance), while Jacob’s nascent figuration highlights the implicit potentiality in his emergence. Both images query the integrity of form—whether empty or inchoate—and its status within aesthetic process. Wall sees these images in the tradition of the still life or *nature morte* painting, in which they assert both a sense of stability and “timelessness only to accede to the flow of time and change more elegiacally because of time’s momentary cessation” (Wall 300). However, in the flexibility of aesthetic consideration, these same images can also be seen in light of Modernist simultaneity in which past, present, and future converge to reveal the temporal and formal motion held in a single moment. Far from only suggesting elegiac timelessness, the repetition of the room and its haunted animation, along with Jacob’s intended potential, recognize the indeterminate activity that continues within interior life. Despite its inaccessibility to sympathy, the uninhabited room brackets a space for Jacob to come continuously into being. In the haunted chamber where things move by themselves, the questions that hang heavy in the air never find resolution, because the figure in question never settles into a

final shape. Aesthetic language extends the unseen aspects of a self that move restlessly, animating the part-objects in their continual reimagining of Jacob's world.

In this way, Woolf's consideration of Jacob's potential stretches beyond the boundaries of positivist form: Images that signal emptiness or incompleteness direct the reader toward the negative spaces crucial to aesthetic vision. Her insistence on tracing her protagonist through his vacant room and leftover shoes, in order to evoke his unresolved possibility, makes these sites of radically unknown interiority *the* "significant form" of the novel. Like the forest and the snowfield, these formal "holding environments" may seem to empty the text of what Jacob knows, feels, and experiences; however, these images carve spaces for selfhood's indeterminate phenomenology to exist within the text. By denying sympathy, these deceptive metonyms of interiority actually make the shapes of radical interiority palpable as objects able to compel forms of relationality. Before turning to an analysis of this specific mode of imagery in the text, seems necessary to invoke one historical figure within Woolf's circle, Rupert Brooke, the poet and erstwhile soldier, haunts the negative spaces in her portrayal of Jacob. Brooke and his poetry became symbolic of the nationalist pride that circumvented the human cost of World War 1. In "The Soldier" (1914), he presciently eulogizes the fallen soldier he becomes, urging mourners to:

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given ll 9-11

Brooke refigures the last moments of the dead—the "pulse in [his] eternal mind"—as a psychic infinity; however, instead of conjuring his life's potentiality, these lasting thoughts return the gifts "by England given." Nationalist pride makes the final claim on the life of a man who dedicates his thwarted potential to naive (and over romanticized) faith in Horace's belief that

“dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”—a sentiment that Wilfred Owen uses with irony in his own poetic critiques of World War I.

When reviewing a posthumous collection of Brooke’s writing, Woolf notes that readers “will be left, we believe, to reflect rather sadly upon the incomplete version which must in future represent Rupert Brooke to those who never knew him” (*Essays* 278).⁴⁸ However sad, Brooke’s potential lingers on as an unknown quantity that shadows the flawed version of his life emerging from sympathetic narrative. Finding dissonance between her personal knowledge of him and his legacy as memorial to British imperialism, she ponders, “One turns from the thought of him not with a sense of completeness and finality, but rather to wonder and question still: what would he have been, what would he have done?” (*Essays* 281-281) Woolf, rather than taking his death and patriotism as the sole consequences of his life, holds to the potentiality implicit in her question. Instead of compelling an answer, she allows Brooke’s incompleteness to stretch on like the snowfield of radical interiority. In many ways, Woolf figures Jacob as the antidote to distorting elegiac impulse she witnessed happening to Rupert Brooke. Instead, she stages her protagonist’s interiority in the negative spaces that assert his final incompleteness. She constructs Jacob’s radical interiority as a means to trouble the belief that his final thoughts were with England, thwarting the ability of his memorial to smudge out his individuality as a vehicle of pro-war propaganda. Just as in the opening scene on the beach, Jacob vacillates from representing the one and the many; and yet, Woolf’s method of asserting Jacob’s unknown selfhood opens spaces to consider the meaning of losing a whole generation of *individual* men beyond mass memorialization.

⁴⁸ See both Julia Briggs and Vara Neverow.

This method makes urgent the ethical call of both “On Being Ill” and “Modern Fiction”: Eschewing sympathetic/materialist form, we must approach an elusive selfhood from a position that repairs our understanding of what constitutes “life.” In the latter essay, Woolf’s loose netting in the diary entry finds its purpose:

life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? 154

Woolf’s belief that the novelist’s task is to protect the “essential thing” from the “mixture of the alien and external” seems to repeat Bell’s call for art to rise above “the stream of life” through “pure form.” However, in Woolf’s view, it is life itself—the “luminous halo” or “semi-transparent” envelope” that confounds material stability—which the novelist’s representation must sustain. Resisting any attempt to sum up a life, or make it look “like this,” her writing strives to show life as equally form and phenomenology: it is a halo and an envelope; it varies, cultivates the unknown, and remains uncircumscribed. This approach calls for her loose netting and to allow for the “unrestricted experience” of Hite’s “visionary body.” It also makes pressing the purchase on representing incompleteness to assure rescue from the damaging over-determination of “alien” and “external” narratives, like the nationalist pride that entombs Brooke. In the mutable netting of ephemeral spaces, Woolf empowers the varying unknown with reparative energies to maintain the phenomenological aspects of Jacob’s life to circulate through the text.

In contrast to the empty room and shoes, Woolf strings together a loose grouping of images throughout the course of the novel to vouchsafe Jacob’s luminous incompleteness as the

significant form of the text.⁴⁹ As many critics note, allusions to Classical sculpture abound Jacob—speaking both to his ideal beauty, nascent queerness (and the homosocial *métier* of the “Oxbridge” circle), and the legendary heroism of Greeks. Other characters frequently compare Jacob to Greek statues (pillaged through colonialist exploits and brought to the British Museum): among them the promiscuous Florinda (“Jacob. You're like one of those statues...”), his married lover Sandra Williams (She “got Jacob's head exactly on a level with the head of the Hermes of Praxiteles. The comparison was all in his favour.”), and Fanny Elmer, the artist’s model who

⁴⁹ It is with some degree of irony for this project that I am working in tension with Bishop’s evocation of the psychoanalytically minded semiotics of Kaja Silverman to read Jacob’s incompleteness. Bishop utilizes Silverman’s idea of the “discursive plentitude” which is a foundational theory for my project, as the presence in earlier chapters attests; however, my reading of Woolf and the specific aesthetic of *Jacob’s Room* does not follow their lead. Bishop thinks through the novel cinematically to argue that the desirous pull toward Jacob comes from the narrator’s fractured syntactical method: “the space breaks on the page fragment the narrative into ‘shots,’ short takes which emphasize their incomplete status, inscribing a lack which we desire to fill, a gap or a wound which we desire to suture over” (Bishop 164). The narrator’s method of herding the reader through an open circuitry of minor characters’ subjectivities each with an experience of Jacob—fleeting, banal, pregnant—breaks the narrative into incomplete filmic scenes that by turning the focus away from Jacob as subject replaces him with Lacanian lack from which the motivating desire of the novel issues. Wall and Bishop assert these ideas to the same end: to extend sympathetic relations to “recover” what is lost—the irony being that object is loss itself. Unlike Charlotte Bronte and Henry James, Virginia Woolf does not carve a narrative space for Jacob's interiority, as that violates the novel's critical ethos on the nature of selfhood. Furthermore, Jacob's privileged place in Edwardian society does not necessitate the emergent desires for self-interpretation that restrictive social constructions make urgent for Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, and Isabel Archer. (In many ways my readings of these characters in previous chapters bears more than passing similarity to Hite’s notion of Woolf’s “visionary body.”) Within the world that so seemingly depends upon Jacob for its form, he is not left to actively figure himself within the breaks of narrative and social discourse. Rather, Woolf supplies the mode that attends both to his socially constructed life trajectory and her own philosophy of selfhood. Searching for Jacob as a stable and knowable form within the discursive and narrative fractures results not only in the unbearable acceptance of mortality, but further compels a suspicious or paranoid reading that Woolf’s break with convention is determined to thwart.

falls in love with him (81, 153). For Fanny, the idealized representations of Greek mythology and history become stand-ins for the young man after their acquaintance ends:

Fanny's idea of Jacob was more statuesque, noble, and eyeless than ever. To reinforce her vision she had taken to visiting the British Museum, where, keeping her eyes downcast until she was alongside of the battered Ulysses, she opened them and got a fresh shock of Jacob's presence, enough to last her half a day. 180

The battered Ulysses not only shocks Fanny into feeling “Jacob’s presence,” but crystalizes the leitmotif of the statue standing in for the tragic protagonist. The years’ roughshod handling of the Classical hero resuscitates both his epic journey, and makes tangible the ways in which art and life continuously shape representation and experience.⁵⁰ While Fanny, in a sense, loses Jacob—growing more remote and damaged in the statue’s thrall—to his radical interiority, the formal significance of the work of art becomes a potent and flexible symbol for his unknown potentiality. Like the battered statue, the simultaneous fracture and suture of form manifest in a narrative accreted of fragments and repetitions. The broken thoughts or descriptions, lines echoing over the novel speak to the reparative energies within the text. In particular, the ekphrastic exercises evoking Jacob through Classical sculpture find formal integrity when Woolf grants negative space a significant form. What Bishop sees as the narrator’s stalled attempts at writing Jacob’s history and deliberate “un-creating” of his character may also be taken as the reparative process that assembles these part-objects into the luminous halo of a life.

⁵⁰ Returning briefly to the opening scene on the beach: the symbolic cow skull Jacob encounters becomes more than just a death omen. While perhaps signaling to an even more speculative and inaccessible interiority—an animal’s—the cross-species dialogue cannot help to penetrate; it also foreshadows Jacob’s conflation with statuary. Woolf both evokes the formal purity of Classical art while speculating on the ephemeral nature of material form:

Clean, white, wind-swept, sand-rubbed, a more unpolluted piece of bone existed nowhere on the coast of Cornwall. The sea holly would grow through the eye-sockets; it would turn to powder, or some golfer, hitting his ball one fine day, would disperse a little dust— TK

Jacob's conflation with statuary takes on a further reparative cast when he visits the Acropolis and notes that "the Greeks, like sensible men, never bothered to finish the backs of their statues'...observing that the side of the figure which is turned away from view is left rough" (149). The figures at the Parthenon mirror his own significant incompleteness as an aesthetic formulation. While Jacob finds this incompleteness a pragmatic solution, Woolf insists on this visual leitmotif, pointing out that this roughshod back is "turned away from view." The exposure of the unfinished nature of these historical works of art echoes the unseen and unmarked snowfield of the self. With this image, she makes solid the significance of negative space—left untouched by positivist forces—that remain crucial to Jacob as the form on which the world depends. Throughout the novel, Woolf slyly develops this other aspect of the statuary leitmotif that percolates beneath its more obvious allusions. Earlier in the novel, the narrator foreshadows the sculptures of the Parthenon in a moment of swarming of inter- and extra-textual relations:

Even while you speak and look over your shoulder towards Shaftesbury Avenues, destiny is chipping a dent in him. He has turned to go. As for following him back to his rooms, no—that we won't do.

Yet that, of course is precisely what one does. 98

In this moment, Jacob having spied Florinda arm-in-arm with another man walking down the aptly named Greek Street, narrative desire comes to a discursive cross-roads. Prefiguring the unfinished backs of the statues, destiny insistently chips away at Jacob, attempting to bring out form. Evoking Michelangelo's famous idea that "Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it," Woolf symbolizes the process by which teleological narratives chisel off negative spaces to complete a life. In the same passage, Jacob's heartbreak registers in his face "as if a stone were ground to dust; as if white sparks flew from a livid

whetstone, which was his spine” (98). Reinforced by the imagery of cutting, sharpening, and grinding, Jacob’s body becomes a site of discursive process rendered as aesthetic intervention.

Hacking away at his back, narrative momentum forces him into shape before halting itself. The ambivalent pas-de-deux within the narrator—not following him back to his room, but then doing precisely the opposite—emblemizes the desire to form Jacob through sympathetic representation. In turning away from the narrator, he reveals his own unfinished back, but makes it vulnerable to the sculptural completeness. However, the narrator’s ambivalence continues: shortly after accounting for him in his locked room, alone, she turns to the panorama of street life around him, commenting that “the march that mind keeps beneath the windows of others is queer enough” (99). Having supposedly penetrated Jacob’s radical interiority, the narrator actually reveals herself to be stalking outside the locked room. Locating his radical interiority within this room, Woolf preserves negative spaces as sites of possibility for Jacob’s negative capability. It is this Keatsian idea of “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” that allows for the “magnetic” center of the novel to remain dynamic and engaging without becoming what Bishop called the “solid core of selfhood that can be captured” (Keats 41; Bishop). Unlike Brooke’s public image, Jacob’s embodies uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts: Destiny may have chipped away at him, but within the room he remains out of the reach of fact and reason that mobilize complete figures as subjects of memorialization. Still in his thrall, the narrator circles the impermeable subject, foregrounding the negative capability in a novel that has “for centre, for magnet, a young man alone in his room” (99).

Woolf offers glimpses of Jacob’s back again and again throughout the novel. His characteristic move to turn and walk away not only signals a break with sympathetic connection, but further reinforces the visual leitmotif of his radical interiority—as an embodied formal edge

negotiating the multiple relational and discursive forces of the text. This continual evasion, though, does not erase him from the text, but rather opens up a reparative reading of the negative spaces as sites for his radical interiority. This desire to follow Jacob (along the beach, back to his room, off to war) runs steady, but no one—neither the reader nor any other character—will ever catch up to him. Forcing a recognition of Jacob’s radical interiority through the unfinished back, the empty room, the novel’s edges erode to give way to the ever-stretching snowfield and its sympathy-thwarting distance. In pointing out Jacob’s incompleteness as a necessary form itself, Woolf permanently stalls the summing up that she advises against throughout her novels.⁵¹ Not a blank surface, nor a discursive plenitude demanding the projection of desires, Jacob’s self stands both ontologically realized and yet unfinished like the statues of the Parthenon.

In emphasizing blankness as a form itself that the readers must confront and realize they cannot force into a shape that suits themselves, Woolf collapses Jacob’s magnetism with a discursive tension. In the penultimate chapter, Jacob exits the book turning his back to the reader and leaving his potentiality unresolved: “Jacob rose from his chair in Hyde Park, tore his ticket to pieces, and walked away” (173). He drifts passed Reverend Floyd, who “watched Jacob, turned round to look at him, but could not be sure—...he remembered in a flash” (173). Retelling an event foretold earlier in text, the repetition of his encounter with his childhood tutor, creates an uncanny temporal displacement in which memory and prophecy intersect—perhaps

⁵¹ In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Clarissa states, “She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that” (8); while in *The Waves*, Bernard’s need “to sum up” and “to explain to you the meaning of my life” is undercut:

What delights me then is the confusion, the height, the indifference and the fury.
Great clouds always changing, and movement; something sulphurous and sinister,
bowled up, helter-skelter; towering, trailing, broken off, lost, and I forgotten,
minute, in a ditch. Of story, of design, I do not see a trace then. TK

completing the luminous halo of Jacob's life, or defying the teleological momentum of a linear narrative. Through this maneuver, though, Jacob shirks more than just the attention of his childhood acquaintance and the drive of the narrative, but he also disengages himself from the narrative force of ideological subjecthood which Bishop argues interpellates him from the start.⁵² He walks away, deliberately turning on the text—as well as the futile sympathies of the narrator, characters, and the reader—offering a final glimpse of his unfinished back.

Jacob remains for Reverend Floyd—and so many like him—but a memory. Jacob never stands in full-view of the narrator, and in this way shrugs off her diminishing observations, despite the magnetic pull to pin him down, to sum him up:

But something is always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery, endowing Jacob Flanders with all sorts of qualities he had not at all...what remains is mostly a matter of guess work. Yet over him we hang vibrating. 73

The novel pulses with humming vibration that brings the reader to the edge of recognition, like the moth outside the cavern of mystery, or the room of the solitary man. These negative spaces, shadowed with the mysteries of negative capability, establish his potentiality as the reparative force drawing together the fractured and fragmented discourse. Like the luminous spirit of the essential thing that escapes the tyrannical grip of materialist representation, Jacob's back becomes the sign for his unfinished potentiality. As Linda Martin reads it, "In short, broad assessments about Jacob's mind and character cannot definitively be made, and recognizing this fact is vital to understanding Woolf's method" (Martin 183). Recognizing the unknowable within the text remains key to Woolf's portrayal of Jacob as free from the over-determinations of

⁵² Relying upon Althusser, Bishop states, "'Hey, you there!' comes the call in the Althusser's famous anecdote of interpellation, and the individual thus hailed turns around and becomes a subject" of ideology (147).

sympathy. While Martin sees this loss of connection as sustaining elegy, a reparative reading of the dark recesses where the light of knowledge cannot pierce, allows negative capabilities to sustain the potential in Jacob's unfinished life.

Attending to these negative spaces from a reparative position, Woolf's metaphors and images signal the partial presence self takes in the life of another. The boldness of this new approach, though, does little to quiet her unrelentingly self-criticism; however, this active querying voice gives momentum to Woolf's push against the limitations of any form of novel—or language at all—to capture the truth of the human heart. The novel's point of view, reflecting its author's concern for the capacity of representation, allows both intimacy and distance to coexist by simultaneously remaining self-consciously aware of the events of Jacob's life, and yet at a remove from sympathetic over-determination. These discursive attempts to net Jacob—a shifting narrative perspective and ambiguous (if not wholly ambivalent) image—grant mobility to Woolf's visionary text. In this way, Woolf's highly aestheticized discourse engages the reader in its net, allowing Jacob's radical interiority to loom at-large. Giving form to the freewheeling unknown, Woolf activates its agency to negotiate the epistemological limits of unique individuation and the reach of ethical relations. These negative spaces coincide with an aesthetic of poetic ambiguity that thwarts the materialist sympathies seeking to survey and account for that snowfield within selfhood. The desirous pas-de-deux between the reader and the narrator forces a recognition of the limits of sympathetic knowledge and replaces it with an epistemology of radical interiority understood within an aesthetic field of visionary phenomenology.

The unanswered call that opens the novel—"Ja-cob! Ja-cob!"—echoes across chapters, across the lips of different characters, inaugurating a search that exhausts itself, unfulfilled, on

the final page (4). The first voice to utter this cry is his brother Archer's while playing at the beach in the opening chapter. It reverberates with an "extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body. Pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks—so it sounded" (5). This disembodied voice not only carries his name, but also summons forth the form Jacob will take in the novel: free of materialist trapping, elegiac, alone in the world, and moving against the currents of time and space with the ephemerality and perpetuity of the waves. Ricocheting off the Cornwall coast, the desire for Jacob penetrates the minds of other characters and draws them toward the elusive protagonist. His name rings like a choral refrain: the thoughts of his erstwhile and unrequited lover Clara Durrant in the penultimate chapter remain "Jacob! Jacob!"; the cries of his devoted friend, homosexual Richard Bonamy—"Jacob! Jacob!"—shudder the last chapter (176, 187). His name becomes the rallying cry for Woolf's investigation into selfhood and the radical relations it engenders.

Throughout the novel, she follows the soundings of others' search for Jacob, departing from the accustomed paths of conventional novelistic patterns. Alex Zwerdling notes that Woolf's departure from the plotting of the bildungsroman confronts the "problem" that "fictional convention does not hold good for all human beings at all stages of life" (Zwerdling 250). In this way, she seeks ways for the novel to represent self-formation beyond normative stagings of the bildungsroman. In this way, her experiments with the novelistic form are an attempt to stretch its ability to question the representational and ethical stakes poised at the edges of epistemology. Throughout her apprehension (in both senses of the word) of Jacob Flanders, she breaks away from novelistic expectation to open the text as a site of meditation upon her philosophy of a life. Woolf zooms out from her consideration of his life and the intersections that delineate it, to

contemplate the universal aspects of the relational impossibilities—one cannot see another, rather only one’s self—that the novel explores:

The strange thing about life is that though the nature of it must have been apparent to every one for hundreds of years, no one has left any adequate account of it. The streets of London have their map; but our passions are uncharted. 99

Abandoning the organized search for the subject, she comes to terms that there is no “adequate account” of life, no chart of its passions. The characters’ attempts at echo-location cannot overcome the mists that enshroud the bright fire of the self. She renders this elusive paradox of life—so well known, and yet unsubstantiated—in the novel’s fragmented structure and enigmatic characterization that defies linear time and positive space. In thwarting the materialist representation of a life, she releases Jacob from the “curbing & controlling” and into the phenomenological plentitudes of radical interiority.

Circumventing the sympathetic connections that scaffold the materialist novel reinforces the narrator’s insistence upon the futility of knowing another. In other words, Woolf permits Jacob to live on as an aesthetic phenomenon precisely because she refuses to represent him through the very end. Like the forest and the snowfield of “On Being Ill,” selfhood persists insofar that it extends beyond the realm of the ontic reality. Determining the difference between materialist and modern fiction, Woolf finds that

there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful, despair. 158

In making her protagonist significant through negative space, she stymies the efficacy of conventional forms to engender sympathy. Instead, she situates selfhood as a phenomenology fueled by Keatsian negative capability: Her history of Jacob interrogates the structures of that enforce the stream of life into the conventional pattern. Ultimately, it is this constant querying

that shapes the paradoxical coordinates of the self affected in her writing. As what was truth becomes an uncertainty, Woolf's writing denies narrative resolution in order to mirror the luminous halo of life that spreads toward the unknown.

As a model of representing the "odd immeasurable soul" that Woolf contends with in her fiction, criticism, and diaries, the novel constantly moves Jacob away from forms that would ultimately curb and control his representation. In "Modern Fiction," Woolf succinctly states, "Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile" (MF 153). While Jacob does, in fact, turn away and escape the text, he does so to prevent sympathetic form from absconding with the vitality of his narrative. His death at the end is not worthless; rather, Woolf's modernist experiment—equal parts elegy, pacifist critique, and existential inquiry—activates the selfhood as a site of inexhaustible potentiality and vision. In this way she makes radical interiority palpable by situating it within the desires and frustrations that shape relationality. The novel ultimately determines that the attempts to follow Jacob moves one farther astray; the desirous calls out to him attenuate into futility. While Woolf thwarts sympathetic connection, she recognizes the dialectic momentum of radical interiority that resonates like Sedgwick's notion of shame, "toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality" (Sedgwick 53). Not all individuation is painful, especially for Woolf; further, it is not individuation that causes Jacob pain, but rather it is the uncontrollable relationality of others that produces agonizing frustration and sadness. Woolf, without qualifying the specific texture, considers this unavoidable:

It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force. They say that the novelists never catch it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves them torn to ribbons. This, they say, is what we live by — this unseizable force. 156

The strength of this "unseizable force," while at times violent, grants relational vitality and perpetual motion toward individuation. In this way, life does not escape from the netting of her

representation, but is released to survive in the wilds of radical interiority. Although Jacob himself turns his back on the relations that would grant access to his inner life, he leaves in his wake a desirous chorus. Jacob draws the world into order through the magnetic pull—the “unseizable force” —of his singularity’s⁵³ negative significance; and yet, it is a force that the novel cannot contain. The urge to sympathize, to find Jacob and to know him, rips the novel apart; he tears through its loose netting, leaving his representation in ribbons. Echoing Woolf’s diary entry that describes this new form for a novel, this passage claims discursive practice in *Jacob’s Room* as reparative practice. She finds the significance in the negative spaces between the torn fragments as essential to her representation of Jacob’s selfhood.

In another meditative break, Woolf crystalizes the aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical character of the novel:

In any case life is but a procession of shadows. And why, if this and much more than this is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us—why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.

Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love. 72

In turning away from the “sympathetic forms” of linear plotting and stable characterization, Woolf achieves the significance for her new form. The vision of Jacob in his room is “of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us,” only to be lost in the ephemeral folds of the unknown. In lieu of strangling life in materialist trappings, Woolf describes life as a series of negative forms, “a procession of shadows,” that are constantly in motion, always flickering bright and knowable as fire, and still remaining crepuscular and formless as mist. In this paradoxical discursive vision of life and relationality, Woolf urges

⁵³ It is worth noting that the astronomical phenomenon of the black hole—a similarly magnetic force produced of a profound void—is also called a “singularity.”

negative capability to condition our means of seeing and feeling. Within the negative spaces of the unknown, she inaugurates ethical thinking through aesthetic consideration. In situating the question of radical interiority as the novel's ordering principle, she activates form as integral to her social, political, and historical critique. Jacob's room becomes the wellspring for an ethical scrutiny of narrative representation and relationality: This negative space not only reveals the systemic oppressions that manipulate human relations, but also how these mystifications determine narrative convention. Out of this void, she summons negative capability as a resource against the social structures that limit phenomenological potential.

The novel follows the call of "Jacob, Jacob" to its end, haunting the bereft interior of his room. Woolf does not record those final horrors of war in the trenches, nor could she truly capture it in words. It is this repression of his death in the gaping absence that starts the novel that paradoxically allows Jacob to remain vibrant and vital within the text. Upon his unwitnessed death, Betty Flanders at last joins Richard Bonamy in the titular room to end the search for her son that began on the beach and continued in her letters begging "come back, come back, come back to me!" (90). In the novel's final moment, she offers Jacob's empty, left-behind shoes and asks, "What am I do to with these, Mr. Bonamy?" (90, 187). Betty Flanders paces the edge of blankness where the novel ends, worrying where her unshod son could be, and imploring to whom does he belong. Her last question, poised as much to the reader as to Bonamy, replaces the call for Jacob echoed across the previous pages. It is not only his death that the empty shoes signify, but also the painful gesture of thwarted sympathy toward the son left so incomplete, unknown. Over what field does Jacob walk without shoes to mark his path? She holds them out toward that infinite snowfield into which her son has retreated and has left no impressions in the drifts for her to follow. Betty, at last, resists the pull of sympathy and gives her son up to his own

radical selfhood.

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