“We Are the Thing Itself”: Embodiment in the Künstlerromane of Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a study of the relationship between the modern Künstlerromane of Arnold Bennett, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf and issues of embodiment. Born of the field of aesthetics, the literary genre of Künstlerroman inherits its conflicts. The chief dilemma of the form is how an isolated artistic consciousness connects with the world through a creative act. Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf offer different and contradictory resolutions. By examining how each writer conceives the body, I discover in Woolf the idea of an ethical aesthetics that contravenes the assumed polarity between mind and body, between self and other, and between material and ideal. Written only a few years apart, Clayhanger (1910), A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), and The Voyage Out (1915) tell a compelling story of the relationship between embodiment and a creative life.
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For Alia
The absolutely sharp edge of this beginning is absolutely roomless of other than action; the first transcendental reality—which itself is not unnameable—is absolute act. If it is not action entire, the necessity of the new beginning is infinite self-division, the absolute self-severing of self in the rest which is death. To stand on this absolutely sharp edge of beginning is perpetually to create.

D. G. Leahy, *Beyond Sovereignty*
Introduction

In the novels examined in this study, three major twentieth-century writers address the obstacles that young artists face in their quest to create. In the process, each writer faces the same questions. What characterizes the artistic consciousness? What is the nature of art? How does an artist connect with the world through a creative act? Arnold Bennett, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf offer different possibilities for the relationship between an artistic consciousness and the world it encounters. Integral to each of their conceptions of the artist is their understanding of the body. Each of the protagonists of Clayhanger, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and The Voyage Out suffers the same crisis: the conflict between their increasingly disembodied consciousness and their heightened sensory experience of the world.

The Künstlerroman: A Definition and Brief History

The artist novel arises as a distinct genre in eighteenth-century Germany at the same time as the field of modern aesthetics. A variation of the Bildungsroman, the Künstlerroman focuses on the development of an artistic consciousness from adolescence into adulthood. Questions of identity and relationship dominate the young artist’s sense
of self. Oftentimes, these budding artists find themselves in families and societies that
either don’t understand them or are openly hostile to them. In the course of their
development, the young protagonists usually experience various social and romantic
setbacks. Their first sexual experiences are conflicted and sometimes carry a sense of
shock. Unlike the endings of traditional Bildungsromane, where the protagonist integrates
with prevailing social norms, the endings of artist novels are often ambivalent.

All novels that have characters who are suffering artists are not Künstlerromane.
The artist figure needs to be young, to be the central consciousness of the novel, and to
be developing in his or her awareness.¹ The development need not be linear, stable, or
complete. In many cases, it proceeds in fits and starts, making incremental and
equivocal progress. These, then, are the two markers of the genre: a young artist figure
as the central consciousness and some kind of development from beginning to end.

Many other conditions might be considered customary to the genre, but these two are
essential.² Various critics find important that Künstlerroman tend to be

¹ Some critics define the genre more loosely, deeming the existence of any artist figure in a novel
as sufficient for the designation. For the purposes of this study, I mean Künstlerroman in the
stricter sense of a development novel—a narrative centered on a young artist figure whose
consciousness develops in some way as the novel progresses.

² Jerome Buckley lists six defining characteristics of Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman: a
sensitive child growing up in a provincial setting; an antagonistic father; inadequate education; a
move from rural to urban environment; at least two love affairs—one degraded, the other
exalted; and a mature return home. Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to
Golding, pp. 17-18.
semiautobiographical first novels. That is the case for Joyce and Woolf. Bennett, though, writes nearly a dozen books before *Clayhanger*. Bennett also does not set out as explicit a theory of art in his novel as do Joyce and, to a lesser degree, Woolf. All three *Künstlerromane* do, however, reveal aesthetic preoccupations and allegiances that animate these writers’ future works.

The novel widely cited as the prototype of the genre is *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96). In it, Goethe tells the story of young man who leaves home in search of life, joins an acting troupe, has love affairs, and finally becomes a member of a secret society dedicated to public works. More sentimental than artistic, Wilhelm learns through his adventures and eventually settles into married life. The *Künstlerroman* adopts this model of development and focuses on characters on the verge of being artists of one kind or another. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the standard example of the genre in English. Other earlier or contemporary examples are: Schlegel’s *Lucinde* (1799), Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), Sand’s *Consuelo* (1842), Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), Browning’s prose-poem *Aurora Leigh* (1856), Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), Mann’s novella “Tonio Kröger” (1903), Hesse’s *Peter Camezind* (1904), Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Cather’s *The Song of the Lark* (1915), Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage* (1915), and Lewis’s satirical *Tarr* (1918). These novels feature men and

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3 See Roberta Seret, *Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman*; Christine Froula, *Modernism’s Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce*; and György Bodnár, “The *Künstlerroman* as an Early Form of Intertextuality.”
women, poets, painters, and singers as their protagonists. They vary stylistically from traditional third-person narration to more experimental forms. Their artist-protagonists face different challenges and come to different ends.

There are two full-length studies in English of the Künstlerroman: Roberta Seret’s Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman (1992) and Evy Varsamopoulou’s The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime (2002). Seret defines the Künstlerroman as an autobiographical Bildungsroman, where “the real journey is that of the author-artist, who by writing the Künstlerroman, voyages into the most demanding realm of all—the voyage into creativity.” Like the authors, the protagonists undergo psychological, social, and artistic voyages during the course of their formation as artists. The modern Künstlerroman is an anti-Wilhelm Meister, adopting its structure

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4 Many critics focus on the differences between male and female artists. For the purposes of this study, I am more concerned with issues that pertain equally to both. For feminist perspectives on the genre, see Linda Huf, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature; Bonnie Braendlin, “‘I Have Had My Vision’: Teaching To the Lighthouse as Künstlerroman”; Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development; Susan Gubar, “The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)Production, the Künstlerroman Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield”; Pamela Caughie, “I Must Not Settle into a Figure’: The Woman Artist in Virginia Woolf’s Writing”; and Lyn Pykett, “Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Representations of the Female Artist in the New Woman Fiction of the 1890s.”

5 In German, Peter Zima has recently written Der europäische Künstlerroman: Von der romantischen Utopie zur postmodernen Parodie (2008), and there is Marcuse’s foundational study, Der Deutsche Künstlerroman (1922).

of development but rejecting its ending of integration into society. Instead, Seret uses the trope of an endless voyage, characterized mainly by the artist’s alienation from society and concerned only with reflexive theories of creativity. She distinguishes between novels that come out on the side of life (Goethe, Hesse, and Lawrence) and those that favor art (Joyce, Dreiser).

Varsamopoulou takes issue with Seret’s narrow definition of the Künstlerroman as simple aesthetic autobiography. She proposes the sublime—an otherworldly, magical, mythical, and infinite conflation of terror and pleasure—as the ruling category of the genre. The artist, refusing to fulfill his social and economic duties, instead seeks solace in the sublime. Focusing on Künstlerromane by and about women, Varsamopoulou regards the linguistic constitution of subjectivity in these novels as a metafictional discourse on the experience of the sublime. Interestingly, along with intersubjectivity, she identifies the experience of death and of love as particular hallmarks of the sublime. In the chapter on The Voyage Out, I also discuss love and death as integral to the Künstlerroman, but from the perspective of embodiment.

In addition to these two books dealing explicitly with the Künstlerroman genre, there are countless studies of the artist figure in literature. Maurice Beebe’s Ivory Towers

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7 Ibid., p. 145.

8 Varsamopoulou, p. xv.
and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce (1964) is perhaps the most widely cited of these. Beebe isolates three dominant themes in novels with artist heroes: the artist as a divided self (the archetypal realm); the equation of art with experience (the realm of life); and a conflicted ideal of attachment (the religious realm).\(^9\)

Tracing the social history of art from decorative to didactic to self-expressive, Beebe sees the Victorian period as the end of revolutionary notions of the artist. As people become interested more in wealth than in art, the artist retreats from participation in social life. He has two choices: to withdraw into a self-conscious interiority (the ivory tower) or to grapple with a life of intense experience (the sacred fount).\(^10\) All artists confront this dilemma and resolve it differently.

Like Beebe’s more general account of artist fiction, Jed Esty writes panoramically about modern fictions of development. In his book, Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development (2012), Esty reads both The Voyage Out and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man as examples of “frozen youth,” where the characteristic development of the Bildungsroman genre is stunted or stalled.\(^11\) Esty equates this failure of self-making with the era’s failure of nation-making, Development

\(^9\) Beebe, pp. 6-18.

\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Esty, p. 27.
is conceived primarily in terms of social, political, national, and economic progress. That
Stephen and Rachel fail to grow up, according to Esty, reflects a modern resistance to the
imperialist fiction of adulthood. This is part of a larger argument about “the unsettling
effects of the colonial encounter on humanist ideals of national culture,” which includes
the erosion of any sense of development or progress.12

None of these critics, whether writing specifically about the *Künstlerroman* or
more generally about artists and development, consider issues of embodiment central to
the genre. Because of that, each account is partial. The *Künstlerroman* depicts a young
artistic consciousness that is (1) central, and (2) developing in some way. Seret and
Varsamopoulou both focus exclusively on the centrality of the artistic consciousness.
They regard the aesthetic as imaginative, linguistic, semiotic, and discursive. They chart
the artistic consciousness along autobiographical (Seret) and ideological
(Varsamopoulou) axes. Neither critic focuses much on the aspect of development. Beebe
does focus on the development of the artist, but casts it as a vast struggle between
opposing archetypes. The creative consciousness is engaged in an eternal struggle
between solipsistic withdrawal from life (the ivory tower) and intense surrender to it
(the sacred fount).

Esty, on the other hand, questions development altogether. Focusing more
broadly on modern *Bildungsromane*, he equates development with imperialism. He can

12 Ibid., p. 25.
do this because he “[takes] the bildungsroman as a generic ideal more than an empirical object or set in literary history.” The “frozen youth” of early twentieth-century development novels constitute a modern critique of the notion of national progress. For Esty, development is primarily social, political, economic, and national progress. He neglects any idea of personal or ethical development, of development in consciousness. Also, because he assumes a model of development that is linear, stable, and complete, he reads any disturbance of development as antidevelopment, rather than as an integral moment of development. Posing twentieth-century cultural difference as antidote to nineteenth-century historical progress, Esty fails to see that difference is the basis of ethical development, that difference and progress can go hand in hand. This becomes most clear in my analysis of Rachel’s relationships with Helen and Terence in The Voyage Out. It is in that novel that Esty’s account falters most. He considers both Portrait and The Voyage Out “novels without arcs,” where Stephen and Rachel do not develop in any appreciable way. Although Stephen’s ultimate flight might reasonably be considered stalled development (which, nevertheless, is development), Rachel’s

13 Esty, p. 18.

14 See below, pp. 158-73.

15 Esty, p. 159.
death is definitely not a "lyric" withdrawal from life.\textsuperscript{16} A close reading of the novel makes clear that her death is neither lyric nor regressive.

All of these critics acknowledge the centrality of the artistic consciousness. None of them adequately tells the story of development in the modern \textit{Künstlerroman}. I believe that is because they do not sufficiently consider the nature and role of embodiment. Development in these novels proceeds along a number of different trajectories, which correspond to different ways in which the body is conceived. When characters are primarily determined by physical sensation and characteristics, development is described in terms of evolution and historical progress. When they are determined by pre-existing patterns and language, development is described in terms of repeating cycles and endless play. When characters are considered individuals relating to other individuals, development becomes a matter of personal maturation. The primary dilemma that these developing protagonists face is how to connect with the world and with others through the creative act.\textsuperscript{17} To do this, Edwin, Stephen, and Rachel must confront their bodily experience.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 2.

\textsuperscript{17} Many critics cite this problem of connection as a central theme in the genre. For a clear account, see Carl Malmgren, "‘From Work to Text’: The Modernist and Postmodernist \textit{Künstlerroman}.”
The Body

What is the body? Why is it central to this account of the *Künstlerroman*? Most basically, the body is the center of our lived experience of the world—sensations, emotions, thoughts, actions, and interactions. Less basically, in reading *The Voyage Out*, I identify six narrative modes that Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf use to describe the body and physical experience: the natural, the historical, the archetypal, the semiotic, the philosophical, and the ethical. Each of these dimensions of conscious experience corresponds to different ideas of time and space, of union and difference, of self and other. The natural mode has to do with immediate physical sensations and, at its other extreme, evolution. Various categories of experience—race, class, gender, nationality, and so on—characterize the historical mode. Archetypal consciousness is an atemporal iteration of established cycles and patterns. Linguistic play, displacement, and deferral are the emblems of semiotic consciousness. The philosophical mode of describing conscious experience values concentrated moments of significance, what Woolf has called “moments of being.” Finally, the ethical mode of bodily consciousness is based on autonomous action and interaction. So the body has at least these six dimensions of experience, and likely many more. Although I’ve isolated them here, in the novels, these

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18 See below, pp. 139-57.

19 “A Sketch of the Past,” in *Moments of Being*, pp. 70-73.
aspects of physical existence and experience are layered and interpenetrating. The body can be understood as the entirety of these kinds of experiences as well as any one particular mode.

As to the question of what the body has got to do with the *Künstlerroman*, that is the subject of the first chapter of this study. To give an abbreviated answer, the *Künstlerroman* is intimately tied to the field of aesthetics. The genre arises on the heels of modern aesthetics in eighteenth-century Germany and assumes issues of the artist, art, and creativity as its defining topoi. Modern aesthetics, in turn, is founded on a deviation from, a near reversal of, the traditional sense of aesthetics.

*Aisthesis* originally refers to the entire range of sensory and bodily perception, not to art in specific. In 1750, the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten uses the term “aesthetic” to refer to “the art of beautiful thought” and “the criticism of good taste.” All subsequent thinkers, despite Kant’s objections to the contrary, adopt Baumgarten’s sense of the word. So at the heart of aesthetics is the removal of the body and the senses from their rightful place. This, then, is the sense of aesthetics that the *Künstlerroman* inherits. What is excised etymologically returns in the themes, structures, and resolution of the genre based on notions of the modern aesthetic. Senses, the body, and embodiment dominate the three *Künstlerromane* I will examine.

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20 OED.
In addition to this etymological link between the body and the *Künstlerroman*, the fact of growing from adolescence into adulthood makes prominent issues of sexuality, physical sensation, autonomy, and connection. In these novels, the body also acts as a counterweight to the protagonists’ impulse to withdraw into disembodied vision. Most body-oriented criticism of these novels tends to draw on the first four ways of conceiving the body: as natural and physiological, as historically determined category, as cyclical pattern and archetype, and as linguistic sign. In writing about *The Voyage Out*, I demonstrate why basing our understanding of the body on only these dimensions of experience gets us no closer to solving the riddle of the *Künstlerroman*—namely, how a disembodied consciousness connects with the world in a creative act.

**Selection and Method**

Of all the modern British *Künstlerromane*, why have I chosen these three? *Clayhanger*, *Portrait*, and *The Voyage Out* are representative of the genre and, taken together, tell a compelling story. Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf, as major writers of the period, express its prevalent concerns. And yet they are enough at odds with each other that considering them together offers a sweeping view of the issues that accompany embodiment. Each writer approaches the question of the body and of creativity from a different perspective, which is expressed in the three very different artist figures they
create. Edwin is preoccupied with his drawings and watercolors until he is compelled to take over the family printing business and settle into marriage. As Stephen’s childhood fascination with words, sounds, and rhythms develops, he begins to value language and poetry above all else. Rachel’s love of music transforms from a solitary preoccupation to a creative activity that connects her with others. Each of these novels follows the development of these young artists along various arcs—from cognition to sensation, from interaction to solipsism, from withdrawn reflection to active creation.

Proceeding loosely from a material to an ideal to an ethical aesthetics, these novels tell an evolving story of the relationship between consciousness and world, between self and other. In the course of doing so, notions about what constitutes art and the artist are challenged and reworked. Each of these novels also embodies overlapping perspectives that work with and against each other. It is Woolf who first considers Clayhanger and Portrait together in her essay “Modern Fiction.” She deems Bennett a materialist, Joyce a spiritualist, and remains unsatisfied with either alternative as the model for good fiction. By adding The Voyage Out to the conversation that she began, we begin to see what Woolf’s literary solution to her critical quandary is.

21 Although we often see Rachel simply playing the piano, she does create a daring piece of music during the dance at the hotel. She strings together bits of a sonata, a minuet, and old English hunting songs and hymns, and creates an exaggerated rhythm for which the guests invent a new dance. The Voyage Out, p. 152.

22 In The Common Reader, pp. 146-54. This essay first appears in 1919 as “Modern Novels” in the Times Literary Supplement.
In no way is this an exhaustive account of these novels. I say nothing of the beauty and originality of Joyce’s prose, or of the power with which Bennett writes about landscape, industry, and class in the Potteries, or of the colonialist implications of Woolf’s setting. Other critics have written extensively on these topics. Nor am I saying that these novels are only *Künstlerromane* and, as such, that their literary value rests on whether or not these artists manage to connect with the world in the act of creation.23 Each novel presents a different possibility of what it means to be an artist. I read these novels with a particular focus: how the experience of the body is understood and how that understanding relates to creative action. I offer not a plenary account of these novels but a magnification of a single thread, whose implications reverberate throughout these writers’ works.

My argument relies foremost on a close reading of issues of embodiment within these novels. I focus on the development of character and the ways in which the body is narrated. I use letters, journals, and autobiographical material not to establish intent but to demonstrate relevance and resonance. Where possible, I have read the works that are referred to in these novels. With the exception of the first chapter, I have mostly relegated critical perspectives on relevant issues to the footnotes. I have done this primarily to make the story as readable as possible.

23 These novels can be and have been read fruitfully within other generic contexts—travel, colonialist, marriage, *Bildungsroman*, etc. I am grateful to Sarah Cole for raising this issue of multiple genres.
The body of this dissertation consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, I trace the development of notions of the aesthetic from classical to modern thinkers. I do this briefly and with a particular focus on how different thinkers conceive and deal with notions of the body and of sensation. Beginning with Descartes, we begin to see the various ways, both materialist and idealist, in which the body becomes objectified and loses its central role in the field of aesthetics. The Künstlerroman genre inherits this disembodied idea of aesthetics.

The second chapter is a close reading of Edwin Clayhanger’s development from a demure, disembodied artist to a burdened, disembodied husband. Edwin’s increased awareness of physical sensation and pleasure does not grant him the autonomy that is necessary to create. Being embodied requires more than having heightened sensory experiences. Although he learns to relate to another person, Edwin does so at the expense of his own creative life—autonomy and connection remain opposed at the end of the novel.

Stephen Dedalus, likewise, remains disembodied throughout Portrait, but instead of reaching out for connection, he withdraws completely into an inner world. Although he compulsively and graphically reports the experiences of his body, Stephen does so always from the safe remove of a reflecting mind. His body is something that needs to be managed and controlled, from without as well as from within. Stephen resorts to vision, myth, and language to overcome what he cannot bear to face in life.
Of these artist-protagonists, it is Rachel Vinrace who learns how to connect self and world in a creative act. Her development, neither easy nor stable, requires consistent effort and exertion, in both what she does and how she relates. As Rachel’s sense of self develops from vague to definite, her consciousness also develops from enclosed and reflexive to shared and creative. In this first novel, we see the underpinnings of the roving, shared consciousness that comes to define Woolf’s major novels. In the final chapter, I examine Woolf’s new possibility for the genre—an embodied consciousness that becomes the basis for an ethical aesthetics.
Chapter 1: Aesthetics and the Body

“Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body.”

Terry Eagleton, The Ideology of the Aesthetic

The novel of artistic development is a narrative of the protagonist’s increasing awareness of his body in relation to, often in conflict with, his evolution as an artist. A literary counterpart to the study of aesthetics, the genre deals with many of the same issues and conflicts. Chief among them is the relationship between mind and body. The Greek origin of the word “aesthetic” supports this assertion. Originally meaning “the perception of the external world by the senses,” aiisthesis refers to the entire range of sensory and bodily perception, and not to art in particular or to reason in general. Nevertheless, modern aesthetics has become an account of the relationship between the

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1 Eagleton makes the connection between aesthetics and the body in order to argue that aesthetics is simultaneously an instrument of capitalist ideology and the place from which to launch a challenge against it (The Ideology of the Aesthetic, p. 13). Aesthetics becomes a central philosophical category so that the German feudal state in the eighteenth century can secure its authority over the daily sensory lives of the people. Perception is wrested away from the subject and inserted under the firm grip of reason. Although Eagleton’s argument is compelling, his purpose in linking the body with aesthetic theory diverges from that of the present study. Eagleton’s interest in the body is as a site of political challenge; my interest in the body is as the place where self and other are identical, which identity does not mean sameness.

2 OED.
self-conscious mind, which has been the prevalent concern of Western thought since
Descartes, and the world. The body and sensory perception are ignored, denigrated, or
turned into a fetish. The conflation of aesthetics with matters of taste and art gains
prominence in eighteenth-century Germany, and reaches its apex with Pater’s use of the
term to describe the late nineteenth-century movement that advocated “art for art’s
sake.” So the distinction that is originally made in the field of aesthetics is not between
self-consciousness and the world with art as the mediating term, but between self and
world with the body as the mediating term.

Beginning with eighteenth-century German idealism, a disembodied notion of
art replaces the body as the middle term between consciousness and the external world.
This is the model inherited by the modern Künstlerroman, which is mainly concerned
with how an artist-protagonist might connect with the world through creative activity.
Although this model is based on the suppression of the body, which as the mediating
factor between mind and world was central to the original sense of aisthesis, the genre
cannot escape the body. What is formally excised from the genre—the mediating role of
the body—returns in these novels as a central thematic concern and also as the basis for

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Kant tries unsuccessfully to return to the original sense of the word as sensuous perception
“after Alexander Baumgarten had taken it in German to mean ‘criticism of taste’ (1750s), but
Baumgarten’s sense attained popularity in English c.1830s (despite scholarly resistance) and
removed the word from any philosophical base.” Etymonline. 7 May 2012.
the most compelling resolution of the genre’s dilemma. The question of the protagonist’s relationship to his body is key to any account of the Künstlerroman.

A brief history of the field of aesthetics will be useful in seeing how the body lost its mediating function between consciousness and the world. The modern preoccupation with aesthetics finds its center in eighteenth-century Germany, where at the same time the genre of the Künstlerroman is born. With the philosophy of Kant, and later Hegel, German idealism finds its fullest expression. Both philosophers, although to different effect, regard the aesthetic as the mediation between cognitive understanding and sensory perception. British thinkers take up these issues with characteristic common sense. Unlike the German philosophers, the British writers do not construct comprehensive philosophical systems. Their approach is empirical, more a psychology of the aesthetic than a philosophy of art. Perception and sensation, whether exalted or degraded, dominate the thought of writers from Shaftesbury to Wilde. Neither the modern disregard of nor obsession with the body gets at the issue of embodiment, because both attitudes consider the body an object divorced from personal agency.

There remains the question of where to begin the story of aesthetics. Since this is a study of modern British novels written within a genre founded in eighteenth-century Germany, it would be useful to examine the aesthetic tradition of the period in both countries. The period is from the Enlightenment to the early twentieth century. I mean the term “aesthetic” in its original sense, specifically the embodied relationship between
human consciousness and the world. Although the study of aesthetics reaches a certain climax during the Enlightenment, it owes a great debt to the thought of Descartes. And, in order to avoid the impression that aesthetics was immaculately conceived by Enlightenment philosophy, I begin the story of the aesthetic tradition with the Greeks.

Classical Aesthetics

In Plato, we find intact the distinction between mind and body, intellect and sensation. In his figure of the divided line, Plato illustrates a hierarchy of cognition that ranges from pure intellection, the realm of Form, to mere imagination, the realm of art. Art is equated with image, shadow, and reflection as twice removed from the Idea. The sensible world, itself cast out from the realm of knowledge (noesis) into the realm of opinion (pistis), occupies the intermediary position between Form and image. Neither sensation nor imagination can have any knowledge of the essence of things: “The artist, we say, this maker of images, knows nothing of the reality, but only the appearance.” Essential knowledge is available only to intellect, whose chief agent is the philosopher.

Although he inherits Plato’s conception of art as mimetic, Aristotle rejects the notion of a realm of Form that is unaffected by the sensible world and a realm of

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4 Republic, Book VI, 509.

5 Ibid., Book X, 601.
imagination that has no effect on reason. For Aristotle, the senses are man’s primary source of knowledge. Sensation occupies the mediate position between imagination and judgment. In *De Anima*, he writes, “For imagination is different from either perceiving or discursive thinking, though it is not found without sensation, or judgment without it.”6 The imagination organizes sensory perceptions into images that are then available to discursive knowledge. Plato and Aristotle represent two positions regarding the function of art that persist in different ways in subsequent Western thought on aesthetics: imagination and sensation either as degraded forms of reason or as mediators between self and world.7

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6 Book 3, Chapter 3, 427.

7 For a more detailed account than is possible here of the relationship between classical aesthetics and the modern tradition, see M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, where the author distinguishes the classical from the modern tradition as a move from a mimetic to a creative view of art. Also, for a panoramic consideration of the historical relationship between mind and body from the perspective of the soul, see Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukács distinguishes between classical “integrated civilizations” where self and world were in concert and the modern “problematic civilization” where the self experiences an irremediable break with the world. It is best to let Frank Kermode have the last word. In *Romantic Image*, he argues that the sheer diversity of where various critics choose to place the rupture between a golden period of classical unity and modern fragmentation renders suspect each attempt at such totalization. In fact, Kermode identifies this myth of rupture as the defining historical myth of Romanticism.
Descartes

This brief excursion into classical thought prepares us for the radical departure of Descartes. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Descartes invents the modern subject. He denies the existence of the external world only in order to assert it more forcefully as the product of the human mind. Gone is the classical notion of an external world that is mediated in various ways. What remains is the independent human subject reflecting on his own existence and creating the world for himself in the process of this reflection. The only thing the human subject can be immediately certain of is his own existence: not what he is but that he is. The world and the body recede; the reflecting mind creates whatever exists.

Having established his own existence, Descartes sets out to prove the existence of God. His proof of the existence of God in the “foremost argument” is that God must exist because the idea of God as an infinite being cannot be created by the finite human mind. Something infinite, namely God, must have caused the idea in his mind. Just as the existence of God is founded on the idea of God in the mind of “I”, so is the existence of “I” founded on the idea of God in the mind of “I.” In other words, the idea of God as an infinite being in the human mind proves both the existence of God as well as the existence of man. Something caused the idea and something different is having the idea. Only two things exist: God and the self-reflecting subject. This is the breathtaking
innovation of Descartes—that one can proceed directly from idea to existence, from mind to being, *cogito ergo sum*. God created the subject; the subject creates the world.⁸ In other words, Descartes bypasses the body and the external world as altogether immaterial to existence.

For Descartes, against the Greeks, imagination is neither degraded reason nor mediation between reason and sensation. In the second Meditation, he writes that his perception of wax “is neither an act of vision, nor of touch, nor of imagination, and has never been such although it may have appeared formerly to be so, but only an intuition of the mind [. . .].”⁹ Descartes completely does away with the body as a source of knowing. The mind knows the substance of itself and the substance of the wax directly, that is without recourse to either sensation or imagination. By making the substantiality of the sensible world a function of the human mind, Descartes enshrines self-conscious reflection as the bedrock of modern existence.

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⁸ Porter argues that Descartes’s innovation is to transform the Christian soul into the modern *cogito*, removing it from the domain of religion and making it an object of philosophy and science. See *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. 68.

⁹ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 56.
The British Reaction to Descartes: Empiricism

By rejecting both sensation and imagination, Descartes both incites and divides subsequent champions of the body and of imagination. Thomas Hobbes’ refutation of Descartes initiates the enduring British tradition of reliance on empirical inquiry. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes argues that sensory perception precedes human consciousness. He writes that “there is no conception in a man’s mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense.”10 An absolute materialist, Hobbes denies the existence of anything that cannot be empirically determined. He does not, though, deny the existence of human consciousness. Rather, he identifies the nature of consciousness as material. Nothing immaterial exists. Human consciousness, therefore, is the result of various biological and sensory processes that mechanically give rise to ideas, imagination, and memory. As Descartes denies materiality independent of consciousness, Hobbes denies consciousness independent of materiality. One is bound by a circular abstract speculation that allows no connection to the world and the other by an essentialism that allows no freedom from physiological determinism. These are the two poles of the aesthetic tradition.

It is up to John Locke to mediate. Following Hobbes, Locke dismisses the possibility of knowledge that exists apart from sensory experience. Man is born a *tabula rasa*, an unformed mind without any impressions of the world. Knowledge is a process

10 *Leviathan*, p. 21. Part 1, Chapter 1.
of sensory accretion whereby man reaches sufficient, if not absolute, truths. Sensation, though, is divided into two parts: external sense and internal sense. By internal sense Locke means “that notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them, by which means there come to be ideas of those operations in the understanding.” Locke adopts Hobbes’ eminence of sensory experience but includes within it Cartesian reflection as an internal sense. Locke rescues man from mere corporeality by positing consciousness, not substance, as the source of identity. It is the continuity through time of a self-reflecting consciousness, rooted as it is in experience, that determines what man is. Bodily existence does not determine selfhood.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, although tutored by Locke, does not inherit his notion of the continuity of self as a function of consciousness. Rather, he extols the mind’s momentary appreciation of beauty, without any concern for the continuity of experience. Beauty usurps sensation as the mediator between mind and world. Shaftesbury’s thought is considered to be more influential on the German tradition than on the British, and marks the beginning of the conflation of the aesthetic with art. He advances the idea of artist as Prometheus, hemmed by rules of taste and

11 An Essay Concerning the Understanding, Knowledge, Opinion, and Assent (1690), p. 63. Book II, Chapter 1, Section 4.

12 See Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, pp. 200-02. He identifies Shaftesbury as the chief British proponent of organic imagination, which founds creativity on spontaneous internal energy and
decorum rather than limited by an external world. Writing against Hobbesian materialism, Shaftesbury posits beauty as an independent value, elevating above all else the moments of genius and beauty as functions of intellect. Just as God creates the beauty of nature, the artist creates the beauty of the work of art. In his collected writings _Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times_ (1711), Shaftesbury writes, “[. . .] there is nothing so divine as beauty: which belonging not to body, nor having any principle or existence but in mind and reason, is alone discovered and acquired by this diviner part, when it inspects itself, the only object worthy of itself. For whatever is void of mind, is void and darkness to the mind’s eye.”

Beauty exists only in mind and reason, not in the world or in the human body. Completely outside the realm of sensation, beauty is apprehended when the mind inspects itself. Because no external object can produce beauty, nothing outside of the mind’s own processes is worthy of notice.

Although he follows the Cartesian insistence on a self-reflecting and self-enclosed mind, Shaftesbury takes issue with Descartes’ _cogito_. By founding his proof of existence on circular thinking, Descartes neglects the more fundamental question: what is the nature of the thinking “I”? Certainly not a sensate body, Shaftesbury answers. What distinguishes man is knowledge, beauty, and virtue, none of which has anything growth. This is opposed to the mode of mechanical fancy, which operates by laws of association and combination of parts.

to do with the gross body. Not only does beauty not belong to the body, but following
Plato’s notion of Forms, no virtues find their source in bodily sensation: “‘Tis thus the
improving mind, slightly surveying other objects, and passing over bodies and the
common forms (where only a shadow of beauty rests), ambitiously presses onward to its
source, and views the original of form and order in that which is intelligent.”
Shaftesbury posits sentiment and feeling as the bridge between reason and world.
Sentiment, though, is not bodily sensation. Sentiment and feeling are related to the
imagination. Manners and politeness rule as virtue becomes a matter of taste.

David Hume makes absolute Shaftesbury’s conflation of ethics and aesthetics, of
beauty and virtue, by claiming reason itself a function of sentiment: “all the materials of
thinking are derived either from our outward or inward sentiment.” Nothing can be
known directly or completely; all knowledge is filtered through human experience.
Although he exalts sensibility, Hume does not dismiss bodily sensation altogether. He
writes that “the most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation.” Following

14 Ibid., p. 427.

15 Eagleton writes that by aestheticizing ethics, that is, by turning virtue into a matter of taste,
ideology loses “its coercive force and reappear[s] as a principle of spontaneous consensus within
social life.” p. 41. See Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the French Revolution for an appeal to
manners and beauty as ethical virtues.

Locke, his concept of perception combines impressions and ideas, sensation and reflection. In fact, only perception exists. Human experience cannot provide any basis for constructing universal truths. It is impossible to move from particular subjective experience to general objective speculation. Since reason is mere habit of association and belief is fervent feeling, all that remains is custom. Although Hume dismantles the Cartesian monopoly of self-reflecting reason, he does not counter with immediate sensation. Instead, in his concepts of imagination and custom, he introduces reflection to the realm of sensation, rendering sensation less immediate. Hobbes’ push toward a sensibility that dethrones reason ends in a localized subjectivism. Descartes’s self-conscious mind has become Hume’s self-conscious perception.

The German Reaction to Descartes: Idealism

As Hobbes’ rejection of Descartes’s empirical idealism begins the British inquiry into experience and sensation, Kant’s refutation of Descartes initiates the German tradition of aesthetics as systematic philosophy. Kant is caught between Descartes’s


18 My understanding of the relationship between Descartes, Kant, and Hegel owes a great deal to a series of independent studies with D.G. Leahy. The clearest expression of this thought can be found in Faith and Philosophy, in which Leahy examines the foundational effect Christian faith has had on the idea of mind in Western philosophy.
disavowal of the external world and Hume’s reduction of reason to sentiment. For Kant, against Descartes, the sensible world exists apart from the reflecting mind. Although he inherits the Cartesian duality between res cogitans and res extensa as the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal, Kant, unlike Descartes, grants substance to both realms. He writes in the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) that “the simple but empirically determined consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of external objects in space.”  

Therefore, the mind and the world both exist. This is the practical reason that Kant posits against Descartes’s speculative reason.

Although both mind and world exist, neither can be known in particular (as phenomenal substance). Both subject and object (Ding an sich) can only be known as universal properties (as noumenal appearance), through a series of conceptualizations and judgments. This is because it is impossible to go from consciousness to world, from idea to being, from thought to thing. What is real cannot be reduced to thought

19 p. 167.

Interestingly, Woolf echoes Kant’s notion of the Ding an sich in her formulation of art and the artist. She writes, “[. . .] we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.” See below, pp. 129-37 and pp. 208-09.

Eagleton notes that although Kant “secures for the subject a real environment,” it is at the expense of the subject’s power. The world exists but is not fully accessible to the human mind. The Ideology of the Aesthetic, p. 78.
(Descartes) or to feeling (Shaftesbury/Hume). The “foremost argument” of Descartes depends on demonstration by causality. For Kant, causality is only operative in the sensible world, not in the operations of the mind.

With Kant’s writings, aesthetics becomes a central philosophical discipline. Whereas imagination was usurped by immediate cognition in Descartes, for Kant, like Aristotle, aesthetic judgment mediates between pure reason and the world of perception. In Critique of Judgment (1790), Kant advances universal subjectivity as the standard of aesthetic judgment. It is the form of the representations and not the sensations of the subject that is universal. Aesthetic judgment, based on universal form, is disinterested, free from concerns of utility and from responsibility to the object. It nevertheless, by virtue of the universality of form, is compatible with theoretical reason and the morally good.

The idealism of Descartes finds its absolute expression in Hegel. The movement from Descartes to Hegel is one of an expanding cogito. The Cartesian mind is immediately aware only of its own existence. In Kant, both the mind and the world are immediately given to the subject as phenomenal substance. With Hegel mind, world, and God come into immediate being as Absolute Idea, whose first sensuous appearance is in art. The value of art is in its position as the first moment of the unfolding of the idea

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22 Its awareness of the existence of God is mediate—through the operation of causality in the “foremost argument.”
toward complete self-consciousness. The distinction between idea and being is finally obliterated.

Against Kantian natural reason, Hegel reinstates Descartes’s speculative reason, which now includes not only self-knowing but also absolute knowledge of the world and of God. Only cognition is immediate in Descartes. For Kant, both cognition and sensation are immediate. Hegel mediates both cognition and sensation through the infinite in an act of supreme idealism. The infinite causes the finite in Descartes. Both the infinite and the finite exist independently for Kant. For Hegel only the infinite is: “the finite has vanished in the infinite and what is, is only the infinite.”²³ The nature of the finite is self-negation, an absolute need to transcend itself. Outside of the Absolute Idea there is nothing. The world exists and is available to the subject, but only as an idea, as the Absolute Idea.

In discussing the aesthetic theories of Kant and Hegel, my focus has not been their ideas about the function of art in the world but rather their conception of the relationship between mind and world, between the infinite and the finite. In keeping with this original sense of *aisthesis*, I employ the notion of the aesthetic in the particular sense of the creative relationship between consciousness and the world as manifest in the entire range of human sensory perception. Whereas the German tradition tends toward systematic philosophy, the British thought of the period is concerned mostly

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with what can be determined empirically. British aesthetics focus primarily on the individual’s conscious experience of the world through sensation.

Materialism Meets Idealism: Psychology of the Aesthetic and British Romanticism

In this common concern about the relationship between mind and world, there is a direct link between the aesthetic theories of Hobbes and Locke and the nineteenth-century beginnings of modern psychology. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth write that “mental physiology” wrests issues of cognition and sensation “away from the abstract realm of metaphysics, and [subjects] them to empirical criteria and practical application based on the study of physiology.” Psychology, then, as applied aesthetics. Both aesthetics and psychology plumb the relationship between consciousness and the world. Each has moments, albeit with qualification, in which it considers the sensate human body the center of both cognition and life.

24 Eagleton attributes this difference to economic and political factors: German rationalism as a product of noble fiefdom and British materialism as an extension of mercantilism and a rising middle class. pp. 31-33.

25 Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890, p. xiv. This is an invaluable collection of writings that displays the range and diversity of Victorian psychology and thinking about the body.
If the German tradition originates a philosophy of art, the British establishes a psychology of the aesthetic, focusing on the experiential relationship between mental processes and sensory perception. The mind and the world are both open to direct empirical inquiry conducted chiefly through an examination of the sensations of the body. More explicitly than his predecessors, David Hartley in his *Observations on Man* (1749) declares that all mental phenomena are founded on physiological grounds. Whereas Kant takes up the ideas of Shaftesbury and Hume, Hartley refutes them in favor of a return to Hobbesian materialism. There are no mental ideas that are not a function of the brain and nervous system. Sensations become ideas through a process of repeated associations that create physical vibrations between the brain and nerves. Hartley writes:

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26 In a letter to J. B. Priestley, Arnold Bennett writes, “There is a lot of new observation about the relations of men and women—what I believe is called psychology.” *Letters of Arnold Bennett*, ed. James Hepburn, v. 3, p. 296.

27 Along similar lines, Abrams consistently refers to the English tradition ranging from Hobbes and Hume through Coleridge as a “psychology of art.” See *The Mirror and the Lamp*, pp. 156-225.

28 As demonstration of the relevance of psychology to aesthetics and both to the body, Hartley’s two-volume work opens with, “Man consists of two parts, body and mind.”

29 Abrams connects this mechanical model of human understanding in Hartley to Newton’s science of mechanics: the units of ideas are particles, the motion of ideas is like the motion of matter, and there is a general force that guides motion. See *The Mirror and the Lamp*, pp. 162-63.
Since therefore sensations are conveyed to the mind, by the efficiency of corporeal causes of the medullary substance, as is acknowledged by all physiologists and physicians, it seems to me, that the powers of generating ideas, and raising them by association, must also rise from corporeal causes, and consequently admit of an explication from the subtle influences of the small parts of matter upon each other.\textsuperscript{30}

Hartley, like Hobbes, insists that the only thing that exists is matter. All else, including consciousness, arises from some motion of matter. By borrowing the methods of the physical sciences, theorists from Hobbes through Hartley consider the movement from sensation to idea a mechanical process: sense impressions are received particles that are organized by association, all of which process is governed by known physical laws.

Victorian studies in physiognomy, phrenology, and associationism unfold from this materialist conception of the human mind. The work of John Caspar Lavater introduces physiognomy, which regards physical form as a manifestation of the mind.\textsuperscript{31} Although decidedly idealist in terms of advocating an animating inner spirit as the source of external form, Lavater nevertheless popularizes the notion of reading the body for meaning.\textsuperscript{32} He divides the body into three centers: the belly and productive organs

\textsuperscript{30} Observations on Man, p. 46. Volume II, Chapter 1, Section 2.

\textsuperscript{31} Reminiscing about his first memory of literature, Arnold Bennett recalls a childhood scene where he is walking around the kitchen holding “a single leaf which had escaped from a printed book.” Although he was too young to read, Bennett attaches supreme significance to the contents of the page. “One of these three, I fancy, it must surely have been…Lavater’s Physiognomy, Blair’s Sermons, or Burnet’s Own Time.” The Truth About an Author, pp. 9-10.
as the seat of the animal life, the chest and heart as the center of the moral life, and the head and eyes as emblems of the intellectual life. What remains is for the physiognomist to use his powers of precise observation to read human characteristics, which process and result inspire awe in the unity of God’s work.

Although his intention is idealist, Lavater’s method is wholly materialist. In *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789), he writes that man “exists and moves in the body he inhabits, as in his element. This material man must become the subject of observation. All the knowledge we can obtain of man must be gained through the medium of our senses.” Sensory perception, although in the service of a Christian holism, is the primary source of knowledge. Cognition does not proceed from the inside out but from the outside in.

Although it shares with physiognomy the method of reading the body as sign, phrenology is avowedly materialistic. Unlike physiognomy, which arbitrarily assigns various meanings to physical characteristics, phrenology distinguishes itself by its reliance on anatomy and physiology. Founded on Franz Joseph Gall’s physiological work on the brain, phrenology was popularized in England by George Combe’s *The

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32 As evidence of the popularity of physiognomy, Taylor and Shuttleworth include a sketch by Dickens in which he analyzes the dispositions of his neighbors according to the physiognomy of their door knockers. In *Embodied Selves*, pp. 22-23.

33 Ibid., p. 8.
Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects (1829). The brain, considered the organ of the mind, houses various faculties in different locations. By examining the contours of the skull, the phrenologist determines the strengths and weaknesses of the person’s intellectual, moral, and animal faculties. Genetic inheritance determines the dominant portion of man’s capacities, but there remains room to exercise one’s will to remedy constitutional weaknesses.

Whereas Hobbes and Hume posit the physical sensation of an external world as the means, and sometimes ends, of cognition, with Lavater and Combe the body itself becomes subject to external observation and analysis. It is no longer man’s sense impressions of the world but one man’s sense impressions of another man that animates these studies. While the general import and method of these studies is materialist, by turning the body into an object of analysis, albeit empirical, these attempts paradoxically lead to the ultimate usurpation of the body by modern consciousness. For these thinkers, embodiment is a matter of consciousness being determined by physiological processes.

34 Combe’s book had sold 90,000 copies by 1851 and, according to Harriet Martineau, “was outstripped in all-time readership only by the Bible, Pilgrim’s Progress, and Robinson Crusoe.” Ibid., p. 4.

35 Combe and his followers used phrenological knowledge to campaign for various social causes: criminal legislation, education, industrial employment, women’s rights. It was also used to justify racial and gender stereotypes. Ibid., p. 5.
This prevailing movement to embody the mind is accomplished at the cost of diminished focus on an external world. As the boundary of what is substantial draws inward to man’s body, the world recedes into background. The step from body as object of study to consciousness as the subject conducting this study is a short one. Whether speculative or empirical, whether man transcends his body or is a function of it, such thought has the shared effect of turning the body into an object.

Both the idealist and the materialist approaches take self-consciousness as their center. The former inspects human consciousness through disembodied self-reflection, the latter through determined physical sensation. If the aesthetic is, as I contend, the creative relationship between consciousness and the world, what is lost in this focus inward is man’s creative relationship with the world. This loss enables the aesthetic dimension to be recast as the relationship between consciousness and art rather than consciousness and the world.

Even though movements in phrenology and physiognomy advance British materialism, Hartley does not pass without challenge. Coleridge vigorously denies Hartley’s insistence on the physiological basis of all mental functioning. Hartley’s

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36 Although the focus here has been on physiognomy and phrenology, the science and literature of the period abound with various physical sensations: reflexes, hysteria, mesmerism, shock, amnesia, spasms, and fight/flight impulses.

37 See Kermode, p. 112, and Abrams, pp. 158-77, where Coleridge’s innovation is characterized in terms of a shift from a mechanical psychology of art to an organic one.
associationist thought neglects all notions of will, reason, and imagination, subjecting man to “the despotism of outward impressions, and that of senseless and passive memory.”\(^{38}\) In his *Treatise on Method* (1818), Coleridge insists that cognition begins with the mind:

> Events and images, the lively and spirit-stirring machinery of the external world, are like light, and air, and moisture, to the seed of the Mind, which would else rot and perish. In all processes of mental evolution the objects of the senses must stimulate the Mind; and the Mind must in turn assimilate and digest the food which it thus receives from without.\(^{39}\)

Coleridge relegates mechanics to the external world. Spirit and mind, although dependent on the senses, have a separate existence that is organic like “seeds” rather than mechanical. Against Hartley, mind and matter are not of the same substance. Mind is what grows, what is active; the world is passive food.

In *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge assigns all of the mind’s mechanical properties of association to memory and fancy. For reason and imagination he reserves vitality and creativity, which cannot be reduced to physiological functioning. Whereas the empiricist tradition elevates the body, but in mechanical terms, Coleridge aggrandizes the consciousness, but in physical terms. His organic theory of


psychological invention abounds with metaphors of living plants and growth, a
veritable “jungle of vegetation.” Although equally as deterministic as mechanical
theories of mind in so far as organic growth unfolds beyond the reach of conscious
intention, Coleridge’s theory of imagination nevertheless retains a privileged position
for artistic design. Knowledge derives as much through revelation as through sensory
perception. Coleridge’s response to Hartley’s associationism is important because it
proposes a creative theory of mind to counter the prevailing physiological model. British
Romanticism in this way is much more closely allied with German idealism than its own
empiricist lineage.

Further complicating matters, Herbert Spencer introduces the idea of
evolutionary progress into the relationship between consciousness and the world. The
mind is neither entirely creative nor wholly determined by individual physiology. In
The Principles of Psychology (1855), published before Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859),
Spencer argues that human consciousness is the result of a long process of man’s
physical adaptation to the environment. Comparing “mental life” with “bodily life,”
Spencer writes that, “regarded under every variety of aspect, intelligence is found to

40 Ibid., p. 169.

41 A short time after Clayhanger is published, reading Spencer’s Autobiography, Bennett notes in
his journal entry on September 15, 1910 that Spencer’s First Principles (1862) “by filling me up
with the sense of causation everywhere, has altered my whole view of life, and undoubtedly
immensely improved it...You can see ‘First Principles’ in nearly every line I write.” The Journals
of Arnold Bennett, v. 1, p. 383.
consist in the establishment of correspondences between relations in the organism and relations in the environment [. . .].”

By ascribing both man’s mental and physical development to evolutionary adaptation, Spencer inserts the external world between Coleridge’s insular notions of consciousness and sensation.

As Spencer interjects evolution between Hartley’s materialism and Coleridge’s creative imagination, George Henry Lewes intervenes with the notion of the social. In The Foundations of a Creed (1874), he writes:

If there is a valid objection against the functions of the brain being investigated in the cabinets of metaphysicians, there is an equally valid objection against intellectual and moral processes being sought in the laboratories of physiologists. To understand the Human Mind we must study it under its normal conditions, and these are social conditions [. . .].

Lewes offers the palimpsest as an alternative metaphor of mind to Locke’s tabula rasa.

The senses do inscribe impressions on the mind, but on a mind that is not blank and that has a history. The relationship between mind and world can be studied neither abstractly nor biologically. It must be studied in the context of man’s social, historical, and evolutionary existence.

Lewes adopts the associationist assertion that sensations create physical paths of discharge along the nervous system that spur motion and ideation. To this he appends

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43 In Taylor and Shuttleworth, p. 91.
the idea that this discharge is not altogether predictable. Over time these physical paths become automatic and descend beneath the notice of consciousness. Beneath consciousness means beyond control. What begins as physiological determinism leads to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are unexpected.

This unpredictable realm beneath consciousness is made explicit in the thought of William Carpenter. “Unconscious cerebration” accounts for those sensations and thoughts over which we have no conscious control.44 Uneasy at being at the mercy of unconscious whim, Carpenter works to regain man’s mastery. Between mind and body he asserts the will. Using the image of a rider trying to control a powerful horse as analogy to the relationship between mind and body, Carpenter bridles automatic and spontaneous sensation and thought. He claims the moral utility of the will in *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1874):

> [..] in the control which the Will can exert over the *direction* of the thoughts, and over the *motive force* exerted by the feelings, we have the evidence of a new and independent Power, which may either oppose or concur-with the automatic tendencies, and which, according as it is habitually exerted, tends to render the Ego a free agent. And, truly, in the existence of this Power, which is capable of thus regulating the very highest of those operations that are causally related to corporeal states, we find better evidence [..] that there *is* an entity wherein Man’s nobility essentially consists, which does not depend for its existence on any play of Physical or Vital forces, but which makes these forces subservient to its determinations. It is, in fact, in virtue of the Will, that we are *not*

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44 Ibid., p. 99.
mere thinking Automata [. . .].45

Neither a physical nor mental phenomenon, man’s will is rather the “finite representative” of an infinite will.46

While Spencer, Lewes, and Carpenter mediate between consciousness and physiology, Walter Pater advances Coleridge’s idea of cognition as revelation. Pater takes issue though with Coleridge’s reliance on nature to characterize the artistic mind. By subjecting the imagination to natural laws, Coleridge undermines the volition and consciousness of the artist. For Pater, moments, impressions, and visions mediate between the mind and the world. Rather, they more than mediate; they merge thought and sensation.47 Although consciousness and sensation are fused, the movement originates with and concludes in the mind. Pater makes his most influential statement of aesthetic practice in the “Conclusion” to The Renaissance (1873):

[. . .] when reflexion begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are

45 Ibid., p. 98.

46 Ibid., p. 99.

47 In The Last Romantics, Graham Hough writes that Pater’s “ideal is the kind of art where thought and its sensible embodiment are completely fused.” Cited in Kermode, p. 27.
extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind [. . .] each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.48

Pater’s fusion of mind and world is decidedly idealist. The mind is the agent, and objects dissipate into impressions. Mind and world come together, but in the medium of consciousness. It is not that mind is embodied but that the world is idealized. Coleridge challenges Hartley’s materialism; Pater reverses it completely.

Oscar Wilde makes absolute Pater’s idealism. Hobbes’ insistence on physical reality is now replaced by mental reality. The world of varied sensations has transformed into one of universal ideas. It is not objects that are known, but rather the mind’s own processes of knowing. Man is not created by the world he lives in; he creates the world:

For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence.49

48 p. 151.

Wilde distinguishes between sensory perception and creative conception. Sight has shifted from the sensory perception of an external world to the creative vision of an internal idea. What gives an object life is beauty. This is Shaftesbury’s Promethean ideal liberated from all moral and social constraints. Despite his reduction of the world to consciousness, Pater nevertheless grants a moral function to vision. Wilde refuses art any utility. The value of a work of art is solely its existence and beauty. Otherwise, “all art is quite useless.”

We conclude this survey of major shifts in the field of aesthetics with an influential American. William James is important to this debate not only because of his own work but because of the influence he had on Henri Bergson, who figures prominently for modern writers. James’ reliance on human experience as a “stream of thought” presages modern narrative technique as well as the entire field of phenomenology.

In his two-volume work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), James charts a middle course between consciousness and the world. Reality is neither mental nor material. It comprises a stream of moments, each experienced in a different way.

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50 See Kermode, pp. 25-28, where he discusses Pater’s attempt to incorporate the *utile* into the *dulce*.


52 *The Principles of Psychology*, v. 1, Chapter 9.
Experience itself is a synthesis of sensation and thought, perception and conception.

James recognizes the physiological basis of cognition but does not accept the associationist doctrine of repeated experience. Nothing happens twice in the same way:

“no state once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before.” On the other hand, James also rejects Hegel’s absolute idealism. The external world exists absolutely and independently of the human mind. James describes his notion of cognition as a

“thoroughgoing dualism”:

It supposes two elements, mind knowing and thing known, and treats them as irreducible. Neither gets out of itself or into the other, neither in any way is the other, neither makes the other. They just stand face to face in a common world, and one simply knows, or is known unto, its counterpart.

Like Kant, for James the world and the mind stand apart. Whereas Kant bridges this chasm with the form of universal judgment, James relies on human experience. The method of knowing one’s experience remains, nevertheless, Cartesian introspection, the mind reflecting on its own processes of knowing.

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53 Ibid., p. 230. This echoes Heraclitus’s fragment, “No man steps into the same river twice.” Whereas Heraclitus refers mainly to the external changing state of the river, James also has in mind the internal changing state of man.

54 Ibid., p. 218.
Aesthetics is the study of the creative relationship between consciousness and the world, specifically as man’s sensory perception of an external world. We can understand the development of the field as a series of attempts to guard against the anarchy of the senses. Descartes overthrows the role of an embodied consciousness in favor of a self-enclosed, reflecting consciousness. After Descartes, the classical sense of aisthesis, which is rooted in sensory perception, becomes divorced from embodied experience. Even when lauded, as in Hobbes and Hartley, the senses are nevertheless organized by some overriding principle of physiological determinism. The line from Shaftesbury to Wilde, passing through Hegel, Coleridge, and Pater, simply bypasses sensory experience as a degraded form of reason and imagination. Modern aesthetics replaces embodied experience with visionary reflection as the central term between consciousness and the world. In the process of divorcing aesthetics from embodiment, many ideas intervene: Locke’s internal sense, Hume’s morality, Kant’s universal form of judgment, Coleridge’s organic imagination, Spencer’s evolutionary progress, Lewes’s social man, Carpenter’s willpower, and James’ daily experience.

Although art has been only one of many proposed mediations between consciousness and world, it has come to dominate, indeed define, the field of modern aesthetics. It has been my intention here to show the major shifts in response to this perceived dilemma between human consciousness and the external world and, thereby, to broaden the field of inquiry to include more than only matters of beauty and taste.
One of the primary effects of the development of aesthetic theory has been that the
notion of embodied experience, which was central to the field, has been abandoned. The
modern Künstlerroman, which is the literary genre conceived out of the primary dilemma
of aesthetics—the creative relationship between consciousness and the world—inherits
this disembodied notion of aesthetics. Aesthetics, and by extension the Künstlerroman,
has to do not exclusively with art but also with the entire range of man’s creative
relationship with the world. Or, put another way, art and creativity have to do with
more than only matters of vision, beauty, and solitary reflection.

The fundamental question of the Künstlerroman genre is how an artist-
protagonist scales the distance between his isolated consciousness and the external
world in a creative act. The three protagonists of the novels I examine sway between the
poles of physiological determinism and unbridled consciousness. They resort to the
same mediations between consciousness and world as do the preceding thinkers—
human will, social relationships, religion, beauty, evolution, sexuality, morality, the
unconscious, and everyday experience. The modern Künstlerroman, following the
modern aesthetic tradition, has replaced the central role of embodied consciousness with
disembodied vision. But by closely reading these novels, we will see that the resolution
of the primary dilemma of the genre lies precisely in what has been left out—the realm
of embodiment.
This brief intellectual history of the relationship between aesthetics and the body is not a preamble to declaring Joyce a Hegelian, Bennett a disciple of Spencer, or Woolf a late Paterian. Such correlations would be schematic at best. There is also the certain risk in such a cursory treatment of making tidy what is invariably complicated. I have hazarded this risk in order to give a sense, in broad strokes, of how it was that the body came to lose its central role in the field of aesthetics. The consequence of the Cartesian invention of the modern subject, this disembodied consciousness has survived equally intact in both materialist challenges to Descartes as well as idealist fortifications of his thinking.

Because the Künstlerroman form is founded precisely on the relationship between artistic consciousness and the world, it is useful to consider the contemporary theories of aesthetics that existed while these novelists were writing. The intellectual context of the genre as well as the local climate in which these novelists were writing is paramount to the issues raised by these Künstlerromane. Kant was being widely read as Goethe was writing Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795-96), the prototype Bildungsroman from which the Künstlerroman is derived. Bennett, Woolf, and particularly Joyce were well aware of the German novelistic tradition and its relationship to philosophical idealism. All three

had direct access to the works of British thinkers as well as private exposure through literary circles and public journals.56

The question of selection may arise. Why these thinkers and not others? What about the British philosophers of modernism? Clearly, I do not intend this to be a comprehensive account of Western aesthetics. You will note that Hegel receives a mere two paragraphs. Such an account is beyond what is useful for this study. My main criterion has been to include thinkers who represent specific and divergent positions in the shifting understanding of the relationship between mind and body, between consciousness and world. This conversation spans nearly three hundred years of disagreements, reinforcements, and negotiations about the exact nature of consciousness and its relationship to physical sensation.

Also, although I will not be making any arguments of influence, I have limited myself to thinkers that these novelists would have had access to, whether directly or indirectly. My aim is to avoid interjecting contemporary theory into the past. This is not to suggest that there has been no progress in thought that may illuminate what has preceded, but rather to be cautious about flattening a unique moment into an eternal now. In any case, to the extent that I myself am a product of contemporary thought,

56 See the introduction to Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth’s anthology of nineteenth-century psychological texts in Embodied Selves for an account of the prevalence of ideas of consciousness and embodiment in British culture. Also, Porter’s chapter entitled “The Spectator: The Polite Self in the Polite Body,” in Flesh in the Age of Reason for a description of eighteenth-century debates in the popular press about issues of mind and body.
there is an implicit way in which the present necessarily reads the past from its own perspective. My choice to leave out contemporary theorists is an attempt to minimize this tendency, not only for the sake of plausibility but also for the sake of clarity.

As for the question then of why these particular thinkers, I answer that, read together, they aptly tell the story of how modern aesthetics came to abandon sensory experience as its defining characteristic. Each writer is representative of a specific shift in thinking that undermines the role of the body in aesthetic experience. These thinkers refer directly to each other’s work, whether through shared assumptions or outright refutations. Descartes is the centerpiece. There follows the German response of a systematic and idealist philosophy of art and the British tradition of an empirical psychology of the aesthetic. The two traditions meet in British Romanticism, where German idealist philosophy penetrates British materialism. The nineteenth-century focus on history and sensation gives way to the modern return to the Romantic ideal of a visionary artistic consciousness. Beginning in the eighteenth century, these thinkers present different possibilities for what embodiment might mean—some reduce it to a

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57 This very curious shift in the history of the British novel from increasingly historical and material concerns throughout the nineteenth century to the modern fascination with consciousness is often viewed in terms of rupture and has not, as such, been accounted for satisfactorily. There are some plausible explanations: the Franco-Prussian War and World War I; the move from an industrializing economy to advanced capitalism; the return via the Romantics to German idealism; the psychology of William James and Freud. Rather than viewing Modernism as a break or discontinuity, I think the increasing materialism of the nineteenth century actually heralds the rise of consciousness. As I argue above, by turning the body into an object, exalted though it may be, Victorian psychology retreats from the world and confers the position of subject to the reflecting mind.
matter of physiology, some find the issue altogether irrelevant to aesthetics, and others offer various middle terms between mind and body. These various mediations are precisely the possibilities that Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf encounter in writing their novels of artistic development.
Chapter 2: “We must love one another or die”

“Next the long nerves unite their silver train,
And young SENSATION permeates the brain;
Through each new sense the keen emotions dart,
Flush the young cheek, and swell the throbbing heart.
From pain and pleasure quick VOLITIONS rise,
Lift the strong arm, or point the inquiring eyes;
With Reason’s light bewilder’d Man direct,
And right and wrong with balance nice detect.
Last in thick swarms ASSOCIATIONS spring,
Thoughts join to thoughts, to motion motions cling;
Whence in long trains of catenation flow
Imagined joy, and voluntary woe.”

Erasmus Darwin, The Temple of Nature

In the continuum between consciousness and life, critics generally regard Arnold Bennett as squarely on the side of life. Bennett wrote prodigiously: novels, plays, short stories, essays, articles, journals, letters, and “pocket philosophies” that offer instruction in modern living. He found no contradiction in writing for critical acclaim as well as popular success. His decline in reputation is often attributed to the critical influence of Virginia Woolf. In her famous rebuke “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf declares Bennett a materialist who is more preoccupied with the external details of his characters’
houses than with the internal movements of their souls. She relegates him to a dying breed of Edwardian novelists who are out of step with the modern sensibility. Woolf is reacting to Bennett’s essay “Is the Novel Decaying?,” in which he accuses her of creating characters who “do not vitally survive in the mind because the author has been obsessed with details of originality and cleverness.”

Although Woolf unfairly exaggerates Bennett’s attention to detail and underestimates his study of emotion, she correctly identifies his allegiance to life. Rebecca West writes that Bennett “had the first necessity for a novelist in his insatiable appetite for life. He loved every phenomenon which the world presented to him and grudged no expense of time and energy in studying it. Also, he had the right emotional dynamo: what he saw he loved.” In The Author’s Craft (1914), Bennett writes that “no artist is likely to be entirely admirable who is not a man before he is an artist. The notion that art is first and the rest of the universe nowhere is bound to lead to preciosity and futility in art.” Bennett firmly rejects the notion that art precedes life.

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1 The essay first appears in Nation and Athenaeum on December 1, 1923. A revised version of the essay was given as a lecture to the Cambridge Heretics on May 18, 1924. This revised version appears as “Character in Fiction” in the Criterion in July, 1924.

2 First published in Cassell’s Weekly on March 28, 1923. See The Author’s Craft and Other Critical Writings of Arnold Bennett, ed. Samuel Hynes, pp. 87-89.

3 Arnold Bennett Himself, p. 13.
The life to which Bennett is devoted is not a catalogue of negligible details, as Woolf suggests, but, much like for Woolf herself, the richness of ordinary events. Bennett emancipates everyday phenomena from meaninglessness and obscurity and places them at the center of his art and ethics. “The whole spectacular and sensual show—what the eye sees, the ear hears, the nose scents, the tongue tastes and the skin touches—is a cause or an effect of human conduct.” Sensation is taken seriously. But his is not a simple materialism. Rather than transforming the material into the artistic, Bennett recognizes the inherent art in everyday phenomena. He writes in an early journal entry that the “day of my enthusiasm for ‘realism,’ for ‘naturalism,’ has passed. I can perceive that a modern work of fiction dealing with modern life may ignore realism and yet be great. To find beauty, which is always hidden; that is the aim. [ . . . ] My desire is to depict the deeper beauty while abiding by the envelope of facts [. . .]. What the artist has to grasp is that there is no such thing as ugliness in the world.”

The problem of the *Künstlerroman* form is the tension between the protagonist’s artistic sensibility rooted in a disembodied consciousness and his increasing awareness

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4 pp. 117-18.

5 Ibid., p. 22.

of the outside world through his heightened physical sensations. In *Clayhanger*, Bennett presents a young man thwarted from his passion to be an artist by the demands of an autocratic father who installs him instead as an apprentice in, and eventual heir to, his steam printing business. Presented with the conflict between art and life, Edwin Clayhanger abandons art altogether. He sacrifices his sketches, watercolors, and architectural designs to the family business. The life that he chooses though is not devoid of creativity. Although he is not fulfilled in his professional life, Edwin eventually finds contentment in his personal life. What he forfeits in terms of art he gains in human contact. In *Clayhanger*, Bennett presents a portrait of the artist as a young printer.

The Unknown Body

Bennett himself derives contentment from neither mind nor body. In *Mental Efficiency* (1911), one of his “pocket philosophies,” he advises readers how best to discipline the mind:

"For me, spiritual content (I will not use the word ‘happiness,’ which implies too much) springs essentially from no mental or physical facts. It springs from the spiritual fact that there is something higher in man than the mind, and that that something can control the mind. Call that something the soul, or what you will. My sense of security amid the collisions of existence lies in the firm consciousness that just as my body is the servant of my
mind, so is my mind the servant of *me*. An unruly servant, but a servant—and possibly getting less unruly every day! Often have I said to that restive brain: ‘Now, O mind, sole means of communication between the divine *me* and all external phenomena, you are not a free agent; you are a subordinate; you are nothing but a piece of machinery; and obey me you *shall.*’

Bennett constructs a hierarchy of facts. Physical facts serve mental facts serve spiritual facts. The body is at the bottom and the soul at the top. The mind is a mechanism that mediates between the divine and the worldly. Neither the mechanical mind nor the phenomenal body is free. They are servants whose obedience guarantees man safety “amid the collisions of existence.”

It is these “collisions of existence” between mind and body that determine the course of Edwin Clayhanger’s life. The novel opens in July, 1872, as young Edwin is going home after his last day of school. His appearance is described in particularly feminine terms. With “fair hair and a clear complexion,” Edwin passes the old townswomen as they observe that he is the “spitten image of his poor mother,” years ago dead of cancer. He is a “slim, gawky [. . .] naïve [. . .] simple creature” whose gestures and features have a “wistful grace” (2–3, 39). Not only are his physical features feminine but his character is as well. Edwin fears for his future “as a woman with a vague discomfort dimly fears cancer” (13). Darius Clayhanger, Edwin’s oppressive

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7 pp. 112-13. This book is a revised version of *The Reasonable Life* (1907).

8 *Clayhanger*, p. 15. Subsequent references to the novel appear in the text.
father, with a mixture of anger and pride, observes that Edwin is “A cocky infant! A girl! [. . . ] so young, fragile, innocent, and defenceless!” (87-88). Darius’s pride in his son resembles that which a man “may have in an idle, elegant, and absurdly expensive woman” (138). The Orgreaves, a well-to-do family from Bleakridge, take a particular interest in Edwin. Janet Orgreave, single and charged with the task of luring Edwin to dinner at the family house, remarks that Edwin’s “sister Clara was an impossible piece of goods, and that his sister Maggie was born an old maid. One of her brothers then said that that was just what was the matter with Edwin too!” (149).

Although physically, and in terms of his fears, innocence, idleness and reserve, Edwin is described by both the narrator and other characters as feminine, he himself is entirely unaware of his body, which fact is attributed to the shortcomings of his education:

He knew, however, nothing of natural history, and in particular of himself, of the mechanism of the body and mind, through which his soul had to express and fulfil itself. Not one word of information about either physiology or psychology had ever been breathed to him, nor had it ever occurred to anyone around him that such information was needful. And as no one had tried to explain to him the mysteries which he carried about with him inside that fair skin of his, so no one had tried to explain to him the mysteries by which he was hemmed in, either mystically through religion, or rationally through philosophy. (9)

In this passage Bennett sets up the conflict that dominates the novel—between the human body as natural and the human body as mechanical. That the relationship
between the body and the mind is a mechanism suggests that it can be known and explained as a machine, rationally and quantitatively. Its units are “information” and knowledge of the body is conflated with “physiology,” which is simply what he carries around “inside” of himself, stitched in by what is external. At the same time, his body is a “mystery” and what is sought is “natural” history that is “breathed” to him. This passage also introduces the dichotomy between inside and outside. Edwin’s mind and body are inside him, the province of psychology and physiology. Outside lies the realm of religion and philosophy. Clayhanger tells the story of how Edwin comes to know himself—by turns mechanical and mystical—and how he learns to relate with the world and with others.

The tension between man as mechanism and as organism is the subject of Bennett’s The Human Machine (1908). One of his many “pocket philosophies,” this popular book prescribes a regimen for mental training. “The human machine is an apparatus of brain and muscle,” Bennett writes, that allows “the Ego to develop freely in the universe by which it is surrounded.” The brain is a “highly quaint organism,” a

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9 This echoes Hartley’s formulation that the relationship between sensations and ideas is a mechanical process that can be rationally known. See above, pp. 33-34.

servant that “can be trained, as the hand and eye can be trained; it can be made as obedient as a sporting dog, and by similar methods. In the meantime the indispensable preparation for brain-discipline is to form the habit of regarding one’s brain as an instrument exterior to one’s self, like a tongue or a foot.” Bennett’s analogy of mental training to physical training overlooks that the majority of physical processes take place outside of conscious human control. Similarly, a great deal of mental functioning happens beyond the realm of conscious thought. Bennett’s solution to this organic effusion that defies conscious intention is that of Carpenter’s: “the beginning of wise living lies in the control of the brain by the will.”

Like Bennett, Edwin finds the constraints of his body a nuisance. One evening as Edwin works late at his architectural drawings “suddenly a yawn surprised him, and recalled him to the existence of his body” (85). Since Edwin has to work in the printing office before he can dedicate time to his watercolors and design practices, he finds the physical constraints of his tired body inconvenient. Working in spite of them, he “thought he had conquered the gross body, and that it was of no account” (92). Edwin is trying to conquer physical necessity in terms of “accounts,” reminiscent of the printing

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11 The Human Machine, p. 44.

12 Ibid., pp. 28-29.

13 Ibid., p. 32. For Carpenter’s view, see above, pp. 41-42.
accounts for which he is now responsible. But the deeper point is that what he is trying
to overcome is not his gross body but the gross body, as if it were somehow detached
and abstract, a category rather than integral to his sense of self. Edwin’s urge to conquer
the body is the urge to conquer what he does not know. Reason and control are the tools
he relies upon to rein in his physical limitations. By considering the body a mechanism,
he can subject it to detached and rational analysis.

Bennett’s own relationship to his body is notoriously vexed. He suffered from a
lifelong stammer that was never cured by any of the various therapies he attempted.
Bennett’s journals are a detailed catalogue of physical ailments and remedies. His sexual
relationships with women ranged from repressed to licentious.14 Bennett writes, “I see
that at bottom, I have an intellectual scorn, or the scorn of an intellectual man, for all
sexual-physical manifestations. They seem childish to me, unnecessary symptoms and
symbols of a spiritual phenomenon. (Yet few Englishmen could be more perversely
curious and adventurous than I am in just those manifestations.) I can feel myself
despising them at the very moment of deriving satisfaction from them [. . .].”15

14 In her biography of Bennett, Margaret Drabble’s chapter on Marguerite Soulié, his first wife,
gives some details of his failed romance with Eleanor Green in Paris as well as the nature of his
marriage with Marguerite. Arnold Bennett: A Biography. See also Reginald Pound, Arnold
Bennett, pp. 159-64, 175-80.

The juxtaposition between a precisely knowable and mechanical body that is understood through rational explanation and a mysterious and organic body that is revealed through the gradual experience of physical sensation is central to the novel. Reginald Pound insists it is central to the period. In his biography of Bennett, Pound writes that the first decade of the twentieth century was rife with “the neurasthenia induced by the ruthless doubts of thinkers like Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Clifford, Tyndall [. . .] who [. . .] paradoxically brought about the eclipse of reason by engendering the first symptoms of the modern malady of thinking with the nerves.”

Clayhanger can be read as the uneasy evolution of knowledge from reason to sensation.

The Sensing Body

As the novel progresses Edwin comes into greater contact with people outside of his immediate family. Despite his best efforts, he increasingly comes to rely on his physical sensations as a mode of knowing. The narrator describes an encounter he has with Janet Orgreave, a young, attractive woman who is trying to invite him to dinner:

16 Arnold Bennett, p. 189.

17 In his journals Bennett makes numerous references to his own capacity to know through physical sensations. On October 11, 1896, he notes, “A week of sluggish liver and disordered kidneys; restless nights; ill-tempered mornings.” Listening to Wagner, he writes, “I felt those strange tickling sensations in the back which are the physical signs of aesthetic emotion.”
The fact was that Janet had been espying him for a quarter of an hour. When at length she waved her hand to him it did not occur to him to suppose that she was waving her hand to him; he merely wondered what peculiar thing she was doing. Then he blushed as she waved again, and he knew first from the blood in his face that Janet was making a signal, and that it was to himself that the signal was directed: his body had told his mind; this was very odd. (168)

“The gross body” is now “his face,” “himself,” and “his body.” The episode begins with a “fact” that is unintelligible to Edwin’s rational “supposing” and “wondering” until his body responds by “blushing,” thereby revealing the meaning of the fact. Edwin “knew first from the blood.” He deciphers meaning by reading a series of signs written on his body. His usual mode of knowing has been reversed. Rather than his mind making an “account” of his body, it is his body that informs his mind. Like the yawn that signals to him that he is tired, blushing reveals to him that he is the object of Janet’s attention.

Edwin senses his reaction before he knows what causes it.

It is the accumulation of such experiences of his semioticized body and his increasing enjoyment of them that illuminates Edwin’s identification with the luxurious new house that Darius is building in Bleakridge, adjacent to the home of the Orgreaves.

The old Clayhanger house, attached to the printing office, allowed Edwin no room except the “inconvenient and makeshift” attic (38). Although he loves the privacy of it,

(February 13, 1897) “There can be no knowledge without emotion. We may be aware of a truth, yet until we have felt its force, it is not ours. To the cognition of the brain must be added the experience of the soul.” (March 18, 1897) “The whole of life ought to be covered thus by ‘impressionists,’ and a vast mass of new material of facts and sensations collected for use by historians, sociologists and novelists.” (September 13, 1907) The Journals of Arnold Bennett, v.1, pp. 16, 32, 36, 254.
the cramped and cold attic, particularly suited to the Edwin who aimed to “conquer the gross body,” no longer satisfies his newfound desire for pleasure. Edwin’s evolving relationship to his body is mirrored in his feelings about the house. Whereas the old house represents Edwin’s attempt to overcome the body, the new house is his excited and incipient discovery of his body. On a visit:

[... he entered and stood in the square hall of the deserted, damp, and inchoate structure. The house was his father’s only in name. In emotional fact it was Edwin’s house, because he alone was capable of possessing it by enjoying it. [... But to Edwin it was not a house, it was a work of art, it was an epic poem, it was an emanation of the soul. He did not realize this. He did not realize how the house had informed his daily existence. All that he knew about himself in relation to the house was that he could not keep away from it. (163-64)

The new house, like Edwin’s growing awareness of his body, is “inchoate.” But the new house is not simply like Edwin’s body, it is his body. It is the difference between simile and metaphor. No longer is Edwin interested in conquering “the gross body.” His claim to the house and his body is based now on pleasure. Reason is replaced by sensation, conquering by possession. It is true that the house remains a “structure” but it is simultaneously “a work of art [... an epic poem [... an emanation of the soul.” Edwin begins to seize the house—and his body—through imagination and pleasure.

The identification of the house as “emanation” suggests the sense in which the world originates by a series of descending reflections from the divine essence, one stage of which is the human body. In her biography of Bennett, Margaret Drabble writes that
to him “houses expressed souls. People were not disembodied spirits and the houses that they built were as much a part of them as their bodies.”  

We are told by the narrator that Edwin is not yet aware of his relationship to the new house. His rational awareness is not yet commensurate with his sense experience. His body knows things that his mind does not. Edwin’s knowledge is restricted to his need to constantly visit the new house, his inability to “keep away from it.”

With his enthusiasm for the new house, Edwin’s ideas about houses in general evolve. He used to think of a house “as a front-wall diversified by doors and windows, with rooms behind it,” but comes to realize that “the front of a house was merely the expression of the inside of it, merely a result, almost accidental” (164). From valuing the surface, Edwin shifts his attention to what is “inside,” but unlike the “hemmed in inside” of his youth, this inside finds an “expression,” albeit a contradictory one. The surface is at once a “result” and “almost accidental,” caused as well as arbitrary. In other words, the same “inside” can have numerous outward manifestations. The body is a product both of definable processes as well as of random and unpredictable happenings. 

18 Arnold Bennett: A Biography, p. 31.

19 Writing about Clayhanger, Squillace notes that Bennett’s idea of causation is founded on “the Spencerian model of the mutual influence of mental states and material circumstances [. . .] to detail the evolutionary forces that had produced the patterns of everyday living in the Potteries [. . .].” Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett, p. 87.
Moreover, Edwin reconciles his idea of immaculate construction with human effort. The human origin of the new house is undeniable:

When the house began to ‘go up,’ Edwin lived in an ecstasy of contemplation. I say with deliberateness an ‘ecstasy.’ He had seen houses go up before; he knew houses were constructed, [. . .] he knew that they did not build themselves. And yet, in the vagueness of his mind, he had never imaginatively realized that a house was made with hands, and hands that could err. With its exact perpendiculars and horizontals, its geometric regularities, and its Chinese preciseness of fitting, a house had always seemed to him—again in the vagueness of his mind—as something superhuman. The commonest cornice, the most ordinary pillar of a staircase-balustrade—could that have been accomplished in its awful perfection of line and contour by a human being? How easy to believe that it was ‘not made with hands’! But now he saw. He had to see. [. . .]. He understood that there was no golden and magic secret of building. It was just putting one brick on another and against another—but to a hair’s breadth. (166)

The setting apart of “go up” signals it as something representative of Edwin’s thought.

A house that passively “goes up” lacks an agent, arising from abstract or “superhuman” origins. It is in this mode that Edwin lives in “ecstasy,” the state of “rapture in which the soul, liberated from the body” is “engaged in the contemplation of divine things.” The narratorial “I” interrupts to underscore the point, chiefly by inserting an embodied “I” in the middle of Edwin’s disembodied “ecstasy.” Bennett contrasts Edwin’s vague ideas of the superhuman quality of houses with the repeated image that a house is “made with hands.” Just as the passive “go up” suggests superhuman origins, the active “made

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20 OED.
with hands” suggests an embodied human being. Since Edwin identifies the new house with his new body, he realizes too that bodies are borne of other bodies, neither mystically nor mechanically, but simply. Edwin is beginning to see that there is no “golden and magic secret” but rather plainly “putting one brick on another.”

The narrator contrasts what Edwin “knew” with what he “imaginatively realized.” This reinforces the distinction between the two modes of knowing: rational and imaginative. The passage begins with what Edwin “knew,” which is limited in understanding, and ends with what he “saw,” which is a more complete understanding. His understanding develops from mental to sensory, from knowing to seeing. Although Edwin factually knows that houses are constructed, he cannot grasp it “imaginatively,” cannot allow human hands and, therefore, human error to rule. The “vagueness of his mind,” which Bennett underscores by repetition, prohibits this imaginative understanding yet easily accommodates “exact” and “precise” “regularities.” To decide whether a “human hand” is capable of such feats, Edwin unexpectedly sets the test of the “commonest” and “most ordinary” of effects. Why not determine the limit of human fitness by invoking the rarest and grandest effects? Because the emphasis is not on human fitness, but rather on the “superhuman” “perfection” of the most modest elements of a house.

It is in connection to Edwin’s concern over his shabby appearance that we get the clearest image of the new house as his body. He considers it “ridiculous for a man
about to occupy a house like that to be wearing garments like those” (172). The house
demands new clothes. For Edwin, “the inauguration of the new house was to be [. . .], in
a very deep and spiritual sense, the beginning of the new life! He had settled that. The
new house inspired him. It was not paradise. But it was a temple” (173). What is
imminent with the new house is “the new life,” some particular life that is not yet named,
rather than a new life that is open-ended. The house is not “spiritual” in terms of a
transcendent “paradise,” but is a more earthbound “temple”—literally, the “dwelling-
place or house of a deity.” But “temple” also in the figural sense of “any place regarded
as occupied by the divine presence, specifically the person or body of a Christian.”
In the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul says:

[. . .] you are God’s farm, God’s building. By the grace of God
which was given to me, I laid the foundations like a trained master-
builder, and someone else is building on them. [. . .] Do you not
realise that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in
you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will
destroy that person, because God’s temple is holy, and you are that
temple.

The human body is the “temple” of God. Edwin’s new house is a “temple.” The new
house is a body—Edwin’s by virtue of the fact that he “alone was capable of possessing
it by enjoying it.”

21 Ibid.

22 1 Cor. 3: 9-17.
The Body of Pleasure

Edwin’s awakening pleasure in his body allows him to identify positively with his sensations. He begins to cherish the comforts that the new house will provide. The hot-water system “affects and inspires Edwin like a poem” (173). More than the ability to take a hot bath whenever he chooses, it provides the luxury “to splash—one of the most voluptuous pleasures in life” (174). What permits this particular gratification of his senses is “a cistern room, actually a room devoted to nothing but cisterns [...]. Out of [the main cistern] grew pipes, creeping in secret downwards between inner walls of the house, penetrating everywhere” (173). The imagery is decidedly organic. In addition to referring to a reservoir of water, a “cistern” also denotes a fluid-containing sac or cavity in an organism. The pipes “grow” and “creep in secret” and “penetrate.” The effect is a house overgrown and effuse with living matter. This is an evolution of the “exact perpendiculars and horizontals,” the “geometric regularities,” the “Chinese preciseness of fitting” that characterizes Edwin’s earlier musings about the house (166). What Edwin realizes is that the house, like his body, is both mechanically precise and organically effuse.

With pleasure comes an anxiety over its loss, with the inhabited body a fear of its abrogation. As Edwin becomes increasingly embodied through sensual delight, there is a clear sense in which he has undergone a radical shift: “He honestly thought that he
had recovered from the catastrophe undisfigured, even unmarked. He knew not that he would never be the same man again [. . .]” (175). The “catastrophe” is that of his disappointment at not becoming an artist, a designer of houses rather than one who merely enjoys a house, creator rather than created. The “honestly” signals that things are not as Edwin thinks. He is, in fact, “disfigured” both by the “wistful resignation” on his face, as well as by the shift in metaphor from the old house to the new house, from the rational body to the experienced body, from man as mechanism to man as organism. Further, he is “marked,” legible, his body inscribed in metaphor and susceptible to being read.

After his first dinner with the Orgreaves, Edwin, excited by the company, leaves early and, rather than going home, goes to visit the empty new house:

He wanted to be in full possession of himself, at leisure and in freedom, and to examine the treasure of his sensations [. . .]. It was the hope of pleasure that intoxicated him, the vision which he had had of the possibilities of being really interested in life. He saw new avenues toward joy, and the sight thereof made him tingle, less with the desire to be immediately at them than with the present ecstasy of contemplating them. He was conscious of actual physical tremors and agreeable smartings in his head; electric disturbances. But he did not reason; he felt [. . .]. Why go to gaze on it again? There was no common sense in doing so. And yet he felt: ‘I must have another glance at it before I go home.’ From his attitude towards it, he might have been the creator of that house. That house was like one of his successful drawings [. . .]. The act of inspection gave him pleasure. So with the house. Strange, superficially; but the simple explanation was that for some things he had the eyes of love [. . .]. Yes, in his dancing and happy brain the impulse to revisit the house was not to be conquered. (205-06)
Whereas in the earlier passage Edwin is concerned with “possessing” the house, here it is “himself” he wants to possess. He possesses both the house and himself through the pleasure of his sensations. Being in the house means being in his body. To “possess” himself means to be alone in the new house.

Edwin no longer reasons; he feels. He is minutely conscious of the movements of his physical state. Yet, there is still distance between Edwin and his bodily sensations. They are something for him to “examine,” “inspect” and “contemplate.” It is the “hope” and “vision” and “sight” of pleasure that “intoxicate” him and make Edwin “tingle,” not simply the pleasure itself. His is after all not the “immediate” experience of his body as much as the reveling in the possibility of delayed pleasure. Unlike the earlier drive to “conquer the gross body,” this impulse to possess his body “was not to be conquered.”

Edwin’s earlier detachment from his body results from his need to control and master it rationally, whereas now the distance comes from setting the body up as an object of love.

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23 In his chapter on *Clayhanger*, George Lafourcade summarizes the novel as the “first awakening of sensuous pleasure in a soul long starved of beauty.” *Arnold Bennett: A Study*, p. 128.

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24 Bennett too lives in a state of extremes in relationship to his body. In a letter to Dorothy Cheston before they are married, Bennett writes in order to clarify the boundaries of their physical intimacy: “My idiosyncracy (or part of it) is that my relations with you have to be, physically, either one thing or the other. We are both sensual—thank God. I can cut the flesh right out, but I cannot healthily indulge in half measures.” June 28, 1923. *Letters of Arnold Bennett*, ed. James Hepburn, v. 4, p. 368.
love with an identification, with identification itself in a supreme act of narcissism, the 
esto falling in love with its ego-making capacity. Edwin imagines himself the “creator” of the 
house, the architect of his own body as it becomes an aesthetic object, “like one of his 
successful drawings.” Like the nineteenth-century movement to embody consciousness, 
whether he sets out to conquer the body or to become enslaved to its sensations, Edwin’s 
actions turn the human body into an object.

The Terror of the Isolated Body

Still regarding the body as an object, though now one to be loved rather than 
vanquished, Edwin becomes terrified of its loss. He is unable to resist going into the 
empty house because he “must localize his dream in it,” that dream of being his own 
creator, the deity of the “temple” (207). Since he does not have the key to the house, 
Edwin must enter through the cellar. He disappears into the house “feet foremost [. . .] 
as though the house were swallowing him” in a kind of reverse birth (207). Enveloped in 
darkness, he rushes through the “doorless doorway” of the cellar steps through 
“affrighting” matters:

His heart was beating. He trembled, he was afraid, exquisitely 
afraid, acutely conscious of himself amid the fundamental 
mysteries of the universe. He reached the top of the steps as the 
match expired [. . .]. His spine thrilled, as if a hand delicate and 
terrible had run down it in a caress. All the unknown of the night
and the universe was pressing upon him, but it was he alone who had created the night and the universe. He reached his room [. . .]. Only, now, he could not dream in the room as he had meant to dream; because beyond the open door was the empty landing and the well of the stairs and all of the terror of the house. The terror came and mingled with the delicious sensations that had seized him in the solitude of the garden of the Orgreaves. No! Never had he been so intensely alive as then! He went cautiously to the window and looked forth. Instantly the terror of the house was annihilated. It fell away, was gone. He was not alone in his fancy-created universe. The reassuring illusion of reality came back like a clap of thunder. He could see a girl insinuating herself through the gap in the hedge which he had made ten minutes earlier. (207-08)

Edwin experiences an array of physical sensations as he makes his way through the “damp” and “earthy” passages of the cellar toward the “doorless doorway.” He is back in the feminine body of his youth, of his dead mother of whom he is “the spitten image.” The new house very clearly has come to represent Edwin’s body. This, though, shortly after Edwin meets Hilda, is the first time that this body is gendered. As he goes into the cellar “feet first” from the garden, so he emerges from the cellar head first into the empty house. He is “swallowed” into the cellar and reborn inside the house. He has, in fact, never been “so intensely alive as then.” Edwin is unable to “dream” once he reaches his room because now he is aware of the “open door,” the “empty landing,” and the “well of the stairs.”

Having come through all of those voids and empty spaces, Edwin is left only with “terror.” The terror of the emptiness and darkness heightens Edwin’s experience.
The terror comes alive in his imagination. Yet what takes its place is equally unreal. It is the “illusion of reality” that intrudes with a girl who traces Edwin’s path to the house. What annihilates the terror is the possibility of human contact, of not being alone.

Edwin’s youthful repudiation of physical sensation has been replaced with a complete absorption in it. The discovery of his body is accompanied by a sense of isolation from others. He is safe in his solipsism for it is “he alone who created the night and the universe.” He is transformed from the conqueror of the body to the sole creator of not only his body but also the universe. The appearance of Hilda through the hedge forces Edwin to acknowledge that “he was not alone in his fancy-created universe.” What threatens Edwin’s enjoyment of his body is no longer rational will but the existence of another person. As Edwin becomes more aware of his embodied experience, he becomes more subject to being impacted by others.

Whereas in the old house, Edwin is regularly surprised by his family entering his room, in the new house, he is rarely caught unaware. It is the difference between being unconscious of his body and so painstakingly conscious that he fears violation. Although he cannot “decipher her features,” Edwin knows “by something in her walk” that the girl “trespassing in his garden” is Hilda (208-09). It is “his” garden rather than the garden because of his increasing idea of the body as something one “possesses” and must guard against intrusion. He confirms his dislike of Hilda by remarking that “She
was less feminine than masculine. Her hair was not like a girl’s hair” (209). As Hilda nears the house, Edwin loses sight of her:

Where was she? In the garden porch? She did not reappear. She might be capable of getting into the house! She might even then actually be getting into the house! She was queer, incalculable. Supposing that she was in the habit of surreptitiously visiting the house, and had found a key to fit one of the doors, or supposing that she could push up a window—she would doubtless mount the stairs and trap him! Absurd, these speculations; as absurd as a nightmare! But they influenced his conduct. He felt himself forced to provide against the wildest hazards. (209)

The passage begins with the consciousness of Edwin, excited and panicked at the thought of Hilda penetrating his feminine body. She is “masculine.” She is out for a “nocturnal stroll” (208). Edwin imagines her getting through a “door” or “pushing” her way through a “window,” “mounting” the stairs and “trapping” him. His fears are exclamatory. All of the open spaces that had earlier created his pleasurable terror are susceptible to being violated. The imagined escalation of Hilda’s progress and the repetition of “supposing” each manner in which Hilda would get at him heighten his excitement—as an instance of wish-fulfillment. The narrator, signaled by the shift in language to “he” and “his” to refer to Edwin, interrupts to observe how absurd Edwin’s fears are. Edwin himself has no awareness of this. His only instinct is toward self-preservation, a drive to protect his body from the danger posed by another person.
One Body Meets Another

Hilda does not get into his house. Instead, Edwin goes out into the garden and pretends to be surprised by her presence there. He feels his “heart-beats”; his cheeks “burn” (210). “What she happened to have been saying seemed immaterial to the effect, which was physical, vibratory” (228). In fact, “the high and serious mood of complex emotion in which he had entered the new house” dissolves “in comparison with the feverish hand-clasp of the girl whom he so peculiarly disliked” (213-14). This first contact of his body with the body of another opens up an entirely new realm of bodily experience for Edwin. His self-absorbed body is confronted with an expanded field of physical sensation.

As he falls in love with Hilda, Edwin’s sense of his body is affected by his contact with Hilda’s body. He becomes more porous and impressionable. After a hand shake, a “delicate photograph of the palm of her hand” is “printed in minute sensations on the palm of his” (275). He waits in a state of turmoil for Hilda to visit him in the printer’s shop:

He was in love. Love had caught him, and had affected his vision so that he no longer saw any phenomenon as it actually was [. . .]. He could not follow a train of thought. He could not remain of one opinion nor in one mind [. . .]. She was marvellous! But was she? She admired him! But did she? She had shown cunning! But was it not simplicity? He did not even feel sure whether he liked her [. . .]. He had no notion that he was in love [. . .]. Nevertheless the processes of love were at work within him. Silently and
magically, by the force of desire and of pride, the refracting glass was being specially ground which would enable him, which would compel him, to see an ideal Hilda when he gazed at the real Hilda. He would not see the real Hilda any more unless some cataclysm should shatter the glass. And he might be likened to a prisoner on whom the gate of freedom is shut for ever [. . .]. (276-77)

The terror that Edwin earlier feels at the sight of Hilda making her way through the garden is now replaced by “the force of desire and pride.” Neither his vision nor his mind knows what to make of Hilda. What has until now been Edwin’s tendency to turn himself into an object, first conquered then adored, is in love transformed into the capacity to make an object of Hilda. Between them there is a “refracting glass,” which distorts how Edwin sees Hilda. He is compelled and no longer free. There are now two Hilda’s: the real and the ideal. In love, Hilda has become an object of Edwin’s will.

It is now possible for physical sensations to be exchanged and shared between them; they are no longer the strict province of a body engaged in solitary self-reflection. After their first kiss, Edwin thinks: “‘My God! She’s mine [. . .]. I’ve kissed her! I’ve got her [. . .].’ And he thought of his father and of vexations. But that night he was a man.

She, Hilda, with her independence and her mystery, had inspired him with a full pride of manhood” (296, 299). Although Edwin’s sphere of physical sensation has expanded to include another person, there remains in Edwin a notion of ownership and possession that contradicts his idea of Hilda as independent of his will. By kissing her, he has finally cast off past associations with the feminine and is become a man. But Edwin
cannot be fully masculine until he makes an object of Hilda as his father has made of him. Edwin has “got” Hilda in the same way that Darius has got Edwin—through mastery of will.

Soon after declaring their love for one another, Hilda leaves on some business to Brighton. Impatient to hear from her and eager to calm himself, Edwin muses: “And he now learnt that profound lesson that an individual must be taken or left in entirety, and that you cannot change an object merely because you love it” (302). Although the sentiment is indeed profound, the use of the word “object” is striking. It corresponds with Edwin’s continuing notion of distinct and separate bodies that either possess or are possessed. What is loved is an “object,” not an “individual.” Soon after Darius rebukes his attempt to talk to his father about marrying Hilda, Edwin learns that she has unexpectedly married a Mr. Cannon in Brighton.

Darius Dies

Dismayed by his failed romance with Hilda, Edwin observes that true love “could not happen to such as he was [. . .]” (312). He is right. He cannot be with Hilda because to Edwin she is still an object, not a person. What occurs to Edwin after he kisses Hilda is the “thought of his father.” Although he sweeps it aside with the idea of his own nascent manhood, it is precisely his father—rather, the thought of him, the effect of
him—that must be overcome in order for Edwin to truly experience his body. Edwin must first be a person in order to recognize Hilda as such. Darius is what has left Edwin “disfigured” and “marked.” For in his father’s presence he “slipped back insensibly into the boy whose right to an individual existence had never been formally admitted” (306).

Individual existence and autonomy is essential to experiencing oneself and others as capable of an intimacy not of objects but of selves. Edwin can “expect no independence of any kind until his father’s death, and he had a direct and powerful interest in his father’s death” (306). “In his father’s presence he never could feel that he was a man. He remained a boy, with no rights, moral or material” (308).

The third book of Clayhanger is called “His Freedom.” Darius falls ill with a “softening of the brain” after Mr. Shushions, the man who saves a young Darius and his family from certain catastrophe in the workhouse, dies unnoticed and neglected in a workhouse. Every moment of Darius’s bodily decline is accompanied by a rise in Edwin’s sense of himself as independent. As Edwin assumes responsibility for the printing works, he examines his father’s private cash-book: “His father could keep nothing from him now. The interior of the safe was like a city that had capitulated; no law ran in it but his law, and he was absolute; he could commit infamies in the city and none might criticize” (360). Edwin’s assumption of control of the business renders Darius obsolete. Edwin’s “heart lightens” as his father is “beaten,” and Darius
“surrenders” when he finds “his son’s will working like a chemical agent in his defenceless mind” (363).

As Edwin increasingly comes to know himself as a person, Darius degenerates into a body, alternately characterized as that of an animal or child. Every morning and night, Edwin has to “manoeuvre and persuade that ponderous, irrational body in his father’s bedroom. Maggie helped the body to feed itself at table” (400). Darius has become an object, entirely subject to the needs and limitations of his body. Edwin and his brother-in-law Albert struggle to get Darius upstairs remarking that “either Darius was pretending to be a carcass, or [they] were pretending that a carcass was alive” (399). Darius is no longer reasonable but an “incalculable and mysterious beast,” whose body is “cumbrous” and “monstrous” (399, 401). The “child-man” who once toiled in the Bastille degenerates into a man-child (25). At the dinner table he tries “to hold a sausage firm on his plate with his knife, and to cut it with his fork” (375). “Like an unhappy child,” Darius sleeps to escape “the enormous, infantile problems of his existence” (402). As his illness progresses, “the body seemed to have that vague appearance of general movement which a multitude of insects will give to a piece of decaying matter. His skin was sick, and his hair, and his pale lips” (420). Whereas Edwin’s physical experience has developed from a sense of the body to his body, Darius, in his illness, is simply “the body.” Edwin and Darius have changed places. Not only is “the body” separated from
any sense of an integrated self but it is further dissected into its component parts. For Darius there is neither whole self nor whole body.

During a social banquet, Edwin realizes that he has “already finally and definitely taken the place of his father” (417). Not only does he realize it, but also he begins to take pleasure in that knowledge as he observes that “in comparison with his father he was a god of miraculous proud strength and domination” (421). Although compassionate towards his father’s struggle for life, Edwin nevertheless regards his vigil at Darius’s deathbed as a “nocturnal adventure” that sends “tremors down his spine” (423). The image very directly recalls the night that Hilda, out for a “nocturnal stroll,” confronts Edwin in the garden of the new house.25 Then too his “spine thrilled, as if a hand delicate and terrible had run down it in a caress.”26 Just as the episode with Hilda in the garden excites Edwin with the possibility of knowing his body in relation to another person, so the impending death of Darius excites Edwin with the possible “freedom” and “independence” of his physical life. Both encounters create physical excitement. He is “glad that an experience tremendous and supreme had been vouchsafed to him. He knew now what the will to live was. He saw life naked, stripped of everything unessential. He saw life and death together” (424). That he sees life

25 See above, p. 74.

26 See above, pp. 71-72.
“naked” recalls the experience of the body. It is now “stripped” of all signification. What emerges is a body that is no longer an object, whether of will or language, and is therefore vulnerable. Objects do not die; persons do.

After Darius is dead, Edwin’s “distress was shot through and enlightened by his [. . .] experience of such profound and overwhelming grandeur. His father was, and lo! he was not. That was all, but it was ineffable” (434). The passing away of life, of a self, of a body is “all” there is, in the sense of profoundness and simplicity and inevitability. It is in Darius’s death that Edwin “first began to realize an individual freedom. [. . .] he felt sturdily that he was free. The chain was at last broken that had bound together those two beings so dissimilar, antagonistic, and ill-matched—Edwin Clayhanger and his father” (436). But because Edwin’s freedom is contingent on Darius’s death, it is not absolute. There remains the notion that two free persons cannot exist at once—one must always be subject to the will of the other until the other is dead. This tenuous individual freedom gained through Darius’s death allows Edwin to begin relating to Hilda, although haltingly, as something other than an object.27

27 Robert Squillace characterizes this shift in Edwin from conqueror to companion as a “new masculinity” that “involves a learning of the other through sympathetic identification rather than force, a recognition of the other’s right to be other, an extension of the modern ideal of autonomy everywhere without exception.” Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett, p. 108. Although Squillace is aware of this shift in Edwin, he fails to account for it in terms of Edwin’s own increasing autonomy. Edwin must first realize his own absolute freedom before he can recognize Hilda’s.
A New Possibility

The very next section of the book after Darius dies is called “His Start in Life” (437). Edwin learns that Hilda has had a son, is now widowed, and runs a boarding house in Brighton. Ten years after their last meeting, he goes to her and finds that she is heavily in debt and at risk of losing her house completely. Hilda admits that her husband is not dead but in prison, destroying Edwin’s hope of reconciliation. The troubled state of Hilda’s house reflects both her poverty as well as the transgression against her body. After her marriage to George Cannon, Hilda discovers that he is a bigamist and that their son has been born out of wedlock. Alternately cruel and compassionate, Edwin lends her the money to save her house. In a chapter called “The Bully,” Edwin confronts Hilda about her past actions and her current state:

He looked at her like a conqueror. He had taught her a thing or two. He had been a man. He was proud of himself. He was proud of all sorts of details in his conduct [. . .]. ‘This time yesterday,’ he reflected, in his triumph, ‘I hadn’t even seen her, and didn’t know where she was [. . .].’ With pity and with joy he watched her slowly wiping her eyes [. . .]. He had shown her her master. He felt that she had been profoundly wronged by destiny, and that gentleness must be lavished upon her. (481-82)

Although Edwin reverts to his former language of possession and triumph, it is now attenuated by the decade of suffering her loss. The short, declarative sentences further suggest that things are not as Edwin pretends. He addresses himself, relying on the
staccato rhetoric to shore up his position. Hilda and Edwin separate without reconciliation.

In the final scene of *Clayhanger*, Hilda visits Edwin in Bleakridge as he is recovering from a life-threatening flu. In his illness he is “aware of an intensified perception of himself as a physical organism. He thought calmly, ‘What a fine thing life is!’” (547). Reclining in his father’s easy chair, he knows, “‘No other woman was ever like this woman!’ He wanted to rise masterfully, to accomplish some gesture splendid and decisive, but he was held in the hollow of the easy chair as though by paralysis” (551). Unlike his mastery during their last meeting, Edwin now is paralyzed. His impaired body checks Edwin’s impulse to master—his physical vulnerability allows him to be open to Hilda. He sees Hilda as a unique and particular person whom “he could not read” (551). Her body is no longer an object to be possessed. She is irreducible and illegible, not a text to be deciphered. Edwin’s fantasies of mastery and possession have given way to the reality of the relationship. Hilda confesses to Edwin the circumstances of her marriage, renewing the hope of a relationship between them. Edwin thrills as he notices the significance of the situation:

(Somewhere within himself he smiled as he reflected that he, in his

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28 Bennett describes his own physical state after an illness in nearly identical terms. He writes, “I had no real desire to conquer my gloom. Its cause must have been physical….I began to have fine sensations. A perception that my gloom was passing, what a wonderful thing life was; an intensified consciousness of myself as an existing organism….a physical pleasure in the half-fatigued realization of my being…the whole experience was somehow voluptuous.” Things That Have Interested Me (1921), 1st Series, pp. 198-99.
father’s place, in his father’s very chair, was thus under the spell of a woman whose child was nameless. He smiled grimly at the thought of Auntie Hamps, of Clara, of the pietistic Albert! They were of a different race, a different generation! They belonged to a dead world! (553)

They belong to the “dead world” of Darius, where possession and tyranny are the rule.

It is striking that Edwin has this realization enclosed within parentheses. It is a reflection he has “within himself.” Unlike the passage which describes the last time he saw Hilda, in which the short, staccato reflections mirror Edwin’s bullying, this parenthetical realization is not acted out. Against the dead world of tyranny and piety, Edwin chooses life:

After a whole decade his nostrils quivered again to the odour of her olive skin. Drowning amid the waves of her terrible devotion, he was recompensed in the hundredth part of a second for all that through her he had suffered or might hereafter suffer. The many problems and difficulties which marriage with her would raise seemed trivial in the light of her heart’s magnificent and furious loyalty. He thought of the younger Edwin whom she had kissed into rapture, as of a boy too inexperienced in sorrow to appreciate this Hilda. He braced himself to the exquisite burden of life.

(553-54)

Thus ends the novel. It is an uneasy ending, filled with an experience of sorrow and difficulty. In order to appreciate “this Hilda,” and not the one in his imagination, the “ideal Hilda” with whom he first falls in love, Edwin realizes that he has first to recognize his own bodily freedom, which freedom includes vulnerability, and then the recalcitrance that the mortal body presents to any kind of aesthetic reduction.
The next time we encounter Edwin and Hilda, in the last novel of the Clayhanger trilogy, *These Twain* (1916), they are newly married. The first section of the book is entitled “The Woman in the House.” This time Edwin does not intercept Hilda in the garden. She is allowed inside. Edwin’s body is no longer separate and inviolable. Indeed, “the whole house was her affair. It was no longer his house [. . .]” (885). Hilda does “not simply live in the house; she pervaded it. As soon as he opened the front-door he felt her” (885). At the end of the story, despite passionate struggle and conflict with Hilda, Edwin marvels at the “greatness of the adventure of existence with this creature, to him unique [. . .]” (1301).

Edwin has progressed from the will to conquer the body he does not know to the impulse to become engrossed in the pleasure of his body. The move from the old, mechanical house to the new, organic one mirrors this transition in Edwin’s sense of his own body. In both circumstances, Edwin regards himself an object. It is therefore inevitable that he also considers Hilda an object when they first meet. As with himself, he alternately wishes to subdue her by force or to possess her in pleasure. Only after Darius dies is Edwin capable of recognizing himself a free person. Contingent on Darius’s death, Edwin’s freedom, however, is incomplete.
The problem is not that Edwin’s freedom is relational, but that the other person has to die for him to be free. He does not yet conceive the possibility of two free persons existing at once. Edwin remains solitary and self-enclosed in this freedom while others continue to exist as objects. His relationship with a living Hilda, precariously balanced as it is between mastery and surrender, will determine whether Edwin is free or not. As the passage from the old house to the new house indicates Edwin’s evolution from a rational to a sensate body, the change from the new house to “the woman in the house” signals Edwin’s movement from a self-conscious to an other-conscious body. Only when he first acknowledges Hilda’s right to an individual existence can Edwin fully recognize his own. Her freedom is also his.

Bennett does not resolve this issue at novel’s end. We know only that Edwin resigns himself to the “exquisite burden of life” that is contact with another person. Because human love is for Edwin primarily a function of physiological need and attraction, choice is not entirely free. Edwin’s options are either “rapture” or “burden,” both of which imply a passive subjection to his physical state. Although he has gained some measure of autonomy from both external and internal restraints and excesses,
Edwin nevertheless remains tethered to a notion of relationship as conflict and suffering.\textsuperscript{29}

The problem of the novel of artistic development is to bridge the gap between the protagonist’s isolated consciousness and the world. Edwin’s progress reflects the notion of the aesthetic as bodily sensation and relational struggle. Bennett attempts to resolve, albeit tentatively, the problem of the form through human contact. Edwin connects with the world by virtue of his physical relationship with Hilda. But in the process, he has to sacrifice his art in order to connect. Whereas Bennett begins this movement from artistic consciousness toward the world through an actual relationship with another person, Virginia Woolf completes it in \textit{The Voyage Out}. James Joyce intervenes between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf. Edwin Clayhanger abandons his artistic aspirations in order to live in the world; Stephen Dedalus renounces the world in favor of an unfettered, creative consciousness.

\textsuperscript{29} Commenting in his journals about the relationship between men and women, Bennett writes, “The two sexes must forever remain distant, antagonistic, and mutually inexplicable.” June 24, 1898. \textit{The Journals of Arnold Bennett}, v. 1, p. 79.
Chapter 3: “We must neither love one another nor die”

“Verily, it is well for the world that it sees only beauty of the completed work and not its origins nor the conditions whence it sprang; since knowledge of the artist’s inspiration might often but confuse and alarm and so prevent the full effect of its excellence. Strange hours, indeed, these were, and strangely unnerving the labour that filled them! Strangely fruitful intercourse this, between one body and another mind!”

Thomas Mann, “Death in Venice”

Whereas Edwin sacrifices his artistic ambitions to “the exquisite burden of life,” Stephen Dedalus flatly rejects everything but his impulse to create the world. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* had a series of incarnations. Joyce wrote “A Portrait of the Artist” first as a dramatic essay on aesthetics. Casting himself as the artist-protagonist of that essay, Joyce advocates an art that “liberate[s] from the personalised lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts.”

When the editors of *Dana* rejected the essay for publication in 1904, Joyce began to rewrite it as *Stephen Hero*. He then reworked the longer and more conventional

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1 In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson, p. 258.
narrative of Stephen Hero into A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Throughout the different versions of the novel, Joyce remains focused on mining the hidden significance of various “lumps of matter.”

Virginia Woolf, more than any other contemporary critic, gets right what is at stake in Joyce’s first novel. The critical response to the serial publication of the novel, whether laudatory or outraged, principally addresses its minute and original inspection of bodily processes. This detailed focus on the goings on of the body is widely construed as evidence of Joyce’s materialism. Ezra Pound declares him a realist: “He gives the thing as it is.” H. G. Wells recommends its “quintessential and unfailing reality.” On the other hand, an anonymous reviewer finds Joyce clever but feels “he would really be at his best in a treatise on drains.” Critics, both sympathetic and indignant, mistake effusive physical description for materialism.

In an essay that later becomes “Modern Fiction,” Woolf too comments on Joyce’s closeness to life as he records “atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which

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2 The novel was published as a serial in the Egoist from February 1914 to September 1915, and not in book form until the first American edition in 1916.


4 Ibid., p. 87.

5 Ibid., p. 85.
they fall” and as he traces the pattern “however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.”

Unlike other contemporary critics, Woolf recognizes that, despite the abundance of physical description, Joyce is concerned primarily with the workings of the mind. Although she deems Bennett a materialist in the same essay, Woolf insists, “Mr. Joyce is spiritual; concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its myriad messages through the brain.”

She regards Joyce’s novel spiritual rather than material because she does not cease simply at a superficial reckoning of details. She considers the total effect, the use to which the body and life are put.

Ultimately, in the novel “mind” and “consciousness” rule body and world. With characteristic sagacity, Woolf casually goes on to wonder: “Is it due to the method that we feel neither jovial nor magnanimous, but centred in a self which in spite of its tremor of susceptibility never reaches out or embraces or comprehends what is outside and beyond?”

The material specificity of the story, serving simply as fodder for his consciousness, in no way pierces Stephen’s sense of innerness and isolation. He remains witness to and not participant in life or body. Stanislaus Joyce echoes Woolf’s perception:

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6 “Modern Novels,” ibid., p. 125.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 126.
“Though the treatment is objective, we are, as it were, from first to last in the centre of Stephen’s brain. The picture is an interior.” As Bennett embodies the aesthetic tradition of materialism, trumping consciousness with sensory fact, Joyce carries forward the idealist line by subordinating “lumps of matter” to flights of consciousness.

Controlling the Body through External Authorities

* A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is perhaps the most well-known novel of artistic development. Like Edwin, Stephen has a conflicted relationship with his body and his physical sensations. Ultimately, he overcomes the pains and pleasures of his body and of life through an escape into imagination. As Auden writes of Yeats, Stephen is “hurt . . . into poetry.” Although his lack of ease with physical experience ends in flight, Stephen initially attempts to evade, sometimes order, his confused physical experiences by appealing to various external authorities. Often overwhelmed by his physical sensations, Stephen looks to others to rescue him from his physical responses.

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9 My Bother’s Keeper, p. 18. Richard Ellmann agrees: “While he took pride in grounding his art on brute, honest fact, he insisted also on the mind’s supremacy over all it surveyed.” James Joyce, The Critical Writings, eds. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann, p. 214. There are, though, many critics that insist exactly the opposite—that Stephen (and Joyce) is a champion of material reality and the body against the squeamishness of critics like Woolf. I find more compelling the views of critics, like Woolf and Ellmann, who focus not only on the existence of effusive and graphic physical description but also on its function in Stephen’s developing consciousness.

10 “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” in Selected Poems.
As a young boy at Clongowes, Stephen applies to the rector of the school to protect him from an unjust physical punishment that he anticipates Father Dolan will inflict the next day. Years later, unable to cope with his growing sexual desire, Stephen submits his body to a prostitute. Then after a period of wanton surrender to his sexual impulses, Stephen subjects himself to a rigid religious program of self-abnegation. When that does not suffice to control his bodily experience, Stephen throws off his religious devotion in favor of an aesthetic one, invoking the theories of Aristotle and Aquinas in order to regulate his body. His final appeal for mediation is to the mythical Daedalus. In each section of the novel, Stephen attempts to bring his unruly sensations under the order of one authority or another. Although it is not clear whether Joyce intends Stephen’s final flight as a triumph or a failure, the narrative progression is of Stephen exhausting various possibilities of controlling his body via external authorities—educational, sexual, religious, aesthetic, and mythical.

During his time in Clongowes, Stephen is physically frail. Playing a game of football, “He felt his body small and weak amid the throng of players and his eyes were weak and watery.”[^1] Rather than having a sense of a whole body, Stephen experiences bodies, his own and others, as a combination of discrete parts. He is easily overwhelmed by the rushing throng of body parts. Afraid of “the flashing eyes and muddy boots” of

the other boys, Stephen is both fascinated by and terrified of his body (7). His young body is subject to various kinds of physical pain: a schoolmate shoves him into a muddy ditch; he suffers a serious cold; the prefect of studies strikes him for being idle. Stephen responds to these incidents by becoming absorbed in his immediate physical sensations, trying to understand what is happening, falling into confusion, and, finally, bringing some kind of order to his experience.

After the prefect strikes him, “His whole body was shaking with fright, his arm was shaking and his crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air” (42). Confused and unwilling to be beaten again, Stephen asks the rector to intervene on his behalf. When the rector excuses him from his lessons until his parents send him new eyeglasses, Stephen, unsatisfied, insists, “Yes, sir, but Father Dolan said he will come in tomorrow to pandy me again for it” (48). Stephen only relents when the rector promises to speak to Father Dolan directly. The first section of the novel ends with Stephen’s triumph in appealing to the rector. What he does, in effect, is control what is done to his body by appealing to a figure of authority to protect him from physical pain. More importantly, Stephen learns to manage his bodily sensations by ceding authority to an outside figure.

In the next section of the novel, Stephen has matured from a child avoiding pain to an adolescent seeking pleasure. Although his bodily sensations have evolved from pain to pleasure, Stephen’s dynamic of being overwhelmed by sensation and
surrendering to an external force persists. Stephen has his first sexual experience with a prostitute. He follows her into a room and notices a “huge doll [sitting] with her legs apart in the copious easychair beside the bed” (84). He cannot bring himself to admit his desire for the woman, instead displacing it onto the doll. Stephen is unable to kiss the prostitute. As she holds him to her, “he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself” (85). Although Stephen feels strong, the reality is that she is holding him “firmly” in her arms; she “bows” his head and kisses him (85). He “all but burst into hysterical weeping” (84). In fact, “it was too much for him. He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her . . .” (85).

Because neither the rector nor the prostitute has been able to relieve his tumultuous sensations, Stephen decides to do away with his bodily impulses altogether. In an effort to distance his soul from sin, Stephen wonders if that “bestial part of the body [. . .] feels and understands and desires [. . .] moved by a lower soul than his soul” (117-18). Could it be that an independent “torpid snaky life” had been “feeding” off of him (118)? Stephen’s solution is to conquer the body once and for all. “His body to which he had yielded was dying. Into the grave with it! Nail it down into a wooden box, the corpse [. . .] into the grave, to rot, to feed the mass of its creeping worms and to be devoured by scuttling plumpbellied rats” (94). Stephen sets out programmatically to mortify his senses, bringing each under a strict discipline of self-denial: he walks with “downcast eyes;” forces himself to suffer “noises . . . such as the sharpening of knives;”
subjects himself to “a certain stale fishy stink like that of longstanding urine;” practices “strict habits at table [. . .] observed [. . .] fasts;” and to mortify the sense of touch, “sat in the most uncomfortable positions, suffered patiently every itch and pain, kept away from the fire, remained on his knees all through the mass [. . .]” (127). The third section of the novel ends as Stephen kneels for morning communion at the end of the religious retreat at the college. His body is purified and ready for “a life of grace and virtue and happiness” (123). Perhaps religious authority has succeeded where others have failed.

But Stephen soon finds himself dissatisfied with religious devotion too and is unwilling to commit to life as a priest. He disavows the call of the Church and turns instead to fulfill the prophecy of his name. The mythical Daedalus will lead Stephen away from the dread of his own body. Echoing Joyce’s view of the artist as freeing from “personalised lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm,” Stephen finds in his namesake a “symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being” (142).12 Whereas the Church merely aims to purify his still human body, Daedalus holds the promise of a completely transformed body, intangible and immortal. “His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he knew was purified in a breath and delivered of incertitude and made radiant and commingled with the element of the spirit” (142). As

the novel proceeds, Stephen turns from earthly authorities—rector and prostitute—to symbolic ones—Daedalus and art—with the Church as the mediator between the two. He moves from managing the body he has to transcending it altogether.

The final authority to which Stephen subjects his body is art. In the last section of the book, Stephen sets out his aesthetic principles “by the light of one or two ideas of Aristotle and Aquinas” (157). Dividing art into three forms, Stephen values most the dramatic, which grants each person a “proper and intangible esthetic life” while the artist, “like the God of the creation,” is refined out of existence (180-81). Unlike the lyrical and epical forms that arouse desire and loathing, the dramatic form induces emotional stasis by “arresting” the mind in “an ideal pity or an ideal terror [. . .] prolonged and at last dissolved by what I call the rhythm of beauty” (173). The trouble with moving toward pleasure or away from pain is that “they are not more than physical” (173). The first three sections of the novel represent kinetic emotions: appealing to the rector to avoid pain, seeking pleasure with the prostitute, conquering both impulses in seeking pain and avoiding pleasure in religion. These worldly authorities have failed to regulate Stephen’s unruly body. Daedalus and art transcend the bind altogether, guaranteeing immortality and stasis.

Each of the putative triumphs that conclude the five sections is also a moment of defeat. All of Stephen’s appeals to external authority have been ineffectual, either literally or symbolically. We learn that the rector at Clongowes and Father Dolan had a
laugh about Stephen’s bold visit. His sexual encounter with the prostitute is uneasy and anti-climactic. The religion through which he seeks redemption dwindles into skepticism. His art not only does not refine him out of existence but leaves him with heightened desire, for, as Auden continues in his poem to Yeats, “poetry makes nothing happen.” And his final mythical escape from Ireland places him in the unhappy position of Icarus.

Disembodied Sex

Although it sounds counterintuitive to suggest that Stephen discounts his body, given the graphic descriptions of his sexual desire, it is nonetheless the case. No amount of shocking detail can bridge the distance between Stephen and his body. His physical desire remains always a suggestion, allusive, yet to come. Visiting Queen’s College with his father, Stephen is startled to see the word “foetus” carved into a desk:

[... ] the word and the vision capered before his eyes as he walked back across the quadrangle and towards the college gate. It shocked him to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his own mind. His recent monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words [...]. [He wondered] always where they came from, from what den of monstrous images [...]. (75-76)

13 “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” in Selected Poems.
This passage begins Stephen’s struggle toward pursuing his physical urges. His growing inner desire is confirmed and encouraged by an external and legible “trace.” The reveries “throng” and overwhelm him as did the players in the football match years earlier. Although the language is suggestive, what is actually given is a series of deferrals that are never made explicit: “the word,” “the vision,” “a trace,” “reveries,” and “images.” Stephen experiences his body not directly but through substitution and delay.

Later in the passage, we are told that “the letters cut in the stained wood of the desk stared upon him, mocking his bodily weakness and futile enthusiasms and making him loathe himself for his own mad and filthy orgies” (76). Stephen feels isolated by “his monstrous way of life” (77). Although the passage implies that Stephen is tortured by and has succumbed to some bodily tumult, the exact nature of it remains to be revealed.

Near the end of the second section of the novel, Stephen surrenders to his physical desires. His “blood was in revolt” (83). He is an animal seeking relief:

He wandered up and down the dark slimy streets peering into the gloom of lanes and doorways, listening eagerly for any sound. He moaned to himself like some baffled prowling beast. He wanted to sin with another of his kind, to force another being to sin with him and to exult with her in sin. He felt some dark presence moving irresistibly upon him from the darkness, a presence subtle and murmurous as a flood filling him wholly with itself. (83-84)

The descriptive language—the “peering,” moaning, and forcing—evokes a sense of coarse and headlong physicality that is interrupted by Stephen’s conscious desire “to
sin.” The idea of sin introduces a distance and abstraction in the experience of the body; it is a displacement of motive from the physical to the moral dimension. What Stephen wants to “force” and “exult” in, what he is moaning for, is not sex but sin. He is not seeking the fulfillment of physical desires but the transgression of religious codes. He desires not the physical release but the moral consequence of sex. Something always stands between Stephen and the immediate and direct experience of his body.

Stephen wanders further into the “maze” of the narrow alleyways, drawn along by some “dark presence”:

A trembling seized him and his eyes grew dim. The yellow gasflames arose before his troubled vision against the vapoury sky, burning as if before an altar. Before the doors and in the lighted halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some rite. He was in another world: he has awakened from a slumber of centuries. (84)

The language of religious transgression is now replaced by ritual sacrifice. The world of sex as an expression of physical desire holds no reality for Stephen; he is intent on “another world.” His “vision” is “troubled” both because he is nearsighted as well as because he is on the verge of some kind of bodily sacrifice. What is a sexual encounter with a prostitute has been refigured into some ritual sacrifice at an altar. Stephen cannot

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14 In a letter to Joyce about Ulysses, his brother Stanislaus writes: “This brooding on the lower order of natural facts, this re-evocation and exaggeration of detail by detail and the spiritual dejection which accompanies them are purely in the spirit of the confessional.” Letters of James Joyce, v. 3, ed. Richard Ellmann, p. 104.
bear the immediacy of his sensations or his sexual desire. He must transform them into a visionary encounter far removed in time and space.

Some twenty pages after Stephen’s first bodily stirrings, he consummates his sexual desire with a prostitute:

He tried to bid his tongue speak that he might seem at ease [ . . . ]. Her round arms held him firmly to her and he [ . . . ] all but burst into hysterical weeping [ . . . ]. His lips would not bend to kiss her [ . . . ]. With a sudden movement she bowed his head and joined her lips to his [ . . . ]. It was too much for him. He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind [ . . . ]. [Her lips] pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech [ . . . ]. (84-85)

This final scene of consummation is far from climactic. It does not fulfill the promise of the “prowling beast,” “mad and filthy orgies,” and “monstrous” behavior that we have been led to expect. The “trace” and “image” and “vision” of Stephen’s bodily experiences do not lead to what they connote. In this sense too is Stephen’s “vision troubled”—what he imagines and what actually happens are different. Throughout the encounter, Stephen remains at the mercy of the prostitute and bears no sense of an independent, bodily agency.

As Stephen struggles with the opposition between his desire and his senses, the chasm between his sexual acts and his actual physical body widens. After his sexual encounter, the “women” and “girls” that designated prostitutes before are now simply “whores” (85-86). As this behavior becomes habit, Stephen:
[...] would pass them by calmly waiting for a sudden movement of his own will or a sudden call to his sinloving soul from their soft perfumed flesh. Yet as he prowled in quest of that call, his senses, stultified only by his desire, would note keenly all that wounded or shamed them; his eyes, a ring of porter froth on a clothless table or a photograph of two soldiers standing to attention or a gaudy playbill; his ears, the drawling jargon of greeting [...]. (86)

It is still his “will” and “sinloving soul” that determine the form and substance of his physical gratification. Stephen’s “senses” and “desire,” rather than being integrated, are at odds, because his desire does not spring from his bodily sensations. His desire “stultifies” his senses rather than heightening them because what he desires is to be transported to “another world.” Furthermore, what “wounds” his senses are matters of decorum and taste: a stain on a table, a gaudy advertisement, unpleasant speech.

Fearing that his body or soul may be “maimed by the excess” of experience, Stephen finds that not only are they not “maimed” but a “dark peace had been established between them” (87). In a reversal, Stephen’s soul is characterized as “reentering her dwelling shyly after the frenzy of his body’s lust had spent itself [...]” (88). His “sinloving” soul has been made “shy” and his timid body is now “frenzied.”

The end of this “riot” of the soul disguised as physical abandon comes with the school’s religious retreat in honor of Saint Francis Xavier. After the first day, Stephen goes home agitated:

He ate his dinner with surly appetite and, when the meal was over and the greasestrewn plates lay abandoned on the table, he rose and went to the window, clearing the thick scum from his mouth
with his tongue and licking it from his lips. So he had sunk to the state of a beast that licks his chaps after meat. This was the end; and a faint glimmer of fear began to pierce the fog of his mind [. . .]. His soul was fattening and congealing into a gross grease, plunging ever deeper in its dull fear into a somber threatening dusk, while the body that was his stood, listless and dishonoured, gazing out of darkened eyes, helpless, perturbed and human for a bovine god to stare upon. (94)

For all of the sexual intimations of “blood revolt” and “filthy orgies,” this scene of eating is more explicit and viscerally forceful than the scenes of Stephen’s dalliance with the prostitute. His bodily surrender to the prostitute is innocent compared to his licking his lips after a meal. That is why this is “the end” of his sexual adventures—because this is the first moment he experiences their impact bodily. Until now, Stephen has experienced his sexual exploits as moral or aesthetic transgressions. Because his sexual encounters are more about his morals than about his body, Stephen’s sexual riot ends at the religious retreat.

As he distinguishes “his soul” from “the body that was his,” the distance between Stephen and his physical experience grows. He cannot bring himself to think of it as his body, the relationship remaining more an accident than an identity. In this passage describing a meal, more than in any of the scenes describing his sexual exploits, we first see Stephen “sunk to the state of a beast.” The soul is what is “fattened” and “congealed” through his transgressions; the body, in fact “helpless” before the “sinloving soul,” is simply “human.” Thus, as the religious sermon at the college
suggests, when “degraded man outrages and defiles the temple of the Holy Ghost,” he is defiling the body (104). Although resolved to mortify his offending senses, Stephen’s penitence is short-lived precisely because he displaces onto his body what has been and remains a revolt of his soul.

Each of the five sections of the novel, like the labyrinth at Crete, presents an obstacle for Stephen to overcome on his way to eventual flight. Stephen attempts to escape the experience of his body through various displacements, all of which fail to regulate his sensory experience. Each section of the novel concludes in a dead end that forces Stephen to turn another way. When he has finally exhausted his earthly and embodied possibilities, Stephen looks up. Although his sexual experiences verge on graphic materiality, Stephen remains disembodied throughout the novel. His sexual encounters are figured more as moral, ritual, and aesthetic experiences than as physical ones.

15 Paul writes, “All other sins that someone may commit are done outside the body; but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not realise that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you received from God? You are not your own property, then; you have been bought at a price. So use your body for the glory of God.” 1 Cor. 6: 18-20.
Stephen the Creator

Frustrated by his inability to regulate his body by appealing to various external authorities, Stephen turns inward. He begins to focus on his own internal capacity to refashion himself and the world. His drive to actively create the world replaces his posture of passive surrender to external authorities, which now are so many “nets” flung at the soul “to hold it back from flight” (171). Art and myth allow him to internalize the authority he needs to control both his bodily impulses and his responses to the world. The movement from the dramatic third person narration that opens the novel to the first person journal entries that end it completes Stephen’s voyage in. The real boy with the real father has become the mythical boy with the mythical father.

The novel opens with an epigraph from Ovid’s Metamorphoses: “Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes” (3). The line refers to Daedalus as he sets out to make the wings with which he escapes the labyrinth of the Minotaur. “So then to unimagined arts he set his mind [and altered nature’s laws]” (224). As with Daedalus, where one unnatural invention necessitates another (the wooden bull that requires the labyrinth that requires the wings), Stephen’s art too becomes self-perpetuating. Designed to transcend the limitations of his body, Stephen’s alternate world of images and traces, visions and poems, creates an unbridgeable distance between him and the world. He does this foremost by denying the experience of his body, the medium and substance of his
connection with his own experience, with the world, and with others. Unsuccessful in
his attempts to externally curb his bodily experience through a series of displacements,
Stephen sets out to reimagine himself and the world.

As Stephen’s faith falters, he no longer can cast his physical desires as moral
transgressions. Instead, he retreats into a world of language and fantasy in order to
avoid what is unruly in his body and in the world. In an entry titled “Esthetic” in the
Trieste Notebook, Joyce writes that:

> The instant of inspiration is a spark so brief as to be invisible. The
> reflection of it on many sides at once from a multitude of cloudy
> circumstances with no one of which it is united save by the bond of
> merest possibility veils its afterglow in an instant in a first confusion of
> form. This is the instant in which the word is made flesh.\(^{16}\)

The relationship between circumstance and inspiration is one of “merest possibility.” As
the novel progresses, the connection between things and words loosens from simple
representation to active creation. In an alchemical “confusion of form,” words come to
stand apart from the things that they represent. This happens not naturally but as a
consequence of a bold act of creation by “a priest of the eternal imagination,” who
transmutes “the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life”
(186).\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\) Joyce made various entries about characters and themes in the Trieste Notebook beginning in
1907, when he decided that he would rewrite Stephen Hero. In A Portrait of the Artist as a Young
The novel follows Stephen’s transformation from passive witness to active creator. During the family’s boisterous Christmas dinner at the beginning of the novel, young Stephen tries to work out the difference between Protestant and Catholic. He remembers hearing that Protestants call the Virgin Mary a “Tower of Ivory.” He wonders, “How could a woman be a tower of ivory or a house of gold” (29). Stephen then thinks of his Protestant friend Eileen: “Eileen had long white hands. One evening when playing tig she had put her hands over his eyes: long and white and thin and cold and soft. That was ivory: a cold white thing” (29). Stephen associates the word with the qualities of the thing it represents. When Stephen is young, there is a correspondence between language and sensory perception.18

Years later, things have changed considerably. Walking through a street of shops on his way to university, Stephen notices an advertisement: “His own consciousness of language was ebbing from his brain and trickling into the very words themselves which set to band and disband themselves in wayward rhythms [. . .]. The word now shone in his brain, clearer and brighter than any ivory sawn from the mottled tusks of elephants. *Ivory, ivoire, avorio, ebur*” (150). Rather than perceiving things as having an independent

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17 Speaking to his brother, Joyce characterizes his early poems as “converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own.” In Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper*, p. 104.

18 Examples abound of Stephen working out the meaning of words through sensory investigation: “belt” (6), “suck” (8), “kiss” (11), “thigh” (20).
existence, Stephen focuses instead on his conscious capacity to create what he sees. Ivory is no longer “a cold white thing” but rather a shining word in Stephen’s brain, a word “clearer and brighter” than actual ivory.  

The artist, Joyce writes in the essay that shares the novel’s name, “annihilated and rebuilt experience.” Perception of external phenomena gives way to their internal recreation, which is then projected outward as original creation. Stephen is increasingly self-enclosed: “Nothing moved him or spoke to him from the real world unless he heard in it an echo of the infuriated cries within him” (77). Words replace things as “the world perished about his feet as if it had been fire consumed [. . .]” (148). As Stephen says in *Stephen Hero*, “My own mind [. . .] is more interesting to me than the entire country.”

As he exercises his inner capacity to create the world, Stephen’s artistry grows in scope. No longer relying on formal verse simply to transcend his physical shortcomings, Stephen uses the entire “sordid tide of life” as the occasion for his aesthetic flights of fancy. Stephen transforms his everyday life, particularly his bodily experiences, into expansive moments of being. Even infestation by lice becomes an opportunity to call

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19 Of Stephen’s relationship with language, Frank Budgen notes that words “were much more potent than the objects, actions and relations they stood for.” *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, p. 58.


21 p. 248.
forth Thomas Nashe’s “A Litany in Time of Plague”: “The life of his body, illclad, illfed, louseeaten, made him close his eyelids in a sudden spasm of despair: and in the darkness he saw the brittle bright bodies of lice falling from the air and turning often as they fell. Yes; and it was not darkness that fell from the air. It was brightness. *Brightness falls from the air.* He had not even remembered rightly Nash’s line” (197). Stephen adjusts his sensory perception to accommodate the poetic line.

Stephen’s drive to create extends further outward, becomes more entrenched and pervasive. He begins to

defile with patience whatever image had attracted his eyes [. . .] he moved among distorted images of the outer world. A figure that had seemed to him by day demure and innocent came towards him by night through the winding darkness of sleep, her face transfigured by lecherous cunning [. . .]. (83)

His daily experience is of “images” and “figures,” not of things or persons. Subject to his desire, he patiently defiles, distorts, and transfigures what he sees to suit his imagination. Instead of writing verse, he now speaks verse and experiences living verse: “Such moments passed and the wasting fires of lust sprang up again. The verses passed from his lips and the inarticulate cries and the unspoken brutal words rushed forth from his brain to force a passage (83). “Verses” and “words” actually “force a passage” between bodily desire and the world. They “pass” and “rush” out of him, casting aside any sense of agency he had in writing poems. “The world for all its solid substance and complexity no longer existed for his soul [. . .]” (126).
In Stephen’s drive to manage his relationship to his body and the world, not only is the word made flesh but the flesh is made word. What is real is fictionalized and what is fantasy is realized. He manipulates actual bodies, his own and others’, to conform to his notions. At the end of the fourth section of the novel, Stephen encounters some school friends wading by the sea. Naked, they look “characterless”:

Shuley without his deep unbuttoned collar, Ennis without his scarlet belt with the snaky clasp and Connolly without his Norfolk coat with the flapless sidepockets! It was a pain to see them and a swordlike pain to see the signs of adolescence that made repellent their pitiable nakedness. Perhaps they had taken refuge in number and noise from the secret dread in their souls. But he, apart from them and in silence, remembered in what dread he stood of the mystery of his own body. (142)

It physically “pains” Stephen to see things as they are, whether naked bodies or “a ring of porter froth on a clothless table” (86). There is no art to which Stephen can subject a naked body. It is literally “characterless,” because it is stripped. The exclamation mark emphasizes the impossibility of conceiving these boys without their emblematic signs. The sexuality of their adolescence, not displaced onto “unbuttoned collars,” “snaky clasps,” and “flapless sidepockets” is too immediate for Stephen to bear.

In this passage, Stephen leaves behind his schoolmates and the “dread” of his own body through a long sequence of identifications with Daedalus. He casts aside “fear” and “incertitude” and “shame” as so many “cerements shaken from the body of death” (143). He shuttles between the semiotic realm of language and the timeless realm
of archetype. His mythical and immortal body has no use for the world and its inhabitants. During this out of body flight, Stephen sees a girl “whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird” (144). There is a “sign upon [her] flesh” for Stephen to decipher (144). The “magic” that works on the girl is Stephen’s own imagination. Joyce describes Stephen’s conception of the artist more explicitly in Stephen Hero:

The artist, he imagined, standing in the position of mediator between the world of his experience and the world of his dreams—<<a mediator, consequently gifted with twin faculties, a selective faculty and a reproductive faculty.>> To equate these faculties was the secret of artistic success: the artist who could disentangle the subtle soul of the image from its mesh of defining circumstances most exactly and <<re-embodies>> it in artistic circumstances chosen as the most exact for it in its new office, he was the supreme artist.22

Stephen splits the world in two, one outer and the other inner. The outer world comprises sensory perception and the “mesh of defining circumstances.” The circumstances of the inner world, on the other hand, are artistic and less entangling. The artist frees the “subtle soul of the image” from the outer world in which he finds it and “re-embodies” it in the world of dreams. The girl wading by the shore is divested of her real body and “re-embodied” as a seabird because “to press out again, from the gross earth or what it brings forth, from sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of our soul, an image of the beauty we have come to understand—that is art” (173).

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22 pp. 77-78.
Art, then, is breaking free from the sensory perceptions and limitations of the body and creating a beautiful image from that struggle for freedom.

Stephen is disturbed by his own body, and can no better bear the reality of any other human body. Real human contact frightens him. Because he has not been able to live his bodily experiences, Stephen can only imagine relationship in magical terms. He fantasizes about meeting “in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld [. . .]. He would fade into something impalpable under her eyes and then in a moment, he would be transfigured. Weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in that magic moment” (54). Although he desires real contact, when the situation arises, Stephen fails to act. As a young boy on the tram with E. C., Stephen thinks he “could easily catch hold of her when she comes up to my step [. . .]. I could hold her and kiss her. But he did neither: and, when he was sitting alone in the deserted tram, he tore his ticket into shreds and stared gloomily at the corrugated footboard” (58). This frustration of his physical desire is sublimated into writing an ode to E. C.:

During this process all those elements which he deemed common and insignificant fell out of the scene. There remained no trace of the tram itself nor of the trammen nor of the horses: nor did he and she appear vividly. The verses told only of the night and the balmy breeze and the maiden lustre of the moon. Some undefined sorrow was hidden in the hearts of the protagonists as they stood in silence beneath the leafless trees and when the moment of farewell had come the kiss, which had been withheld by one, was given by both. (59)
In his fantasy, Stephen reimagines the incident without any of the physical details.

Neither he nor E.C. is “vivid.” The scene is abstract and “undefined.” Not only are all of the sensory details excluded, but also what is frustrated in reality is enacted in poetry. In his poems Stephen can suffer human contact because his images lack the specificity of bodily experience.

Stephen’s frustrated relationship with E. C. continues to inspire his poems well into his university years. Alternately jealous of her relationship with Father Moran and his friend Cranly, Stephen refuses to speak to her on the steps of the library. The next morning, he wakes up and writes a villanelle: “in the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh” (183). Not only is this Christ in Mary’s womb, but, more interestingly, it is yet another metaphorical reversal of what is happening in the narrative. In Stephen’s imagination, flesh is made word. Imagination displaces incarnation as bodies are turned to verse. Stephen’s “rude brutal anger” with the girl breaks up her “fair image” into “fragments” and “distorts the reflections of her image” (185). His “bitter and despairing thoughts” about her evoke the villanelle (186). In the final moment of creation, “the temptress of his villanelle [. . .] yields” to Stephen, “radiant, warm, odorous and lavishlimbed” (187). As with the earlier poem, what cannot be voluntarily had in bodily experience can be forced in aesthetic creation. What
eludes Stephen in life can be fulfilled in verse.\textsuperscript{23} Throughout the novel, the bodily origin of creation is usurped by a disembodied consciousness.

The Isolated Artist

As the novel progresses, Stephen increasingly finds futile his appeals to various external authorities. He hasn’t been able to control either his own body or the world:

How foolish his aim had been! He had tried to build a breakwater of order and elegance against the sordid tide of life without him and to dam up, by rules of conduct and active interests and new filial relations, the powerful recurrence of the tides within him. Useless. From without as from within the water flowed over his barriers [. . .]. (82)

Faced with this failure, Stephen turns next to artistic creation to mitigate between the external world of sensory experience and the inner world of desire. By emptying outer forms and “re-embodying” them as inner forms, Stephen superficially avoids discomfort and temporarily fulfills his desires. Aestheticizing his daily life and writing poems allows him to maintain an uneasy balance between outer and inner worlds. This too eventually fails to curtail his restlessness. Posed as a question to himself, Stephen wonders if

\textsuperscript{23} During one of his separations from his wife Nora, Joyce writes to her: “It is perhaps in art, Nora dearest, that you and I will find a solace for our own love.” \textit{Letters of James Joyce}, v. 2, ed. Richard Ellmann, p. 242. Years later, Arnold Bennett remarks about the couple: “We met James Joyce yesterday. Nearly blind, & totally self-centred: a very strong personality indeed. I should hardly like to be his wife.” \textit{Letters of Arnold Bennett}, v. 4, ed. James Hepburn, p. 612.
[...] he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of language many coloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose? (140)

Art that “re-embodies” the sensible world, no matter how beautifully, no longer suffices.

Stephen aims to withdraw completely and begin from an inner world that is reflected in his art. This passage echoes Pater’s conclusion in The Renaissance. Describing the mind as it reflects on external objects, he writes that

[...] the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each 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.24

So thoroughgoing is the withdrawal of consciousness here that the dream is not of the world but of a world. Like Stephen’s inner world, the dream of an indefinite world is doubly removed from the actual world. The final sentence can be read in two ways: each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner does its own dream of a world, or each mind keeping its dream of a world as a solitary prisoner. So either the mind is a solitary prisoner or the world is. Like Russian nesting dolls, the dream of a world is the solitary prisoner of the solitary mind that is, in turn, the solitary prisoner of an isolated individual.

24 p. 151.
In Stephen’s case, his isolation is complete when he abandons the “glowing sensible world” to the “contemplation of an inner world.” When he is a student at Clongowes, Stephen’s sense of self inheres in his idea of his relationship to the external environment. He writes in a textbook:

Stephen Dedalus  
Class of Elements  
Clongowes Wood College  
Sallins  
County Kildare  
Ireland  
Europe  
The World  
The Universe (12)

As a child, he begins with “Stephen Dedalus” and moves outward in the search for meaning. Stephen soon exhausts these possibilities, rejecting relationships with classmates, family, church, and nation. Instead, he withdraws inward and anchors his sense of self in the reflexive inner workings of his mind.

That the novel begins with third person narration and ends in first person journal mirrors Stephen’s retreat into an inner world. Although his aesthetic hierarchy places the dramatic form above the epical and lyrical forms, Stephen himself progresses in the reverse order. The novel begins dramatic, moves through romantic and religious epic, and concludes in a self-enclosed lyrical mode. The forward march of the novel depletes the number of other persons present until there is no one left but Stephen, and even he is not left, because he is not embodied in his experience. The first section, dramatizing
school and family life, is peopled with characters. The next section ends with Stephen and one other person, the prostitute. As the middle section concludes, Stephen communes alone with God. He is caught in a solitary vision on the shore in the final sentence of the fourth section. In the final journal entry, the novel ends with Stephen absent, present only in his self-conscious address to himself and, secondarily, to Daedalus.

Stephen’s prevailing sense of isolation from life and from others is reflected in the ending of the novel. The lyrical form is one in which the artist “presents his image in immediate relation to himself” (180). Even as a teenager, Stephen “could respond to no earthly or human appeal, dumb and insensible to the call of summer and gladness and companionship [. . .]” (77). Before his experience with the prostitute, Stephen sees “clearly too his own futile isolation. He had not gone one step nearer the lives he had sought to approach nor bridged the restless shame and rancour” that divides him from others (82). Stephen’s “constant failure” to “merge his life in the common tide of other lives” causes him eventually to abandon his faith (128). When the director of the college suggests Stephen consider becoming a priest, he declines, setting out instead “to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world” (136). Either he will learn through isolated withdrawal into self-meditation or through studying others while himself entangled in the world.
Satisfied by his solitary vision, Stephen “turns away” from the girl on the seashore without making contact (144).

Because he is unable to embody his actual lived experience, Stephen cannot make contact with another human being. When Cranly asks him if he has ever loved anyone, Stephen responds, “I tried to love God” (203). The same exchange is amplified in

Stephen Hero:

—Love, said Stephen, is a name, if you like, for something inexpressible [. . .]. I believe it might be a test of love to see what exchanges it offers. What do people give when they love?
—A wedding breakfast, said Cranly.
—Their bodies, isn’t it: that, at the very least. It is something to give one’s body even for hire.
—Then you think that women who give their bodies for hire, as you say, love the people they give them to?
—When we love, we give. In a way they love too. We give something, a tall hat or a book of music or one’s time and labour or one’s body, in exchange for love.25

Stephen has been unable to love because he believes it to be an exchange between bodies. And he cannot give what he does not have, what he does not identify with. His final encounter with Cranly urges separation from his friend: “Away then: it is time to go. A voice spoke softly to Stephen’s lonely heart, bidding him go and telling him that his friendship was coming to an end. Yes; he would go. He could not strive against another. He knew his part” (206). Before leaving, Stephen declares, “I do not fear to be alone or to be spurned for another or to leave whatever I have to leave. And I am not afraid to make

25 p. 175.
a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake and perhaps as long as eternity too” (208). In his second to last journal entry, Stephen writes that his mother “prays now [. . .] that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen” (213).

Stephen is capable neither of love—whether of family, friends, or lovers—nor of death, because he is not embodied. As a schoolboy, when he first imagines dying, Stephen conceives death as “passing out of existence [. . .] by fading out in the sun or by being lost and forgotten somewhere in the universe” (78). His notion of the artist, who “like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence,” closely resembles his idea of death. Hearing the “call of life” from his mythical namesake, Stephen throws aside “the fear he had walked in night and day, the incertitude that had ringed him round, the shame that had abased him within and without” as nothing but “cerements shaken from the body of death” (143). Being beyond death also means being beyond life. Without a mortal body, neither love nor life is possible. Woolf keenly notes that despite Stephen’s “tremor of susceptibility,” he “never reaches out or embraces or comprehends what is outside and beyond.”

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Stephen is no closer than Edwin to answering the central question of the genre: how can an artist-protagonist connect with the world through his creative activity? Both novels suggest that cannot be done. Like Bennett, Joyce maintains the opposition between an artistic sensibility rooted in a disembodied consciousness and an ever-pressing world experienced through heightened physical sensations. Unlike Bennett, Joyce’s protagonist chooses to remain isolated, suffering neither love nor death. Whereas Edwin feels compelled to make a choice, Stephen abstains altogether. Both novels, by either being resigned to a burdensome life or escaping defensively into imagination, end in Pyrrhic victories: nothing has been resolved. Determined to have his body controlled from without or regulated from within, Stephen forestalls any possibility of actually making contact with another human being. Neither friends, nor family, nor lust, nor religion, nor art has sufficed. His final appeal to Daedalus as father does not bode well either, for he is become Icarus in his flight. Stephen dies where he lives: in metaphor.
Chapter 4: “We must love one another and die”

“They must love one another and die.”

“Everything I am is not mine; yet I am it completely. Everything I have is not mine; yet I have it completely. Everything I make is not mine; yet I make it completely. The infinitely transparent I is the surface identifying body and world absolutely. This is the foundation of an unqualifiedly total engagement with the world. This is the foundation for an essential transformation of the world order. Every I that I meet objectively is not me; yet I meet it completely in differentiating it. The face-to-face of perfectly other I’s is a unity perfectly differentiated.”

D. G. Leahy, Faith and Philosophy

If Joyce’s solution to the problem of the Künstlerroman is to move inward, Virginia Woolf attempts instead to voyage out. In her first novel, she deals with themes that persist throughout her fictional, critical, and autobiographical writing—the relationship between art and life, between mind and body, between self and other. Often presenting a wide range of responses to these dilemmas, Woolf does not offer any easy resolutions. Nevertheless, beginning with The Voyage Out (1915), she does present a possibility other than either abandoning art in order to be related or escaping from relationship into art.

Although artists abound in Woolf’s novels, this first work is the only one that focuses specifically on the development of an artist-protagonist from adolescence to
adulthood. The story follows Rachel Vinrace, a sheltered, music-loving introvert, on a sea voyage to a coastal town in South America. Her aunt, Helen Ridley, undertakes the task of educating Rachel about life and the world. Over the course of eight months in Santa Marina, Rachel interacts with English tourists staying at the local hotel, falls in love, becomes engaged, and dies. Most critics consider Rachel’s death Woolf’s statement about the impossibility of marriage for a woman artist. This conclusion not only contradicts Woolf’s life (she married Leonard Woolf in 1912 after completing an early draft of *The Voyage Out*, which is dedicated to him), but also overlooks that Rachel’s death presents an new alternative—neither Edwin’s burdened marriage nor Stephen’s metaphorical flight—to the bind between art and life that is characteristic of the *Künstlerroman* genre. And that new alternative—death—is not simply a defeated

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1 Neither Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) nor Miss LaTrobe in *Between the Acts* (1941) assumes the central narrative position that Rachel Vinrace does. Also, those novels do not focus primarily on the development of the artist figure. *Orlando* (1928) bends genre as much as it does gender. Spanning nearly five hundred years of Orlando’s life, multiple adventures including a change in gender, and the entire history of English literature, the novel has been variously read as picaresque, biography, magical realist, and *Künstlerroman*. Although *The Voyage Out* might also be read in other generic contexts, its most salient features are those of a development novel; and, of all of Woolf’s novels, this is the one most explicitly about the development of a young artistic consciousness from adolescence to maturity. I am grateful to Victoria Rosner for raising the issue of other artist figures in Woolf’s novels.

surrender to the problem. In the narrative world of the novel, Rachel’s death signals a developmental achievement in Rachel, in the notion of what an artist is, and in the genre.

Art and Life

Throughout the novel, the characters consider and discuss the role of art in life. As Rachel encounters these different opinions, her own ideas suffer various shocks.

Early in the novel, when we first find Rachel alone in her room, she is caught in a reverie about growing up in the care of her spinster aunts. She determines that

It was far better to play the piano and forget all the rest. The conclusion was very welcome. Let these odd men and women—her aunts, the Hunts, Ridley, Helen, Mr. Pepper, and the rest—be symbols—featureless but dignified, symbols of age, of youth, of motherhood, of learning, and beautiful often as people on the stage are beautiful. It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for. […] Absorbed by her music she accepted her lot very complacently, blazing into indignation perhaps once a fortnight, and subsiding as she subsided now.³

This is the first statement of Rachel’s artistic temperament.⁴ Her world consists of herself and music—everyone else is a “symbol” of abstract qualities. Other people are “odd”

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³ *The Voyage Out*, ed. Jane Wheare, p. 29. Subsequent references to the novel appear in the text.

⁴ Although Rachel mainly plays the piano, during the dance at the hotel, she does create a daring piece of music by stitching together various unlikely melodies and rhythms. *The Voyage Out*, pp. 151-53.
and “featureless,” distinguished only in that they are unlike her. The scene ends with Rachel fast asleep.

Woolf herself, in a letter she writes when she is nineteen years old, declaims, “The only thing in this world is music—music and books and one or two pictures. I am going to found a colony where there shall be no marrying—unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven—no human element at all, except what comes through Art—nothing but ideal peace and endless meditation.” These could be Rachel’s words. Other than music, her sympathies are only for nature and animals. When she laments the fate of the “poor little goats” that are transported by her father’s shipping business, he replies, “If it weren’t for the goats there’d be no music, my dear; music depends upon goats” (16). Rachel is unaffected by her father’s admonition. After a long passage where she remembers the death of her mother and her domestic life in Richmond, Rachel impatiently casts aside that effort and returns to her love of music. She is a “fanatic about music,” and any energy “that might have made her friends, or shown her the world, poured straight into music” (26).

But on the voyage to Santa Marina, Rachel faces various challenges to her artistic solipsism. When the cargo boat, owned by Rachel’s father, stops in Lisbon, Richard and Clarissa Dalloway join the others on board. Rachel is immediately impressed by Richard’s charm and Clarissa’s pedigree. The couple dismisses the artistic temperaments

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of those on board. During dinner, Richard ventures about the difference between politicians and artists: “Now your artists find things in a mess, shrug their shoulders, turn aside to their visions—which I grant may be very beautiful—and leave things in a mess. Now that seems to me evading one’s responsibilities” (36). Moments later, Clarissa adds:

‘When I’m with artists I feel so intensely the delights of shutting oneself up in a little world of one’s own, with pictures and music and everything beautiful, and then I go out into the streets and the first child I meet with its poor, hungry, dirty little face makes me turn round and say, “No, I can’t shut myself up—I won’t live in a world of my own. I should like to stop all the painting and writing and music until this kind of thing exists no longer.”’ (36)

These ideas that artists shirk political and social responsibility in favor of moments of isolated vision and beauty repeatedly find expression through many minor characters in the book.

What’s extraordinary about this conversation at dinner is the effect it has on Rachel. Until she meets the Dalloways, Rachel is certain that nothing matters except her music. After this conversation, she follows her aunt and Clarissa out of the dining room:

She had taken no part in the talk; no one had spoken to her; but she had listened to every word that was said. She had looked from Mrs. Dalloway to Mr. Dalloway, and from Mr. Dalloway back again. [. . .] As she followed, Rachel thought with supreme self-abasement, taking in the whole course of her life and the lives of all her friends, ‘She said we lived in a world of our own. It’s true. We’re perfectly absurd.’ (38)
She has come under some “trance” that shakes her most fundamental beliefs about art (38). She passively receives what is going on around her. That Rachel is impressionable is clear from this scene, as is that she has not been exposed to much life or talk. Her adolescence in Richmond consisted of playing music, walking through the park, and “doing [. . .] absolutely nothing” as suited her “fine natural indolence” (26).

Feeling strongly impacted by Richard and Clarissa’s views, Rachel attempts “first to recollect and then to expose her shivering private visions” to Richard (57). She puts to him the case of a widow in the suburb of Leeds. She wonders whether the politician or the artist gets closer to the life of the widow. Certainly the bills that Richard supports in Parliament might mean that the widow “goes to her cupboard and finds a little more tea, a few lumps of sugar, or a little less tea and a newspaper,” but what’s more important—“the mind of the widow . . . the affections”—remains “untouched” (57). Although Richard tends to the widow’s physical needs, what about her mind and heart? Richard answers that human beings are “not a set of compartments” but are

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6 In 1908, Woolf uses much the same language but to a different end in an early journal entry. Whereas Rachel simply wants to expose her “shivering visions,” Woolf wants to “[. . .] achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords, [. . .] & achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments [. . .].” The beauty she wants to express is “of life and the world, in action.” A Passionate Apprentice, pp. 392-93.

7 Woolf makes a similar argument about Arnold Bennett’s materialist style in her essay, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.” The essay first appears in Nation and Athenaeum on December 1, 1923. A revised version of the essay was given as a lecture to the Cambridge Heretics on May 18, 1924. This revised version appears as “Character in Fiction” in the Criterion in July, 1924.
organisms that must be taken “as a whole” (57). But his idea of that whole is quite abstract. He continues, replacing the image of the widow with that of society as a complex machine with each citizen acting as one kind of screw or another. Unable to “combine the image of a lean black widow, gazing out of her window, and longing for some one to talk to, with the image of a vast machine,” Rachel is thwarted and deems that “the attempt at communication had been a failure” (57). Communication cannot happen at the level of sharing “shivering private visions” and speaking in “images.” How can Rachel navigate the breach between her inner world and a life with others? This is one of the primary questions of the novel and of the genre—how does an artist connect with the world?

Rachel’s fiancé, Terence Hewet, presents a possibility that lies somewhere between the Dalloways’ critique of the artist’s fecklessness and Rachel’s withdrawal into isolated vision. Himself an artist (he’s working on a novel about silence), Terence is on holiday in Santa Marina when Rachel arrives with her aunt and uncle. Their courtship, by turns mystical and comical, occupies the main action of the novel after the sea voyage. During their first conversation about art, Rachel declares writing inferior to music. Writing is so much “scratching on the match-box,” trying again and again to say things and to connect things without ever reaching what matters (196). Music, on the other hand, “goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once” (195-96). Here again is
Rachel’s idea of art as an intense moment of vision, an instant flame unmediated by so much “scratching on the match-box.”

At the end of this conversation, Terence tries to mediate their different positions. He says that writing and music are not so different after all. “‘We want to find out what’s behind things, don’t we? […] Things I feel come to me like lights…I want to combine them…Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures?…I want to make figures…’” (207). Terence maintains Rachel’s moments of vision as “lights” and adds the impulse of wanting to combine vision with life. Rachel considers what he says, and counters, “‘Music is different…but I see what you mean’” (207). They continue walking and talking, inventing theories and trying to “make their theories agree” (207). This kind of mediation, of coming to agree somewhere in the middle, characterizes their relationship. Ultimately, neither one is wholly satisfied by these agreements.

In an earlier draft of the novel, during this same conversation, Rachel asks Terence why he isn’t content simply to feel. He answers that

‘Behind every sensation there is a shape. Have you ever seen great flowers made of fireworks? They are made of dots of light. Sensations are dots; combine them and you have a flower or a cow or a tea pot. To combine them, to find out their shape, that is my trade. I’ve never done it so far, because the sensations themselves are so overwhelming.’

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8 Woolf echoes this sentiment in a journal entry from 1908: “[…] I should like to write not only with the eye, but with the mind; & discover real things beneath the show.” A Passionate Apprentice, p. 384.
Terence offers the possibility that art can combine intense sensations to give experience shape and coherence. Otherwise, sensations can simply overwhelm conscious experience. When Rachel becomes caught in a fit of indignation about how impossible it is to bridge differences, Terence says, “Try this plan [. . .] Forget yourself.” He means to encourage her to see other points of view. But Rachel cannot forget herself because she is not yet a self, not yet an autonomous person. For her to forget herself would mean to forget her visions, without which she would not exist because she has no other mode of being, of existing. She, like Stephen Dedalus, lives only in her visions. When she hesitates to answer, Terence adds, “We must be our own Shakespeares. We must see things new. If I try, will you?” Whereas Rachel lives enclosed in her inner world of vision, Terence offers her the conventional promise of the Künstlerroman genre: through the act of creation, she can connect her visions to life.

But it is precisely this fundamental assumption of the genre that Woolf questions throughout the novel. Can art bridge the distance between a self-conscious subject and the world? What is art anyway? What exactly is the nature of the consciousness that can give rise to such an act of creation? Is the primary characteristic of this consciousness

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10 Ibid., p. 222.

11 Ibid.
that it is centered in solitary vision? Rachel’s death says otherwise. If intense visionary experience were the source of the creative act that connects self and world, then Rachel would be able to connect with Terence. Woolf remains occupied with these questions throughout her life. All of the points of view about art in the novel—Rachel’s isolated visions, Terence’s shape-making, Helen’s matter of fact attitude, the Dalloways’ denigration—reflect Woolf’s own various ideas, and all of them come under scrutiny.

Nearly forty years after she writes that there is “no human element at all, except what comes through Art,” Woolf describes her experience of writing:

From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.12

This is a starkly different picture than Woolf’s earlier characterization of art as “ideal peace and endless meditation.”13 The idea of a creative consciousness that stands outside

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12 “A Sketch of the Past,” in *Moments of Being*, p. 72. Woolf wrote this autobiographical essay between April 1939 and November 1940.

13 Woolf held and expressed many contradictory ideas about the nature and role of art. Her criticism, letters, and journals can equally give the impression that she was a snobby aesthete or a champion of the oppressed, and everything in between. In using the autobiographical material, my aim is to show that, first of all, she thought extensively and ongoingly about the nature and role of art and the artist and, second, that her ideas about these issues were complex. It is finally
the world and creates “Art” is gone. The ideal of (capitalized) Art is replaced with the lived experience of the whole world as a work of (lowercase) art. Unlike Terence who exhorts Rachel to be her own Shakespeare, Woolf says there is no Shakespeare. But she does not say that there is no art. Human beings are the words, are the music, are the thing itself. What does this mean? What is this art without artist?

“The Thing Itself”

Rachel has lived twenty-four years without any significant challenges to her ideas about life. Her only passions are music and lying around in visionary trance. But her brief interactions with Richard Dalloway begin to disturb this equilibrium. As she dresses for dinner, Rachel feels “tense melancholy, for she had come to the conclusion, since the arrival of the Dalloways, that her face was not the face she wanted, and in all probability never would be” (33). Something about the Dalloways focuses Rachel’s attention on her body. She notes Richard’s “rich, deliberate voice,” and observes that “he seemed to come from the humming oily center of the machine where the polished rods are sliding, and the pistons thumping [. . .]” (38). She sits silently listening through their first dinner on board, and afterwards succumbs to the Dalloways’ views about artists.

in her novels that these conflicting ideas assume the most subtle shapes—tentative yet full of significance.
The next morning, Richard sits next to Rachel at breakfast. She is “curiously conscious of his presence and appearance” (47). Incredulous that a man like Richard wants to talk to her, she imagines saying to him, “Please tell me—everything” (48). Instead, she stirs her tea and “the bubbles which swam and clustered in the cup seemed to her like the union of their minds” (48). Rather than attempt to communicate with him, Rachel is satisfied to imagine their abstract union. A few pages later, she begins to wonder why it is that people marry (51). After Richard falls asleep in a deck chair next to Rachel, she “looked him all over until it seemed to her that he must protest” (54). When he wakes up, he begins to extol the virtues of political activism over writing poetry. Rachel again capitulates, feeling it “painful [. . .] to be one of those who write Keats and Shelley. She liked Richard Dalloway, and warmed as he warmed” (56). Talking to him makes “her heart beat” (57). Where nothing else so far has sufficed, what seems to penetrate Rachel’s fixed ideas about art and solitary vision is her physical responsiveness to Richard Dalloway. It is through the medium of the body that her views are impacted. Neither her aunts nor her father have been able to affect her in this way. Her thoughts begin to be carried along by physical sensation.

But even though Rachel warms as Richard warms, there remains a difference between them. Feeling a “thrusting desire to be understood,” Rachel tries to conceive what Richard means by the image of society as a machine (58). She asks, “Under the streets, in the sewers, in the wires, in the telephones, there is something alive; is that
what you mean?” (58). “Certainly,” Richard replies, “I understand you to mean that the whole of modern society is based on co-operative effort” (58). But this is not what Rachel means. The disconnect between the images is on the level of body from which each speaks. Richard addresses the historically determined body—the body as a category of a specific intersection of time and space. Rachel, on the other hand, is considering the evolutionary body, diffused over a large scale of time. Rachel pauses after Richard’s comment and tries to work out how it is that people have anything in common. She reasons that “the mammoths who pastured in the fields of Richmond High Street had turned into paving stones and boxes full of ribbon, and her aunts” (58). This is the only way she can understand what Richard means by cooperative effort.

At the end of this conversation, Rachel presses Richard to say what it is that matters. He answers that what stands out is “the misery of the poor [. . . ] and ‘love’!” (59). He adds that he doesn’t mean love in the conventional sense, but uses the word “as young men use it” (59). He asks Rachel if she knows what that means. She answers no, “scarcely speaking above her breath” (59). Clarissa interrupts their conversation. We next see Rachel at lunch looking “queer and flushed” (60). Within hours, a storm hits; the Dalloways are seasick and confined to bed for a few days.

Recovering before Clarissa does, Richard shows up at breakfast discouraged “to find what a slave one is to one’s body in this world” (64). As he pushes against the wind to return to his room, Richard collides into Rachel: “he could not see what the body was
he had run into” (65). Theirs is a collision of the materialist body and the idealist body, one a slave to sensation, the other to vision. They step into her room to avoid the wind. Feeling the full vigor of his body after being ill, Richard returns to their last conversation about love:

‘You have beauty,’ he said. The ship lurched. Rachel fell slightly forward. Richard took her in his arms and kissed her. Holding her tight, he kissed her passionately, so that she felt the hardness of his body and the roughness of his cheek printed upon hers. She fell back in her chair, with tremendous beats of the heart, each of which sent black waves across her eyes. He clasped his forehead in his hands.

‘You tempt me,’ he said. The tone of his voice was terrifying. He seemed choked in fight. They were both trembling. Rachel stood up and went. Her head was cold, her knees shaking, and the physical pain of the emotion was so great that she could only keep herself moving above the great leaps of her heart. She leant upon the rail of the ship, and gradually ceased to feel, for a chill of body and mind crept over her. Far out between the waves little black and white seabirds were riding. Rising and falling with smooth and graceful movements in the hollows of the waves they seemed singularly detached and unconcerned.

‘You’re peaceful,’ she said. She became peaceful too, at the same time possessed with a strange exultation. Life seemed to hold infinite possibilities she had never guessed at. (66-67)

Rachel is beginning to experience her emotions physically. Although she is terrified, she also sees that “something wonderful had happened” (67). She chooses though to restore balance and to “cease to feel” by focusing on the sea and the seabirds. The inhuman regularity and detachment of nature calms her. She avoids the particular, physical body by retreating into the realm of the natural body. In this passage, when Richard speaks,
he addresses Rachel; and when Rachel speaks, she addresses the sea. She returns to the order of experience with which she is familiar. Rachel regulates her bodily state in the act of identifying with the peacefulness of nature. But something has been awakened in her and she begins to sense that life “seemed to hold infinite possibilities she had never guessed at.”

That night Rachel has terrible nightmares. As she begins to become aware of her bodily existence, like Edwin and Stephen, Rachel feels terror. She dreams that she is walking down a dark, narrowing tunnel that ends in a vault. There she is trapped “alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails” (68). She is now more terrified than exalted. She wakes up and locks her door. “A voice moaned for her; eyes desired her. All night long barbarian men harassed the ship; they came scuffling down the passages, and stopped to snuffle at her door. She could not sleep again” (68). No matter what she tries, Rachel is never again able to recover her pre-Richard state of pure innerness. Her first flight of vision in the novel, when she decides that “it’s far better to play the piano” than to bother with people, ends with Rachel drifting to sleep (29). It is also in this sense that “she could not sleep again” after Richard kisses her. Throughout the rest of the novel, Rachel struggles with this growing awareness of her bodily existence and its implications.

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14 In a letter to Ethel Smyth, Woolf describes the approach of madness as “that end of a drainpipe with a gibbering old man.” March 11, 1931. Letters, v. 4, p. 298.
The day after Richard kisses Rachel, the Dalloways disembark. Rachel confides in Helen, who makes light of the incident. Helen’s matter of fact attitude “hewed down great blocks which had stood there always, and the light which came in was cold” (72). “By this new light,” Rachel sees “her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled forever—her life that was the only chance she had [. . .]” (72).

This image of her constrained life is reminiscent of her sense of her body in the nightmare: trapped in a dark, narrowing tunnel that ends in the company of a deformed man. Rachel is beginning to connect her bodily responses with insights about her life. And, more importantly, she begins to recognize that how she lives her life does matter.

In this conversation with her aunt, Rachel begins to imagine a new kind of life. She recalls “the image of the world as a live thing that Richard had given her, with drains like nerves, and bad houses like patches of diseased skin” (73). Richard, in fact, gives no such explicit image. Far from it, he speaks of society only as a machine with ideals of cooperation and unity. That Rachel is left with this sense of a live world has to do with how Richard has impacted her: bodily. What Richard gives her is not an image, but a budding felt sense of her body.

Rachel explains to Helen that until now, people had been only symbols, but that in talking to her, “they ceased to be symbols, and became—‘I could listen to them for ever!’” (74). She doesn’t finish the sentence because she doesn’t yet know what it is that
people become when they are no longer symbols. She has had only this one experience with Richard. It is also striking that people stop being symbols when they talk to her, not when she talks to them. Although Rachel still lacks agency in her sense of self, the range of her receptivity to others, by including her bodily awareness, has expanded.\textsuperscript{15}

During this conversation, Helen decides to mentor Rachel and invites her to stay on in Santa Marina with them. Excited by the prospect of interacting with new people, Rachel asks her how she might begin to know them. Helen tells her that she has to find out for herself, that she can “go ahead and be a person on [her] own account” (75).

Rachel is stunned:

\begin{quote}
\textquote{The vision of her own personality, of herself as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or the wind, flashed into Rachel’s mind, and she became profoundly excited at the thought of living. ‘I can be m-m-myself,’ she stammered, ‘in spite of you, in spite of the Dalloways, and Mr. Pepper, and Father, and my Aunts, in spite of these?’ She swept her hand across a whole page of statesmen and soldiers. (75)}
\end{quote}

Although Rachel’s growing bodily awareness broadens her field of experience to include others, her language retains the old framework. Her distinct personality remains a “vision.” She confers eternity to her particular self, identifying with the sea and the wind instead of with mortal human beings. She imagines that her distinct self comes “in spite

\textsuperscript{15} Renée Dickinson considers this lack of agency a specifically feminine issue. That does not seem to be the case in this novel—Terence Hewet, Rachel’s fiancé, is equally adrift. \textit{Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel}, pp. 5-7.
of” others, rather than as a result of being connected with them. The last scene on board
ship is this conversation between Helen and Rachel. It marks Rachel’s transition from a
disembodied, solitary existence to a more embodied, relational sense of self. What
sparks this is the kiss with Richard, which brings about Rachel’s burgeoning awareness
of her body.

The Sea and the Land

This conversation between Helen and Rachel also marks the shift from sea to
land, from ship to shore. Throughout the novel, Rachel identifies with natural forces like
the wind and the sea.¹⁶ They represent freedom from “roads [. . .] and mankind” (20).
Rachel spends her time gazing into “the depth of the sea,” which grows “dimmer and
dimmer” until it is “only a pale blur” (20). In forces like the sea and wind, Rachel can
lose any sense of distinct existence and blend into an undifferentiated union. The land,
on the other hand, is specific, the realm of old ladies snipping flowers, young people
expressing love, and men smoking cigars (23-24).

¹⁶ In an earlier version of the novel, when a guest at the hotel asks Rachel who she lives with,
Rachel answers, “With my father and two Aunts [. . .] and the spirits and the sea.” And when
Terence finally declares his love, Rachel laments her life wasted on “spirits and the sea.”
Melymbrosia, pp. 266, 287.
As the ship makes its way further into the sea, people seem “aimless ants” that eventually become “completely mute” (24). As the land shrinks, the ship becomes ennobled:

[... ] an immense dignity had descended upon her; she was an inhabitant of the great world, which has so few inhabitants, travelling all day across an empty universe, with veils drawn before her and behind. She was more lonely than a caravan crossing the desert; she was infinitely more mysterious, moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources. The sea might give her death or some unexampled joy, and none would know of it. She was a bride going forth to her husband, a virgin unknown of men; in her vigour and purity she might be likened to all beautiful things, for as a ship she had a life of her own. (24-25)

This description also characterizes Rachel’s inner world: empty, veiled, lonely, mysterious, self-sufficient. She too has “a life of her own,” apart from real human interaction. It is the purity and intensity of her inner world that life on land begins to challenge—and challenge in a new way precisely because of Rachel’s dawning awareness of her body. After the shock of being kissed, she is no longer able as easily to evade her body and withdraw into undifferentiated union.

Months later, Rachel is sitting on the edge of a cliff in Santa Marina with land on one side and the sea on the other. She is alone with Terence and they have not yet disclosed that they love each other. They look once toward the land and turn next toward the sea, “and for the rest of the time sat looking at the sea” (194). Whereas the land cannot avoid the specificity of being filled with natives and villages, the sea is the
same one “that flowed up to the mouth of the Thames” (194). Rachel continues to find comfort in this sameness even though she is increasingly aware of difference. The water is calm and “so it had been at the birth of the world, and so it had remained ever since. Probably no human being had ever broken that water with boat or with body” (194). As the courtship with Terence proceeds, Rachel senses that the body breaks the calm of the sea with which she remains identified to some extent. She describes being a girl as “like being the wind or the sea,” free from the care and attention of others (203). When she begins to ask Terence questions about himself, Rachel turns “her back on the sea” (203). Relating with him and communing with the sea are two separate modes of being for her; one mode comes at the cost of another. This untenable dualism—between mind and body, between self and other—becomes her constant dilemma for the remainder of the novel.

Narrative Modes of Describing the Body

These various realms—of vision and image, of mammoths and sea—are so many versions of Rachel’s physical experience. She is able to live her body in different ways, most of which lack a sense of personal agency. To the extent that she can avoid the direct experience of being an embodied individual, she can avoid relating with others. She evade this sense of embodied agency primarily by resorting to various abstract modes
of experience. In *Melymbrosia*, an earlier draft of *The Voyage Out*, Rachel calls this struggle between the visible and the invisible worlds “The Great War.”¹⁷ She delights “at the assurance that the world of things that aren’t there was splendidly vigorous and far more real than the other.”¹⁸ “Her quarrel with the living” is that they don’t sufficiently value this world buried beneath time.¹⁹ She thinks ridiculous the one proposal of marriage that she has gotten: “Why, she half expected to come up next year as a bed of white flowers.”²⁰ What allows her to imagine that she might at any moment appear as a bed of flowers is her lack of physical embodiment. To the extent that Rachel’s sense of self is anchored in her mind rather than her body, she is susceptible to the vacillating movements of her thoughts.

In this earlier draft of the novel, when she talks to Helen about Richard kissing her, Rachel admits, “You see I thought people were images. Somehow they’re becoming real.”²¹ And again on the cliff, when Terence asks her what she thinks about, Rachel

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¹⁷ p. 38.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 100.
replies, “About images and spirits and the sea [. . .]. There is a great war you understand; or there was a great war. But now the images are becoming real.” Her primary identification with the world of vision persists in her thinking that the images are becoming real, rather than that the real had become images. Her point of origin, where her consciousness is located, still harbors traces of the invisible world. Nevertheless, because of her kiss with Richard and her courtship with Terence, the great war begins to subside. Rachel experiments with an alternate mode of being, one in which her thinking and her feeling and her sensations are integrated—and through this wholeness she is able to connect with others, not in a generalized way, but through particular relationships. But because of her habitual pull to the invisible world, Rachel struggles to maintain some kind of autonomy in her relationships. She begins to see beyond the impulse to submerge in undifferentiated union but has not yet learned how to connect as an autonomous self. Rachel shuttles uneasily between various tenuous modes of being her body.

Beginning with this first novel, Woolf experiments with how to narrate lived experience. In a talk delivered to The Women’s Service League in 1931, Woolf says that of the two “adventures of [her] professional life,” she did not solve the one of “telling the truth about [her] experiences as a body.” Although she is referring explicitly to the

22 Ibid., p. 220.
challenges that women writers face, Woolf’s novels deal more subtly with issues of embodiment and creativity. *The Voyage Out*, both in narration and in theme, is constructed through the overlap and intersection of different modes of narrating physical being. Each of these levels is tied to different scales of time and space. There are six main modes in which Woolf conceives the body in this novel: the natural, the historical, the archetypal, the semiotic, the philosophical, and the ethical. By discriminating these modes, which are simply different perspectives from which Woolf writes about being human, I will show what is new in this *Künstlerroman*.

The first two modes, the natural and the historical, regard the body a function of various material processes. The natural body extends from the notion of the body as an ongoing series of immediate physical sensations all the way to the physical body extended in evolutionary process. The natural body is infinitely extended in time and space, without beginning or end. Although alive, this body does not die—it simply evolves. It is in continual process, either immediate or evolutionary. It is in this mood that Rachel becomes flooded with sensory impressions and wants “to run all the days into one long continuity of sensation” (211). She can consider “her own body [. . .] the source of all the life in the world” (244). This natural mode also encompasses Rachel’s physical identification with the “everlasting” and “unmergeable” sea and wind (75).

23 The other adventure was “killing the Angel in the House,” by which Woolf means overcoming the constraint to be charming and conciliatory in her writing. In this, she believed herself successful. “Professions for Women,” in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, p. 241.
After an uncomfortable encounter with a young man at a dance, Rachel steps into the night and says out loud, “‘There are trees,’ [. . .] Would the trees make up for St John Hirst?” (142). The sea did, after all, make up for Richard Dalloway after he kissed her. This kind of displacement, from one order of being to another (person to tree) characterizes the natural mode. In its widest focus, the mode of natural body views particulars as an endless succession of evolutionary manifestations. Rachel can imagine that “the mammoths who pastured in the fields of Richmond High Street had turned into paving stones and boxes full of ribbon, and her aunts” (58).

The mode of historical body is equally as concerned with material processes, but toward a different end. Rather than extending the material body throughout undifferentiated time and space, this way of conceiving the body fixes it in one particular time and space. Although this narrative mode is somewhat more concerned with particularity than the natural mode, it deals chiefly in generalized categories—of gender, class, race, nation.24 The beginning and the end are subsumed in a static now. The historical body is a function of so many power struggles and conflicts between impersonal forces. The Dalloways, and other characters in the story, represent the

24 Considering To the Lighthouse, Randi Koppen writes about the perceived modern aesthetic turn away from life. Woolf critics have responded to this by various “returns to the body” — the materialist feminist line of body as biological/social limit or unlimitable desire, and the phenomenological line of body as perceptual medium. Koppen argues that Woolf’s own conception of the body is more apt than either of these: “the ground of Woolf’s writing is the experiencing, physical body in a spatiotemporal, kinetic field.” “Embodied Form: Art and Life in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse,” p. 382.
various concerns of the historical body. Listening to conversation about women’s
suffrage and the poor, Clarissa deems life “a perpetual conflict” (36). Alone after dinner,
she and Richard “both laughed, thinking of the same things, so that there was no need to
compare their impressions” (42). They find the company “a set of cranks,” of a different
class where “the men always are so much better than the women” (42). There is no need
to consider anyone’s specificity—the general outline suffices for the purpose of
agreement, or discord. As Clarissa talks about the glory of being English, Richard thinks
about the “[. . .] continuity [. . .] of English history, King following King, Prime Minister
Prime Minister, and Law Law [. . .]. He [runs] his mind along the line of conservative
policy, which went steadily from Lord Salisbury to Alfred, and gradually enclosed, as
though it were a lasso that opened and caught things, enormous chunks of the habitable
globe” (42-43). His history begins now with Lord Salisbury and proceeds backwards to
Alfred the Great. The mode of historical body catches and encloses changing particulars
in fixed and continuing categories—conservative, English, male.

Like Richard, Terence’s close friend St. John Hirst regards people as “types.” He
considers the dozens of guests at the hotel in Santa Marina and declares that he “could
draw circles round the whole lot of them, and they’d never stray outside” (97). He then
classifies them according to education, class, race, so many “hens in a circle” (97).
Rachel’s uncle Ridley, a Pindar scholar, is described as “some thousand miles distant
from the nearest human being,” given that “age puts one barrier between human beings, and learning another, and sex a third […]” (156).

Although materially concerned with the body, both the natural and historical perspectives of describing human experience subject lived experience to various impersonal forces—nature, evolutionary time, power, society. By divorcing sensory experience from personal agency, these modes render life either completely beyond localized difference or absolutely determined by it. The particularities of physical existence are either stretched into an insensible universality or enclosed in inescapable categories. These two narrative modes correlate with the materialist aesthetics of British thinkers, which is primarily concerned with the determinism of immediate sensory experience and unfolding physical processes.\textsuperscript{25} With its proliferation of discrete bodies—Edwin, Hilda, the new house, Darius—engaged in various antagonisms, Bennett’s \textit{Clayhanger} chronicles these two modes in Edwin’s final options of either rapture or burden.\textsuperscript{26}

Stephen Dedalus’s final flight, on the other hand, does not descend into a determined materialism, but transcends the body by resorting to idealist escape.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25}See above, pp. 24-28.

\textsuperscript{26}See above, pp. 84-87.

\textsuperscript{27}See above, pp. 113-19.
Joyce’s novel exemplifies the next two modes of bodily experience—the archetypal and the semiotic. In the archetypal mode, the particularity of the person gives way to original patterns and cycles. This is the realm of mythic identification. If the natural mode stretches time out, the archetypal dimension is altogether outside of time. In cleaving to origins, this narrative and bodily mode is always and only beginning. Reading Gibbon, Rachel feels “the book of the world turned back to the very first page” (160). Every particular is some variation of ideal source. As the historical mode fixes bodies as intersections of contemporary categories, the mythical mode sees people as iterations of original types and patterns. Power struggles become mythical agon.

Rachel has various mythical precursors in the novel. She is figured at times as Antigone, and critics have read her death as a voluntary act in the face of being buried alive in marriage (37, 331). Late in the book, lines from Milton’s Comus begin the chapter in which Rachel falls ill and dies (308). The lines tell of the nymph Sabrina, the goddess of the silver lake, who frees the Lady from Comus’s enchanted chair. The Lady represents the virtues of chastity and rational mind against Comus’s vice of bodily excess. Whereas the Lady returns to life after Sabrina frees her from physical captivity, in the imagery of the novel, Rachel descends with the goddess to the bottom of the sea.

By being figured as Antigone and Sabrina, Rachel assumes a mythic body outside of
time, and her struggles are merely a repetition of ancient cycles.

Related to the idealism of the archetypal mode is the infinite withdrawal of the
semiotic mode. Whereas the archetypal mode locates meaning outside of time in eternal
cycles, the semiotic mode simply defers all meaning in the play of subjectivity. This is
the world of endless signs and traces and images, all leading one to the other, all
creating a sense of insurmountable indeterminacy. Both the mythical and the semiotic
modes represent disembodied consciousness, where the mind is able to transcend
particularity and flit from image to myth without the encumbrance of the body.\footnote{Woolf travels through Italy in 1909 as she is working on this novel. In her travel journal, she writes of the difficulty of describing the landscape: “As a matter of fact, the subject is probably infinitely subtle, no more amenable to impressionist treatment than the human character. What one records is really the state of one’s own mind.” A Passionate Apprentice, p. 396. This could as easily be said of the impressionist mode of the semiotic body—one records really the state of one’s own mind.}
The processes of consciousness in this mode are self-enclosed, self-sufficient, and self- and
other-perpetuating. Early in the novel, as Rachel contemplates her life, “from one scene
she [passes], half-hearing, half-seeing, to another” (28). In this mode, not only does she
regard her life as a succession of “scenes,” but also her sensory experience is diminished.
“Her mind [is] fixed upon the characters of her aunts,” who “blot out the trees and the
people and the deer” (28). She regards real people as characters and fails to see the
actual world around her. People seem “like a thing in a play” (121). Everything goes
“round and round,” and everyone is a “featureless but dignified” sort of “symbol” (29).
Late in the book, Rachel attends a Sunday sermon and is infuriated by “the vast flock of the audience” that pretends to understand “a beautiful idea, an idea like a butterfly” that “floats” above and is “always escaping out of reach” (215). Although these floating ideas and characters and scenes seem freer than the repeating patterns of the archetypal mode, they are nonetheless dependent on the disavowal of an embodied consciousness. The fatalism of endless cycles is replaced by the fatalism of a dissociated mind. In the semiotic mode, nothing ever ends. Everything goes “round and round,” and one image leads always to another (29).

Often in the novel, when Rachel is reading, this mode of runaway consciousness is the “enchanted place” that characterizes “the transition from the imaginary world to the real world” (112). She thinks that she is Ibsen’s Nora, or Meredith’s Diana, or a romantic Persian princess and speaks “partly as herself, and partly as the heroine” of whatever book she has been reading (112, 142). “Her whole body [is] constrained by the working of her mind” (112). During one of these imaginative flights, Rachel’s mind is “[. . .] contracting and expanding like the mainspring of a clock. The sounds in the garden outside join with the clock [. . .] in a regular rhythm” (114). The noises inside and outside the house become part of the wound energy of Rachel’s mind. It is as if her mind is making the world happen. This Rachel-made world is “all very real, very big, very impersonal, and after a moment or two she [begins] to raise her finger and to let it fall on the arm of her chair so as to bring back to herself some consciousness of her own
existence” (114). This impersonal world that Rachel creates comes at the cost of her bodily existence.

In the semiotic mode, consciousness is dissociated from the body. Rachel wonders from this place who people are and what life is. She decides that life is “only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish [. . .]. Her dissolution became so complete that she could not raise her finger any more [. . .]. She was overcome with awe that things should exist at all. . . She forgot that she had any fingers to raise . . . [. . .] the clock still ticking in the midst of the universal silence” (114).

The semiotic body does not die—like light it vanishes out of existence. The difference is one of embodiment. A disembodied consciousness dissipates into bare nothingness; an embodied consciousness dies. As the workings of the mind assume center stage in the semiotic mode, the body becomes increasingly unconscious. Rachel forgets that she has any fingers. There is only silence and the ticking clock of the mind.

In their novels, Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf each use these four narrative perspectives of the body—the natural, the historical, the archetypal, and the semiotic—to varying degrees and toward different ends. The natural and historical modes hew to the materialist aesthetics of British thinkers; the archetypal and semiotic modes reflect the idealist line of thinking. The materialist modes determine individual experience

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30 See Chapter 1, pp. 24-33. I am not saying that these writers read the history of aesthetics and decided to write novels that illustrate various philosophies. I am saying that the genre of the
through physical processes and historical categories. The idealist modes determine individual experience through Ur-patterns and imaginative play. The former root consciousness in a limited sense of the body and the latter transcend the body altogether in favor of an unfettered mind.

In _The Voyage Out_, Woolf employs these four narrative modes and also two others that Bennett and Joyce don’t. What distinguishes Woolf’s _Künstlerroman_ is the possibility of lived experience that is neither physically determined nor mentally created, neither pure sensation nor pure idea. This allows Woolf the freedom to conceive anew the central problem of the genre. Instead of asking whether art can bridge the gap between self and world, and answering “no” as do Bennett and Joyce, Woolf explores the exact nature of the consciousness that can bridge self and world in a creative act. Whereas Bennett and Joyce maintain the duality between mind and body in the artist-protagonists, plots, imagery, and endings of their novels, Woolf tries something new. In the modes of the philosophical body and the ethical body, she discovers the narrative techniques that she uses in all of her novels.

_Künstlerroman_ necessarily includes the struggles between art/world, mind/body, and self/other, which issues have been the concern of the field of aesthetics and have traditionally been resolved either through a materialist or an idealist perspective. I am discriminating these narrative modes here in order to show Woolf’s novel approach to these characteristic problems of the genre.
The philosophical mode of description is best characterized by what Woolf has called “moments of being.”31 In this mode, “[. . .] one’s life is not confined to one’s body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods or conceptions.”32 These background rods penetrate conscious awareness in “blows” or “shocks” that produce concentrated moments of being, which are flashes of insight and intuition.33 The moments of being arise when consciousness momentarily is able to see some pattern hidden in “non-being,” which is “a kind of nondescript cotton wool” that is the majority of life.34

Like the natural, historical, archetypal, and semiotic modes of conceiving the body, the philosophical mode contains a sense of union. But it’s a different kind of union. Unlike the natural mode of extending the body temporally and spatially to include everything else, the philosophical mode appears as an instant of intense experience. Whereas the natural body extends horizontally, these moments of philosophical being are discrete vertical flashes. Unlike the unity of type and category in the historical mode, moments of being cannot be predicted along any markers. Unlike the atemporal oneness

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31 “A Sketch of the Past,” in *Moments of Being*, pp. 70-73.

32 Ibid., p. 73.

33 Ibid., pp. 70-73.

34 Ibid., p. 70.
of archetypes, the moment of philosophical unity is instantaneous and not repeatable. Unlike the inescapably pervasive unity of the semiotic mode, the philosophical mode is fleeting—it begins and ends in an instant. The sense of union in the philosophical mode has to do with the spontaneous and complete meeting of being and nonbeing an in instant. It’s a bright flash of significance that is not sustainable in extended experience.

The chief characteristic of the philosophical body is absorption in a moment of total depth. This absorption includes body and mind. After a long period of agitation, Rachel emerges from the hotel to have tea outside with a party of guests. As she approaches them, “the group appeared with startling intensity, as though the dusty surface had been peeled off everything, leaving only the reality and the instant” (245). The philosophical body discerns meaning and finds significance in moments of instant depth. Its functioning is not determined by mind or body; neither thinking nor sensing is its primary mode.

Before Rachel walks out onto the lawn, she is restless and can no longer bear to sit: “Thinking was no escape. Physical movement was the only refuge, in and out of rooms, in and out of peoples’ minds, seeking she knew not what” (245). The mind does

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35 Mark Hussey considers Woolf’s novels, based on this meeting of being and nonbeing, as essentially “religious” or “theological” in character. The Singing of the Real World, pp. 115, 130-55. Although that’s a fine way to characterize this particular narrative strain, Hussey does not discriminate the other bodily dimensions in her work. His work shares some of the concerns of this study, but he reads issues of embodiment and relationship through the thought of Merleau-Ponty and Laing. It is because he doesn’t discern the mode of the ethical body that Hussey can declare Woolf a practically-minded mystic who “brings eternity into the world of time.” p. 154.
not quiet her—she cannot think; neither does the body—she cannot sit. What helps is movement and action. She is in an active mode, “seeking she knew not what”: she rises, she pushes back the table, she goes downstairs, she goes out the door, she turns the corner, and she sees the group (245). It is in the midst of this headlong activity that Rachel is seized by “the reality and the instant.” As soon as “for a moment nothing seemed to happen” and “it all stood still,” Rachel recognizes someone and “the dust again began to settle” (245). The moment of being is an active moment of recognition that happens and is gone.

Early in the novel, the narrator describes Rachel playing the piano: “In three minutes she was deep in a very difficult, very classical fugue in A, and over her face came a queer remote impersonal expression of complete absorption and anxious satisfaction” (48-49). But the absorption is temporary—“Now she stumbled; now she faltered” (49). The repeated “now” signals how precarious this moment of absorption is. As Rachel plays “the same bar twice over [. . .] an invisible line seemed to string the notes together, from which rose a shape, a building” (49). Rachel is actively engaged and some shape begins to appear. Being absorbed does not obliterate shape and form, as in the other modes of union, but rather allows them to emerge. What connects absorption with form is doing, is acting, is playing the same bar twice.

36 Taking issue with critics’ reductionist analyses of the body in To the Lighthouse, Randi Koppen asserts Woolf’s notion of art “as disembodied vision whose condition of necessity is embodied
Throughout the novel, Rachel is many times “absorbed” in moments of intense experience (29, 70, 74, 195, 202, 232, 248, 262, 263, 269). Often, nothing comes of these moments because the experience alone is not the creative act; something more is needed. The philosophical mode, the sudden experience of immediate being, needs personal and active agency in order to create something meaningful in the world. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf supposes that “the shock-receiving capacity is what makes [her] a writer.”

The shocks themselves, the moments of being, do not make her a writer; her capacity to receive the “revelation” and “make it real by putting it into words” constitutes the act of creation. The possibility to create arises in the instant where being and nonbeing meet in lived experience.

The creative dimension of action that is receptive to these shocks of being is the dimension of the ethical body. The Voyage Out can be read as Rachel’s attempt to become an autonomous individual with personal agency. The ethical mode is the only personal mode of the body—it includes not only acting in the world but also relating with autonomous others. Whereas all of the other bodily modes erase difference in

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form.” Although she does not fully pursue her notion of “embodied form” to the ethical dimension of embodied consciousness, Koppen does recognize that the relationship between disembodied moments of vision and embodied creation is through the body. “Embodied Form: Art and Life in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse,” p. 378.

37 In Moments of Being, p. 72.

38 Ibid.
various kinds of unity—of sensation, of types, of cycles, of imagination, of absorption—the ethical mode is based on difference. This difference does not isolate consciousness in separate enclosures, but allows connection that is neither union nor insensible merging but free interaction. The more definite and embodied is the self-consciousness, the more freely it can include an other-consciousness.\(^{39}\)

The acting and relating of the ethical mode is not the political and social activism of Richard Dalloway and various other characters in the novel. The ethical mode, in this and other of Woolf’s novels, is closely related to the moments of being. The two modes hinge one on the other. Or rather, the moments of being, of seeing “that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern,” anchor creative doing and relating.\(^{40}\) As the meeting of being and nonbeing, the moments of being are an integrated flash of body and mind. The “background rods and conceptions” do not determine but give a dimension of meaning to “what one says and does.”\(^{41}\) The ethical body acts and relates with an awareness, even though momentary and often ineffable, of the significance of life.

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\(^{40}\) *Moments of Being*, p. 72.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 73.
best way to examine Rachel’s struggle to be an autonomous individual is through her particular relationships with Helen and Terence.

These six ways of narrating bodily experience don’t exist in linear sequence or isolated one from the other. Most often they appear intricately layered in one passage. I have discriminated them here, first, to show the complexity of how Woolf thinks and writes about the self. But more importantly, by discriminating these dimensions and considering them within the larger frame of the novel and the genre, we can begin to see what might be the nature of the consciousness that can connect self and world, self and other in a creative act. This novel is the beginning of Woolf’s literary preoccupation with what an embodied or ethical aesthetics might be.

This table shows in an abbreviated form various qualities of these modes of describing conscious experience:

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42 Focusing on the phenomenology of conscious experience, Harvena Richter calls consciousness a “microcosm of being.” She writes with great sensitivity about the intersection of perception and feeling in Woolf’s characters. The Inward Voyage, pp. 27-41. Although the content and purpose of our observations differ, Richter is spot on about the complex aliveness of Woolf’s narrative technique.
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Table 1
Rachel and Helen

In an essay about the state of the novel, Woolf writes that Stephen Dedalus is “centred in a self which in spite of its tremor of susceptibility never reaches out or embraces or comprehends what is outside and beyond.”43 Rachel too is susceptible, but she does try to understand “what is outside and beyond.” Moments of being encompass what is beyond; the world and others encompass what is outside. Rachel’s earliest memory in the novel is that of her mother’s death when she is eleven years old. In the thirteen years between then and setting off on the voyage to Santa Marina, Rachel lives cloistered in Richmond with her spinster aunts. An introverted only child with few friends, she is interested only in music.

Helen is initially not looking forward to being on a month-long voyage with Rachel. She finds “nothing to take hold of in girls—nothing hard, permanent, satisfactory” (13). She considers Rachel’s face “weak rather than decided,” without “colour and definite outline” (13). The “one definite gift” Rachel has is her musical capacity (26). Rachel’s development as an autonomous self through the novel can be gauged by how “definite” and distinct she feels and appears. Finding Rachel asleep in her cabin, Helen considers her “aesthetically” for some minutes and then leaves to avoid “the awkwardness of speech between them” (29). For her part, Rachel braces herself for

the company of her “elderly” uncle and his wife, “as though they were of the nature of an approaching physical discomfort,—a tight shoe or a draughty window” (7).

But Rachel changes when Richard kisses her after the storm. Sensing this change in her niece, Helen decides to breach the distance between herself and Rachel. Instead of avoiding speech, Helen tells Rachel, “‘Come and talk to me instead of practicing’” (70). They become Helen and Rachel to each other, instead of aunt and niece (74). Helen pushes Rachel to think for herself and to “be a person on [her] own account” (75). She suggests that they can “talk to each other as human beings”—“because we like each other,” Rachel adds (75). After three months together in the villa, “a keen observer might have thought that the girl was more definite and self-confident in her manner than before. [. . .] and she attended to what was said as though she might be going to contradict it” (87). Rachel’s growing confidence makes her seem less vague and more willing to engage as a distinct person, with her own opinions. Although she’s “still a good deal prejudiced and liable to exaggerate,” Helen thinks Rachel is now “more or less a reasonable human being” (86).

Talking becomes the primary relational mode between Helen and Rachel, and presents an alternative to being vague and indefinite. Considering Rachel again after a few months of being together in Santa Marina, Helen is aware:

[. . .] that some sort of change was taking place in the human being. [. . .] She saw her less shy, and less serious, which was all to the good, and the violent leaps and the interminable mazes which had
led to that result were usually not even guessed at by her. Talk was the medicine she trusted to, talk about everything, talk that was free, unguarded, and as candid as a habit of talking with men made natural in her own case. Nor did she encourage those habits of unselfishness and amiability founded upon insincerity which are put at so high value in mixed households of men and women. She desired that Rachel should think, and for this reason offered books and discouraged too entire a dependence upon Bach and Beethoven and Wagner. (113)

Talking and reading invite Rachel into form, into difference, into thinking for herself. She is free to choose books as she pleases and comes “to conclusions, which had to be remodeled according to the adventures of the day, [...] leaving always a small grain of belief behind them” (113). Rachel is learning in increments and is practicing how to be an autonomous person. But she often feels restless and impatient with the process. This interactional mode is slower and more difficult than the solitude she is used to. She prefers the mode of music, which gets to things all at once; talking and thinking is more like books, which are so much “scratching on the match-box” (195-96). Despite Helen’s attempts to draw her into distinct form, Rachel remains “a live if unformed human being” (190).

Although she cares for Helen, Rachel is ultimately unable to find a definite sense of self only in talking and thinking. In the only moment of conflict between them, Rachel accuses Helen of being “only half alive” (248). Rachel is angry because Helen

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44 In an earlier draft of the novel, Terence asks Rachel whether she cares for anyone. “‘My mother was the person I cared for,’” Rachel answers. “‘And now Helen. When she speaks it’s like the beginning of a song.” Melymbrosia, p. 285.
won’t do things; in this case she doesn’t want to join an expedition to a native village. Helen doesn’t “do anything but exist!” (248). Rachel continues, “‘You see that things are bad, and you pride yourself on saying so. It’s what you call being honest; as a matter of fact it’s being lazy, being dull, being nothing. You don’t help; you put an end to things’” (248). What Rachel is objecting to is Helen’s tendency to stand apart, observing and judging things from a distance. Rachel craves something more active and more engaged. In her relationship with Helen, Rachel discovers the possibility of thinking for herself, even when that means realizing that there is more to life than only thinking and talking.

Rachel and Terence

The first time Rachel is alone with Terence is during their walk to the edge of a cliff that overlooks the coast. She tells him all about her life in Richmond and listens to him talk about his life. She feels irritated by all the “spinning out words” and wonders, “Why did they not kiss each other simply?” (203). When he walks her back to the villa, Rachel turns at the gate in silence: “She could not say [. . .] there was nothing to be said [. . .] without a word she went” (207). Terence too is unsatisfied with the encounter. The chapter ends: “What was the use of talking, talking, merely talking?” (207). In the beginning of the next chapter, we see that “Helen and Rachel had become very silent” (208). As Rachel plunges into the world of romantic feeling, she and Helen cease to talk
as they used to. Rather than seeking a differentiated sense of self in her distinct thinking, Rachel begins to experiment with finding differentiation through her distinct feelings.

From the time she meets Terence until the moment he proposes marriage, Rachel’s primary preoccupation is trying to work out what it is that she feels for him. The morning after a dance at the hotel, Rachel considers Terence and his friend Hirst:

> Any clear analysis of them was impossible owing to the haze of wonder in which they were enveloped. She could not reason about them as about people whose feelings went by the same rule as her own did, and her mind dwelt on them with a kind of physical pleasure such as is caused by the contemplation of bright things hanging in the sun. From them all life seemed to radiate [. . .]. (160-61)

Just as her thinking begins vague and becomes more differentiated as she interacts with Helen, who thinks differently than she does, Rachel’s feelings too begin in “a haze of wonder” and become more definite as she encounters Terence’s different feelings. These encounters with real and different others allow Rachel to develop an autonomous sense of self. At the end of this passage, Rachel, sitting alone under a tree, says out loud:

> “‘What is it to be in love?’ [. . .] each word as it came into being seemed to shove itself out into an unknown sea” (161). The “unknown sea” is Rachel’s habitual mode of undifferentiated being. As these words and her feelings come into differentiated being, Rachel discovers “a terrible possibility in life” and braces herself “much as a soldier prepared for battle” (161). Hers will not be a simple transition from union to difference.
Terence too is struggling to find what it is that matters in life. After leaving Cambridge “owing to a difference with the authorities,” he has drifted from place to place, and has enough money that he doesn’t need to work (98). He is writing at least three novels: one about “Silence,” one “about a young man who is obsessed by an idea,” and a Stuart tragedy (204-05). Arguing with Hirst’s idea that people are types, Terence declares himself “a dove on a tree-top,” flitting “from branch to branch” (97). When Hirst asks him what it is he means by saying that “one is never alone, and one is never in company,” Terence falters:

‘Meaning? Oh, something about bubbles—auras—what d’you call ’em? You can’t see my bubble; I can’t see yours; all we see of each other is a speck, like the wick in the middle of that flame. The flame goes about with us everywhere; it’s not ourselves exactly, but what we feel; the world is short, or people mainly; all kinds of people.’ (98)

When two bubbles coalesce, the world becomes an “e—nor—mous” “billowy universe” (98). This is one possibility of the kind of relationship that Terence offers Rachel: fluctuating, indeterminate, neither alone nor together.

After he has organized an expedition to the top of a local mountain, Terence wonders why he has bothered to do so:

‘Cows,’ he reflected, ‘draw together in a field; ships in a calm; and we’re just the same when we’ve nothing else to do. But why do we do it?—is it to prevent ourselves from seeing to the bottom of things [. . .] making cities and mountains and whole universes out of nothing, or do we really love each other, or do we, on the other hand, live in a state of perpetual uncertainty, knowing nothing,
leaping from moment to moment as from world to world?—which is, on the whole, the view I incline to.’ (116)

Because Terence does not have much to do in life, he considers relationships a way to pass time. Relating with others only happens when he doesn’t have anything else to do. He is both lonely and unable to connect in a meaningful way with others. His view of life as perpetually uncertain and of relationship as leaping from one thing to another is reminiscent of the inescapable deferral of the semiotic mode.

Terence expresses these views about the nature of human relationships to Hirst before he has met Rachel. They meet for the first time on the expedition to the top of the mountain. As he falls in love with her, his views change some. But, like Rachel, his old patterns and habits persist despite the various changes. Terence, like Rachel, becomes agitated as he discovers that he is falling in love. While in one of these moods, a guest at the hotel intercepts him to ask his advice about her romantic troubles. Terence feels impatient with her: ‘‘We don’t care for people because of their qualities,’ he tried to explain. ‘It’s just them that we care for,’—he struck a match—‘just that,’ he said, pointing to the flames” (177). Terence is trying to articulate something for which he does not yet have the words. He is aware that he cannot attribute his feelings for Rachel to any of her qualities or to the sum of all of her qualities, but he is not able to discern just what it is that he does love. He returns to the image of the flame, which he has described to Hirst as “not ourselves exactly, but what we feel” (98).
As he sits talking with Rachel on the cliff, Terence thinks that he knows “all the things that were important about her; he felt them in the air around them” (206). He is unable to pierce the vagueness of his feelings and speak with her directly. Rachel is the one that ventures forth, “I like you; d’you like me?” (206). He is relieved by her candor and asks whether they might call each other Terence and Rachel (206). Up to this moment in the chapter, Terence is referred to by his surname Hewet; after this, he becomes Terence. Rachel’s personal relationships with both Helen and Rachel begin when she calls them by their first names, when they become particular human beings (74, 206).

But Terence is not altogether able to consider Rachel a distinct person. When he thinks about her afterwards, Terence cannot think of her with distinct qualities, but rather grasps her “instinctively” (230). He does not know her “and yet he was in love with her” (230). He opens “his arms wide as if to hold her and the world in one embrace” (231). Of the possibilities he presents about why people draw together, Terence embodies all three: he is avoiding seeing Rachel and himself clearly and distinctly; he feels love for her; and he is perpetually drifting from one experience to another.

Rachel and Terence become engaged during the course of the river expedition to the native village. They leave the others and walk in silence into the depth of the forest. Their conversation is more like an echo than an interaction:
‘You like being with me?’ Terence asked.
‘Yes, with you,’ she replied.
He was silent for a moment. Silence seemed to have fallen upon the world.
‘That is what I have felt ever since I knew you,’ he replied. ‘We are happy together.’ He did not seem to be speaking, or she to be hearing.
‘Very happy,’ she answered.
They continued to walk for some time in silence. Their steps unconsciously quickened.
‘We love each other,’ Terence said.
‘We love each other,’ she repeated. (256-57)

Neither one is particularly embodied or interacting with a distinct other. The exchange is hypnotic, Rachel parroting whatever Terence says. There is neither speaking nor hearing. The dim light and the “sighing sounds [. . .] suggest to the traveller in a forest that he is walking at the bottom of the sea” (256). When Terence finally declares love, it is not his for her but theirs for each other. He speaks for her too rather than only for himself. They embrace and fall to the ground. As they rise to return to the boat, Rachel looks very tired and pale (257).45

Walking back to the others “in silence as people walking in their sleep,” Rachel and Terence pass the remainder of the expedition as if in a trance (258). The others interact “high in the air above,” and Terence and Rachel have “dropped to the bottom of the world together” (259, 261). Their union is disembodied, isolated from the company of others. Rachel loses the capacity to distinguish herself and other objects: “The eyes of

45 Some critics cite these as the beginning symptoms of Rachel’s illness, suggesting she contracts typhoid as she is getting engaged. It’s not clear from the novel whether that is the case.
Rachel saw nothing. Yellow and green shapes did, it is true, pass before them, but she only knew that one was large and another small; she did not know that they were trees” (262). Not only is Rachel unable to recognize outer objects, but her own eyes are somehow separate from her sense of self.

The next day, the party draws close to the native village and decides to walk the final mile there. Alone for the first time since the scene in the forest, Terence asks Rachel whether she loves him. “She murmured inarticulately, ending, ‘And you?’” (265). This is the first time that Terence addresses her directly; and Rachel’s answer is an inarticulate murmur. Thinking that they cannot be “united” until he discloses all of his faults, Terence begins listing his affairs with other women, his “sense of futility,” his “incompetence” (265-66). As he carries on talking about his friends and the sights in London, “with every word the mist which had enveloped them, making them seem unreal to each other, since the previous afternoon melted a little further, and their contact became more and more natural” (266). It is the particular details of Terence’s life that finally penetrates the haze of their union. For the first time, Rachel, “observing his grey coat and his purple tie,” can say, “‘Yes, I’m in love. There’s no doubt; I’m in love with you’” (266). It’s not “the eyes of Rachel” but Rachel herself who observes; and instead of seeing “nothing,” she sees Terence in particular detail.

Their relationship alternates between these modes of union and difference for the remainder of the novel. This is the tension that characterizes their relationship: the
struggle between two particular human beings who choose to love one another and the tendency to dissolve into a unitive trance. “Feeling this painfully”—the movement between having “no division between them” and being “separate and far away”—Rachel exclaims, “‘It will be a fight’” (266). She again braces for the battle that she had predicted weeks earlier (161). The struggle is no longer only internal but now with another person.

Just as Rachel learns the independence of her own thinking in interacting with Helen, with Terence she learns the independence of her feelings. She feels love and connection in an embodied way. “With a little surprise at recognising in her own person so famous a thing,” Rachel describes her feeling of happiness “almost as if it were the blood singing in her veins” (267). She and Terence talk about and compare their feelings, “for they were very different” (268).

Rachel faces the battle of maintaining her difference not only in relationship to Terence but also in relationship to her lifelong identification with abstract natural forces. On one side is union with Terence, on the other union with nature, and autonomous Rachel is in the middle. On the last night of the expedition, Rachel and Terence stand at the railing of the boat and look out at the dark world. After a long silence, Terence accuses Rachel, “‘You’d forgotten completely about me […] and I never forget you’” (273). “‘Oh, no,’ she whispered, she had not forgotten, only the stars—the night—the dark—” (272). Rachel is learning to think for herself and to feel for herself, and still the
old ways of being pull at her. Hers is not a simple linear development. Her life has become much like her piano playing: “Now she stumbled; now she faltered and had to play the same bar twice over; but an invisible line seemed to string the notes together, from which rose a shape, a building” (49).

Once they are back in Santa Marina, the couple receives congratulations from the guests at the hotel. When they are alone, Rachel plays the piano and Terence reads. They imagine the children they will have and pity those “outside the warm mysterious globe full of changes and miracles” in which they find themselves (279). At the same time, Rachel feels herself “far apart” from Terence (279). She wonders, “Would there ever be a time when the world was one and indivisible?” (279). Terence suggests that she overcome this sense of a disconnected world by imagining a “common quality” between herself and others; “and once linked together by one such tie she would find them not separate and formidable, but practically indistinguishable, and she would come to love them when she found out that they were like herself” (282). This, ultimately, is the problem with Terence’s notion of love. His mode of connection is insensible merging, becoming “indistinguishable” from others. He suggests that love is based on discovering likeness rather than respecting difference.

But Rachel believes “that human beings [are] as various as the beasts at the Zoo” (282-83). Terence minds that she is “able to cut herself adrift from him and to pass away to unknown places where she had no need of him” (285). She does this not only by
becoming one with nature but also by recognizing her autonomy. Rachel questions whether they ought not to break off the engagement, and they immediately cling together as answer. They feel “soothed” and “the divisions disappeared” (286). But as they compose themselves to go down to lunch, “it chilled them to see themselves in the glass, for instead of being vast and indivisible they were really very small and separate, the size of the glass leaving a large space for the reflection of other things” (286). The question they face is how to be distinct and yet in love, and how to be in love and also include the rest of the world.

In the chapter before she falls ill, Rachel has gone to the hotel with Terence to have tea with some hotel guests. She remembers distinctly previous occasions of being at the hotel: “She felt herself amazingly secure as she sat in her arm-chair, and able to review not only the night of the dance, but the entire past, tenderly and humorously, as if she had been turning in a fog for a long time, and could now see exactly where she had turned” (297). Her sense of self and of life is definite. Even though she was not aware of it at the time, “one thing led to another and by degrees something had formed itself out of nothing, and so one reached at last this calm, this quiet, this certainty, and it was this process that people called living” (297). In this clarity, which is different than the mode of thinking that distances her from the world and the mode of feeling that dissolves her into union, Rachel is able to find meaning in the world as it is. She does not leave her experience to find meaning in the wind or the sea, but rather lives exactly
where she finds herself. And, she is not alone. This calm certainty allows Rachel to see the value of other lives as well: “When she looked back she could see that a meaning of some kind was apparent in the lives of her aunts, and in the brief visit of the Dalloways whom she would never see again, and in the life of her father” (297). Other people exist and their lives have meaning independently of Rachel. Connection can happen even between people who will never see each other again.

Rachel looks over at Terence, who has fallen asleep next to her. She considers his face and his faults, imagining all of the struggles that lie ahead of them “because they [are] so different” (298). She continues:

But all this was superficial, and had nothing to do with the life that went on beneath the eyes and the mouth and the chin, for that life was independent of her, and independent of everything else. So too, although she was going to marry him and to live with him for thirty, or forty, or fifty years, and to quarrel, and to be close to him, she was independent of him; she was independent of everything else. Nevertheless, as St. John said, it was love that made her understand this, for she had never felt this independence, this calm, and this certainty until she fell in love with him, and perhaps this too was love. She wanted nothing else. (298)

This is a change from the beginning of the novel, when Rachel believes that it is “far better to play the piano and forget all the rest” because “to feel anything strongly was to create an abyss between oneself and others who feel strongly perhaps but differently” (29). Rachel now recognizes and finds meaning in difference. And what has allowed this recognition of her and others’ independence is love. This is not a love that coalesces; it is
a love that differentiates. What used to be underneath the surface of life was isolated consciousness, or undifferentiated union with wind and sea, or identification with characters in books. But now, what is underneath the surface of life is personal difference and individual autonomy. This is a new independence and not the solitary isolation that marked her at the beginning of the novel. This independence is not discovered in self-enclosed vision but in differentiated love. Connection now is a choice Rachel makes, rather than being only determined by evolution or attraction or cycles or belonging to the same types.

This is the ethical mode: a distinct and autonomous person able to act in the world and connect with others without being either submerged or withdrawn. And this mode of being human is discovered precisely in interacting with others. Rachel finds this independence in actively relating with Helen and Terence. With Helen, she discovers what she thinks and how to articulate that without rupturing the relationship. With Terence, she discovers what she feels and how to connect without losing her sense of self. This passage where Rachel recognizes the relationship between love and autonomy is the last extended passage from her point of view before she falls ill. In other words, this is the Rachel that falls ill—calm, definite, certain, independent.

Her final realization before getting sick reveals the relationship between self-consciousness and other-consciousness. What allows her to be embodied as a distinct self with agency is recognizing Terence’s independence. She first sees that he is
independent before seeing that she herself is. This is a subtle point. She does not grant freedom and independence to Terence by virtue of his likeness to herself. Terence’s autonomy is independent of Rachel. But only in seeing his clearly can she see her own. As Rachel’s thinking and feeling and sensing becomes embodied, she is able to see others and the world with more clarity and certainty. Her recognition of Terence’s basic freedom confers the agency that allows her to see her own. She cannot begin with herself, as does Stephen, because there is then no way out to the other. She cannot begin with the other and simply end there, as does Edwin, because there is then no personal, creative agency. By virtue of recognizing Terence’s absolute difference, Rachel can recognize her own. This ethical and relational mode of understanding is love.\footnote{While working on \textit{The Voyage Out}, Woolf writes to Violet Dickinson: “You will be glad to hear that I am seething with fragments of love, morals, ethics, comedy tragedy, and so on; and every morning pour them out into a manuscript book.” November 14, 1910. \textit{Letters}, v. 1, p. 438.}

Rachel Dies

Rachel’s voyage out from self to world, which begins with kissing Richard and ends with her death, is far from a stable or linear development. But the stumbling and faltering are not hindrances.\footnote{Jed Esty reads both \textit{The Voyage Out} and \textit{Portrait} as “antidevelopment fictions set in colonial contact zones, where uneven development is a conspicuous fact of both personal and political} Rather, precisely because of the false starts, Rachel is able
to discover an autonomous self through engaged interaction with others. In the chapter immediately after she recognizes her independence, Rachel’s head begins to ache and she soon falls ill with typhoid. Ten days later, she dies. Critics most often read her death as an escape into the mythical world of Milton’s *Comus*; but the novel suggests otherwise.48

As the chapter opens, Terence is reading out loud from *Comus*:

```
Sabrina fair,
    Listen where thou are sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
    In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber dropping hair,
Listen for dear honour’s sake,
    Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save! (309)
```

In Milton’s masque, Comus is a debauched mythical figure that traps the chaste Lady in a magical chair. Her brothers find her but are unable to free her from the enchanted life.” Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development, p. 2. Esty equates uneven development with antidevelopment. But Rachel does develop; so does Stephen. Although the linear development of classical *Bildungsromane* plots is subverted in these novels, the consequence, especially for Rachel, is not the “frozen youth” that Esty posits. In the narrative world of this novel, that Rachel dies is a development. She has developed from a disembodied youth identified with the wind and the sea to an embodied woman capable both of love and death. Esty’s notion of development is chiefly social, political, and economic in nature. Woolf is concerned, above all, with ethical development, the extent to which Rachel can act and interact as a definite and free person.

chair. They appeal to Sabrina, a water nymph, to save the Lady. She does, and the Lady returns to life with her parents. As Rachel listens to these lines, she is overcome by a headache and goes to bed. These lines appealing to Sabrina for help continue to pass in and out of her consciousness while she is sick.

On the first day of being in bed, Rachel feels “a gulf between her world and the ordinary world which she could not bridge” (311). This gulf increases as the days pass. She repeats the lines from Comus to herself. By the second day, the world appears “distinctly further off” and “the glassy, cool, translucent wave” has reached the foot of Rachel’s bed (311). The coolness of the wave is a relief from the heat of the fever. By the third day, “all landmarks were obliterated, and the outer world was so far away” (311). Everything distinct recedes and Rachel is engulfed in various hallucinations. She is “completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated alone with her body” (312). In her delirium, she imagines her room is the damp, narrowing tunnel from the nightmare she had after Richard kissed her (313). Between the fourth and seventh days, Rachel loses all contact with the outside world. She is “suddenly unable to keep Helen’s face distinct” from the content of her hallucinations (322). Rachel falls

[. . .] into a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head. She saw nothing and heard nothing but a faint booming sound, which was the sound of the sea rolling over her head. While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea. There she lay, sometimes
seeing darkness, sometimes light, while every now and then some one turned her over at the bottom of the sea. (322)

This echoes the disembodied moment of her engagement with Terence, when they fall together to “the bottom of the sea” (256). Now she is with Sabrina at the bottom of the lake, not dead but hiding. Unlike the Lady, who returns to her life after Sabrina frees her, Rachel stays in the mythical world of the nymph. She chooses the sea over life. But the novel does not end here. And Rachel lives for another three days.

On the eight day, a more qualified doctor arrives to treat her. By the ninth day, Rachel is “conscious of what went on round her” (327). More “like herself,” she asks what day of the week it is (327). She is riding up and down on a wave and has come “to the surface of the dark, sticky pool” (327). Soon though, “the wave was replaced by a mountain” (327). She is no longer figured as the undifferentiated sea, but now as differentiated land. Her body begins to have more substance and she recognizes Helen and the surroundings. Rachel is still weak and wishes “for nothing else in the world” than to be alone (328). More than anyone, it is Terence who vexes her because he “forced her to join mind to body in the desire to remember something” (328).

Throughout her illness, what Terence has been trying to make Rachel remember is their engaged bliss. Although he has been in a state of hopeless despair, it seems to him unimaginable that Rachel might die. It is on the ninth day, when she improves, when she is most “like herself,” that Terence is finally able to clearly see:
To realise what they meant by saying that she had a chance of life was beyond him, knowing as he did that they were engaged. He turned, still enveloped in the same dreary mist, and walked towards the door. Suddenly he saw it all. He saw the room and the garden, and the trees moving in the air, they could go on without her; she could die. For the first time since she fell ill he remembered exactly what she looked like and the way in which they cared for each other. [...] He could not let her die; he could not live without her. But after a momentary struggle, the curtain fell again, and he saw nothing and felt nothing clearly. It was all going on—going on still, in the same way as before. Save for the physical pain when his heart beat, and the fact that his fingers were icy cold, he did not realise that he was anxious about anything. Within his mind he seemed to feel nothing about Rachel or about any one or anything in the world. (328-29)

To Terence, being engaged is a bulwark against any kind of separation from Rachel. In his experience, they are so merged that it is inconceivable that she might die and he continue to live. But briefly, he is able to see that she could die. In that moment, he sees the world more clearly and more distinctly. He remembers “exactly” what she looks like. What pierces the “dreary mist” that Terence has been living in is Rachel becoming more “like herself.” As she becomes distinct and emerges from the bottom of the sea, Terence has to face that she can die. So long as she was a consort of Sabrina’s (or of Terence’s), Rachel could not die. But when she is herself—distinct and definite—she can die. But Terence can only see this possibility momentarily. His body knows it but his mind will not allow it.

Once Rachel comes “to the surface of the dark, sticky pool,” she does not descend again (327). There are no more images of Rachel under water during the last
two days of her life. On the tenth day, the doctor tells them that Rachel is worse. “It
seemed as if they were at last brought together face to face with something definite”
(332). What is definite is not only the seriousness of her illness but also Rachel herself.
This is the most lucid she has been since she has fallen ill. She is not withdrawn and is
able to communicate. The “attempt at communication” that “had been a failure” with
Richard succeeds with Terence (57). Instead of trying “first to recollect and then to
expose her shivering private visions,” as she wanted to do with Richard, Rachel
addresses Terence simply (57). When Terence goes to sit by her bedside, “she saw him
and knew him” (333). She smiles at him and says, “‘Hullo, Terence’” (333). These are her
last words.

The “gulf” that opens between her and the world when she first falls ill is not
there when she dies (311). Rachel dies seeing and knowing clearly. She is distinct and
sees Terence distinctly, as “Terence.” She closes her eyes and, in a few moments, “she
had ceased to breathe” (334). Sabrina does not save her; nor does Rachel slip to the
bottom of the sea. Rachel’s death is not a descent into mythical consciousness; it is
ordinary and embodied—she stops breathing.

Two storms bookend Rachel’s story of becoming embodied. The first storm
happens on water, during the sea voyage to Santa Marina. Richard kisses her after the
storm subsides and she has nightmares that night. During her illness, the imagery from
the nightmare returns as hallucinations. Her illness is the physical counterpart to the
kiss at the beginning of the novel. The kiss brings her body to life and the illness ends it. After she dies, there is another storm—this one on land. The storm that disturbs sea-Rachel, who is undifferentiated, leads to the awareness of her body; the storm that disturbs land-Rachel, who is embodied, is the possibility of death. The storm at sea nudges Rachel from undifferentiated being to a budding embodiment. The storm on land completes this embodiment by admitting death.

That Rachel dies means that she lived. Terence, still in his “dreary mist,” makes her death a moment of mystical merger, thinking that they now have “the complete union” that was not possible while Rachel lived (328, 334). In one way, he is right. As Rachel becomes differentiated during the course of the novel, she is no longer able to merge completely, whether with Terence or with the sea. The ethical body, the autonomous person with agency, is the only one that can die. In the other narrative modes, the body simply continues in various attenuated ways: the natural body evolves; the historical body struggles; the archetypal body repeats; the semiotic body defers; the philosophical body is absorbed. In the narrative modes of the novel, Rachel can die only if she is embodied as a particular person. Although counterintuitive to consider the

49 In Melymbrosia, talking to Terence about her mother’s death, Rachel says, “‘So I love the sea and music because they don’t die.’” p. 224.

50 Elisabeth Ladenson and Victoria Rosner have raised valuable objections to my reading Rachel’s death as a developmental achievement, particularly given the history of reading women’s madness as liberation. I am not making the general argument that for a woman artist death is
death of the heroine a triumph, within the narrative world of *The Voyage Out*, that Rachel can die is proof that she exists as a differentiated individual. Her primary struggle throughout the novel has been between identifying with abstract forces and experiencing herself as a definite individual. When she is like the wind and the sea, or like characters from novels, she cannot die; nor, though, does she live.

**Art without the Artist**

Unlike *Portrait*, which ends with Stephen’s flight, and *Clayhanger*, which ends with Edwin’s burden, *The Voyage Out* continues for another two chapters after Rachel dies.\(^5\) We don’t see any more of Terence or Helen. The story returns to the minor characters at the hotel, who react to Rachel’s death and then carry on with the business of life. As the guests are eating dinner, a storm hits and the novel ends with the consciousness of St. John Hirst. Throughout the novel, Hirst figures as the brilliant, cynical, and socially inept intellectual. In the end, he finds comfort surrounded by the

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\(^5\) Woolf writes to Lytton Strachey about the novel: “What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again—and the whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled.” February 28, 1916. *Letters*, v. 2, p. 82.
people that he has characterized as so many “hens in a circle” (97). Sitting in the social hall after ten days of caring for Rachel and Terence, Hirst feels a “profound happiness” watching the others: “The movements and the voices seemed to draw together from different parts of the room, and to combine themselves into a pattern before his eyes” (352). When he first appears in the novel, Hirst is reading Gibbon and “a whole procession of splendid sentences entered his capacious brow and went marching through his brain in order” (95-96). The novel ends as “across his eyes passed a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work-baskets, and passing him one after another on the way to bed” (353). Hirst too has become more human during the course the novel. The “splendid sentences” that used to occupy him are now “figures of people.” Although they are “black and indistinct,” his relationship to them has changed—their movements and voices “soothed him” (352).

Returning now to Woolf’s ideas about art and life, we can see more of what she means:

From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there
is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock.52

There is no Shakespeare and no Beethoven in the sense that Rachel dies and life (and the novel) continues. There is no isolated artist figure that is the sole creator or source of meaning. Hirst, a decidedly unpleasant fellow, is as connected to and has as much access to the pattern as does everyone else. Vision and creation are not the province of only the artist. A creative, engaged life is each person’s responsibility. Art does not transcend life, nor is the artist impervious to death. We are the words and the music and the thing itself in that there is nowhere else to get to and nothing else to be—the creative act is not deferred in time or extended in space. Being embodied means living and creating exactly where you find yourself. This is how Rachel learns to be definite without being isolated and to be connected without being submerged.

In this novel, Woolf debunks the notion of the isolated, visionary artist in the very genre created to convey that myth.53 Rather than accepting the inherited model of

52 “A Sketch of the Past,” in Moments of Being, p. 72.

53 Pamela Caughie recognizes that Woolf deconstructs the myth of the artist in her later novels, but suggests that what takes its place is a notion of art and narrative as inconclusive and artificial. “‘I must not settle into a figure’: The Woman Artist in Virginia Woolf’s Writings,” pp. 371-97. To me, this seems to trivialize Woolf’s actual sense of life as a creative act, not only for the artists in her novels but also for all of her characters. Writing about the reception of The Waves, Woolf
the *Künstlerroman*—a sensitive artist bandied about by an unsympathetic world—Woolf works out how an artist might actually bridge the divide between self and world, self and other, in a creative life. Neither abandoning art for daily life (as Edwin does) nor escaping life into art (as Stephen does), Rachel learns how to be an autonomous human being that can connect freely with others. In this and her other novels, Woolf is working out an embodied aesthetics. To the extent that the consciousness of her characters (and not only the artist figures) is anchored in a lived, physical experience, their imaginations are free to connect with others. Thoughts and feelings and sensations can pass from one character to another without direct exchange. When the body holds the center of individual being, self-consciousness can exist alongside other-consciousness. Consciousness that is embodied in a distinct sense of self can neither escape into vision nor dissolve into insensible union.

Descartes moors the being of the self in conscious thinking. The British empiricists locate the self in pure sensation. Both possibilities, by enclosing the self in either mind or body, limit the capacity of the self to connect with the world and with others. Life becomes various continuities of either thought or sensation. The genre of

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says, “I feel things matter quite immensely. [. . .] there is significance [. . .] I’m annoyed to be told that I am nothing but a stringer together of words and words and words.” October 27, 1931. *Letters*, v. 4, p. 397.

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54 Roger Poole writes of Woolf, “The ways the body is ‘lived,’ is active in creating, and participating in, a world of meanings, is her theme throughout her fictional career.” *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, p. 198.
Künstlerroman examines the development of an artistic consciousness in life. How might a young artist bridge the gap between self and world in the act of creation? Beginning with The Voyage Out, Woolf takes up this question. She experiments with what an embodied aesthetics, tethered exclusively to neither sensation nor vision, might look like. The usual modes of bodily experience—the natural, the historical, the archetypal, and the semiotic—cannot govern creation because nothing new ever happens in these modes.

What Rachel discovers is an ethical mode, a personal mode based on acting and relating. An embodied aesthetics is not given from above; it requires personal effort. Rachel learns to live in the same spirit in which she plays music: “Now she stumbled; now she faltered and had to play the same bar twice over; but an invisible line seemed to string the notes together, from which rose a shape, a building” (49). What arises is not a vision or image, but a shape and a building. In this first novel, Woolf suggests what a creative life might be, not only for the artist figure but for all human beings. The self that can live a creative life is actively embodied—distinct without being isolated and connected without being fused.

55 From OE gesceap, shape means “creation, form, destiny.” From late ME, it refers to the “external form or contour of the body.” (OED) Also, building in the sense that Paul talks of the body as God’s building: “[. . .] you are God’s farm, God’s building. By the grace of God which was given to me, I laid the foundations like a trained master-builder, and someone else is building on them. [. . .]” 1 Cor. 3: 9-10. For echoes of this sense of body as building for Edwin, see pp. 66-67 above; and for Stephen, see pp. 102-03 above.
Conclusion

The primary concern of the novel of artistic development is how an artist bridges the gap between self-consciousness and the world through the creative act. This includes how the isolated artist learns to relate to others. Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf create artists that offer different solutions to the main problem of the genre. In *Clayhanger*, Edwin is not able to balance his creative inner life with his actual outer life. He abandons his drawings, takes over the family printing press, and surrenders himself to an uneasy marriage. Stephen Dedalus, on the other hand, renounces the world. Family, relationships, and country are distractions from his impulse to create. Stephen chooses instead to withdraw into visionary flight. It is Woolf who suggests a new possibility. Rather than sacrificing art for the world or the world for art, Woolf questions the nature of the dilemma. In the genre based precisely on the premise of the isolated artist figure reflecting from a distance on an external world, Woolf debunks that idea. She does not dismiss artist, art, or world, but questions the exact nature of these terms. In other words, she challenges the inherited assumptions of the genre. She does this not for sport, but in order to think anew the relationship between artist and world. In the development of Rachel’s consciousness, Woolf reveals the possibility of an embodied aesthetics that is not exclusively the province of the artist.
The main dynamic of the *Künstlerroman* genre can be visually represented as:

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  art

consciousness  →  world
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**Figure 1**

These novels are preoccupied with telling the story of how an artist-protagonist develops over time and whether he is able to strike out, through his art, from solitary vision to connection with the world. As I argue in the first chapter of this study, the original sense of *aisthesis* did not have much to do with art specifically.¹ Rather, the notion conveyed the entirety of man’s sensory responses to the world. *Aisthesis* was the counterpart to the pure intellection of *noesis*. As the field developed, particularly with the contribution of eighteenth-century German thinkers, the central position of sensation and the body was supplanted by art and matters of taste.

Both materialist and idealist aesthetics, either enshrining the body or transcending it, neglect the actual significance of the body. Because the *Künstlerroman* genre inherits this bodiless aesthetics, issues of embodiment emerge as central to these novels. Not only does the body resurface thematically in the sexual development of the artist figures, but also it becomes the key to the solution of the genre’s chief dilemma.

¹ See above, pp. 17-19.
How does an artist integrate his visions with the world through his creative life? Bennett, in *Clayhanger*, suggests this can’t be done. Although Edwin gains some measure of autonomy from his father and is able to fall in love with Hilda, he does so at the expense of his creative life. The novel ends with Edwin surrendering to the passion and burden of his marriage. Edwin develops from a shy, disembodied artist to a beleaguered, disembodied husband. Bennett offers a realist surrender to the material burdens of life as an alternative to visionary escapism. Although Edwin becomes more embodied as the novel proceeds, he is also more determined by and consciously driven by his physical needs and desires. His development is incomplete and uneasy. On the one hand, he is more aware of himself as a living organism; on the other hand, he is as subject to his physiology as he was to his imagination. Bennett’s solution to the question of the genre is that relationship, not art, bridges the chasm between self and world:

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  marriage
consciousness   world
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*Figure 1a*

There is both passion and defeat in Edwin’s final surrender to a life with Hilda. The Edwin who lacked creative autonomy because he was submerged in imaginative flight
is now the Edwin who lacks creative autonomy because he is submerged in marital struggle. Edwin simply trades masters from mind to body.

Like Bennett, Joyce rejects the possibility of the genre. Whereas Bennett sacrifices art, Joyce sacrifices the world. Throughout Portrait, Stephen struggles to connect with classmates, girls, family, and the church. For all of his perseveration about sensation and sex, Stephen is never able to become embodied in a real way. “We are,“ as Stanislaus Joyce notes, “from first to last in the centre of Stephen’s brain. The picture is an interior.” 2 Stephen’s physical experiences of self, of others, and of the world remain figurative—always couched in visions, traces, and images. Because Stephen is not embodied, he is unable to pierce the bubble of his solipsistic innerness. The world and others exist as functions of his imagination. What doesn’t happen in life, he makes happen in verse.

As the novel proceeds, Stephen exhausts all possibilities of connection and withdraws into isolated vision. He is no longer satisfied by simply using the material world as fodder for his visions. Rather, he turns completely to “the contemplation of an inner world.” 3 In a final act of renunciation, Stephen dedicates himself to writing the story of his own inner world:


3 See above, pp. 113-19.
His self-enclosure is complete. Gone is “the glowing sensible world”; instead, Stephen pursues an art that will mirror his private inner world.4

In these novels, both Bennett and Joyce accept the main premise of the genre—an isolated artist enclosed in self-conscious reflection—and offer different escapes out of the bind between vision and world. But neither Edwin nor Stephen is able to bridge the gap between self and the world through a creative act. Woolf, on the other hand, by virtue of questioning the basic assumptions of the genre, does present the possibility of an engaged, creative life. Rather than rejecting either the world or art, Woolf redefines the terms. What is art? What is the world? What is the nature of the consciousness that can reach out in a creative act? In The Voyage Out, Woolf works out provisional answers to these questions that are integral to all of her novels and to her life. In doing so, she also provides an ethical alternative to the dueling aesthetics of realism and idealism.

4 Ibid.
Embodiment

One of the main themes in the novel of artistic development is the artist-protagonist’s relationship to his body. This emphasis on the body can be understood in many ways: as a practical issue of developing from an adolescent to an adult; as an integral part of any romantic or sexual relationship with another person; as a balance to the isolating tendency of the visionary mind; as the root of aisthesis, which is based on sensory experience; as a basis of securing a sense of autonomous self and agency. We can read all three novels as different versions of the relationship between vision and embodiment.

What does embodiment mean in the context of this genre? On the most basic level, it has to do with the extent to which these artist-protagonists are aware of their bodies. We have seen some of the ways in which the body can be understood—as pure physiology, as evolutionary process, as historical site of struggle, as archetypal repetition, as indeterminate sign, as manifestation of being, and as personal agency. Throughout the novels, all three artist-protagonists become increasingly aware of their physical sensations. To varying degrees, their immediate, lived experience begins to include the dimension of bodily existence. Each artist responds differently to the pressures of becoming embodied. Being disembodied includes both rejecting physical sensation as well as being wholly determined by it. More than simply increasing the
range of possible experience, becoming embodied is what allows their capacity for creative agency and relationship. In other words, embodiment is the basis for a creative agency that is connected with the world.

Because Stephen secures his sense of self and his existence entirely through his mental and imaginative activity, he is never able to connect with the world. Because Edwin secures his sense of self and his existence entirely through his physical sensations, he is never able to be free in his actions. Both live in closed circles—of the mind and of the body. Neither the mind nor the body can exclusively vouchsafe human agency and relationship. This is precisely what Woolf works out in The Voyage Out. Rachel discovers her independence and freedom precisely in the act of being related to Helen and Terence. And the nature of these relationships is not insensible merger but creative difference. As her consciousness becomes increasingly embodied, Rachel learns to act and to relate freely. If we return to the central issue of the Künstlerroman, this is Woolf’s solution:

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\text{art} \\
\text{consciousness} \rightarrow \text{world}
\]

Figure 1

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5 See above, pp. 158-73.
She maintains that self and world can be connected in a creative act. But she reinvents what self, world, and art mean. Woolf narrates many intermingling levels of bodily experience. The characters that represent these various views of the body all come under scrutiny. It is Rachel’s development and eventual death that presents a new possibility for the genre. Woolf solves the dilemma of the isolated artist disconnected from the world by first offering the possibility of an embodied consciousness. It is Rachel’s increasing awareness of her bodily experience that allows her to connect not only with others, but also with herself as a creative agent.

As her consciousness becomes embodied, she is both more open to interaction with others and more able to sense her own definite and different existence. Rachel develops from identifying with abstractions—the wind and the sea, vast evolutionary processes, literary characters, mythical figures—to identifying with her actual lived experience. Her development is not linear or simple. She struggles with herself and with others. Rather than being a failure of possibility, Rachel’s death is a triumph of her development. Rachel is able to die, and die in an ordinary way, because she has learned to live in an embodied way.

We can understand this development in the following way:
In following Rachel’s development from visionary self-enclosure to autonomous agency, we can discern three kinds of conscious experience: self-consciousness, body-consciousness, and other-consciousness. These three types of conscious experience are fluid and often overlap in the novel. Self-conscious experience is primarily characterized by flights of solitary vision and imagination—this is Rachel playing the piano at the beginning of the novel. Body-conscious experience introduces the awareness of and openness to physical sensation and responsiveness. Rachel’s kiss with Richard Dalloway begins her life as a self-aware body. Other-consciousness refers to the ability to connect with autonomous and different others through mutual and free interaction.

Through the medium of an embodied consciousness, Woolf interjects others and the world into the very nature of consciousness itself. Consciousness no longer simply designates solipsistic self-reflection. In this way, Rachel’s growing sense of bodily existence spurs her learning to think with Helen and to feel with Terence. In Woolf’s
later novels, this notion of an expanded consciousness includes the ability to connect
with others without any direct contact.\textsuperscript{6}

In \textit{The Voyage Out}, Woolf suggests that any personal consciousness, insofar as it
is embodied, can connect with the world and with others in a creative act. Rachel’s
growing embodiment mediates between self-consciousness and other-consciousness. As
Rachel’s lived experience begins to include her bodily awareness, she gains a sense of
herself both as capable of autonomous action as well as capable of free interaction. The
body, which had been shoved out of the field of aesthetics, returns as the element
essential to the resolution of the novelistic genre based on aesthetics. The artist who is
centered in an embodied consciousness is free to connect both with others and with the
world.

Rachel’s coherent sense of self, which includes action and interaction, is based on
her growing awareness of her bodily consciousness. What keeps self-consciousness from
becoming a recoiling solipsism (a la Stephen) is embodiment. What keeps other-
consciousness from becoming an insensible union (a la Edwin) is embodiment. In both
her flights of fancy and her relationships with others, what gives Rachel a sense of being
an autonomous, creative agent is the lived experience of her body.

\textsuperscript{6} Beginning with \textit{Jacob’s Room}, Woolf experiments with a roving consciousness that questions
the separation between self and other. Thoughts, feelings, images, and experiences pass between
characters without any actual contact. This technique, characteristic of Woolf’s later fiction, is a
natural extension of what appears in this novel as Rachel’s embodied consciousness.
Against Descartes, Woolf shows that existence is not secured by an isolated consciousness reflecting on its own disembodied musings. Nor is existence based on pure physiology. The idealist solution, like Joyce’s, severs the artist from life and others. The materialist solution, like Bennett’s, renders the artist unable to create. Both alternatives are forms of determinism, of either mind or body. Woolf discovers an embodiment that does not trap consciousness in physical processes, but rather anchors the self in such a way that frees the artist to create and relate. When personal existence is secured by an embodied consciousness, the artist can feel independent and related at once. Woolf undoes the dichotomy—between mind and body, between consciousness and sensation, between self and world—that has plagued the field of aesthetics since Descartes’s cogito. We can view these novels now in terms of their conception of the protagonist’s consciousness:
True embodiment is not becoming more entrenched in the body or in sensation, but gaining enough confidence in being and existing that consciousness is free to wander and connect. But, as in the “moments of being,” this sense—of existence, of being and nonbeing at once, of significance—does not persist through time and space. It is an immediate and momentary awareness that makes action and interaction possible.

Paradoxically, the more definite the lived experience of the body, the more freedom there is to strike out, to act and to interact. This roving, creative consciousness rooted in embodied experience comes to characterize Woolf’s later novels. At the heart of creation

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7 See above, pp. 150-54.
is difference that does not separate and relationship that does not merge. This is the double function of embodiment: to secure agency for the person and, simultaneously, to allow connection with the world.⁸

Both Bennett and Joyce conceive self and other, consciousness and world, mind and body as at odds with each other. Neither recognizes the mediating and liberating role of embodiment. Bennett turns objects into bodies; Joyce turns the body into an object. Edwin’s new house is a body with which he develops a relationship; Stephen’s body is a discursive sign. Stephen begins as an interacting other-consciousness and ends as a sequestered self-consciousness, with various failed attempts at connection in between. Edwin begins hemmed in by ignorance and ends indentured in marriage, having in the process abandoned all creative ambitions. It is Rachel who discovers her independent existence in the process of having embodied relationships with others. This is Woolf’s singular contribution to the genre of the _Künstlerroman_—what connects self and world in a creative act is an embodied consciousness.

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⁸ In the philosophical mode, this double function of embodiment is actually single, because there is no notion of temporal duration or spatial extension. So what seems double and simultaneous from the perspective of the personal is single and one from the perspective of being. See Appendix B below, p. 231.
Ethical Aesthetics

An embodied consciousness secures for Rachel the capacity to act and interact in the world. As she becomes more definite, Rachel is able to recognize difference and independence—her own and others’. Embodiment, therefore, is not simply heightened physical sensation or awareness. More importantly, it is being able to act and interact with a definite and autonomous sense of self. Embodiment allows both the immediacy of the entirety of one’s experience as well as the capacity to respond. Unlike Stephen, who despite his “tremor of susceptibility never reaches out or embraces or comprehends what is outside and beyond,” Rachel manages to do just that.9

One way we can view these novels is as an arc of growing understanding about embodiment, moving from the abstract to the personal.10 Clayhanger proceeds mostly along the lines of the natural and historical modes of describing the body. Sensation and struggle dominate Edwin’s experience. The novel begins with Edwin at odds with himself and ends with Edwin bracing for conflict with Hilda. The novel begins and ends in enclosure: it opens with Edwin alone with his thoughts and ends with Edwin and Hilda as a combined unit of experience. During the course of the story, the body is


10 See Appendix B below, p. 231, for a table that outlines the implications of the various dimensions of embodiment.
stretched into various continuities—of sensation, of struggle, of evolution, of categories. Personal agency disappears as the body becomes subject to various impersonal forces. “Clayhanger” designates not only Edwin, but first his father, Darius, and also the Potteries in the Five Towns setting of the novel. Edwin is anchored in name not only to his father but also to the entire region and its chief industry. The novel considers Edwin along the lines of its title—as an intersection of various forces of heredity, geography, physiology, class, and history.

The differences in the narrative structures of the novels mirror the artists’ experiences of their bodies and of development. *Clayhanger* proceeds linearly in chronological time and reflects the progressive development of Edwin’s consciousness. Divided into four books, the story begins with “his vocation” as an artist, follows Edwin’s physical awakening to “his love,” continues to “his freedom” from his father, and ends with “his start in life” with Hilda. Although the five chapters of *Portrait* also follow a larger arc of chronological time, many words, rhythms, sounds, and images recur throughout the book. The cumulative effect of these repetitions is a narrative characterized by patterns, cycles, and echoes—a vast labyrinth of concentric circles with many dead ends and a final escape upward.

Although it expands to include semiotic and archetypal experiences of the body, *Portrait* like *Clayhanger* is devoid of any sense of personal agency. Even though Stephen deems himself a creator, he never actually is able to get “outside and beyond” his inner
world. Both his poems and his relationships fail to connect him with the world. Instead, Stephen is inscribed in the endless deferral of representation. He lives in a world of signs. This is, after all, a “portrait,” yet another layer of artifact and representation. And it is a portrait of “the artist” as an ideal. It is in his identification with archetype that Stephen transcends the world of time altogether and reverts to mythical cycles of repetition. In both semiotic and archetypal notions of physical existence, consciousness withdraws from the world as it is. So does Stephen. The novel begins with third person narration, a scene of Stephen with his father; it ends in first person address, Stephen appealing to Daedalus for support.

Woolf too employs these four modes in describing Rachel’s physical experience. To these she adds the philosophical and personal experiences of the body. In her “moments of being,” Woolf identifies a dimension of experience that is characterized by immediate and instantaneous significance. From this kind of absorption in lived significance arises a personal mode of experience. The ethical dimension is the only mode of experiencing the body that allows creative action, that allows something new to happen. The “voyage out” is an active endeavor, unlike Edwin’s over-determined surname and Stephen’s static portrait. In the other modes of physical experience, nothing much happens that is new: the natural body evolves, the historical body struggles, the semiotic body defers, and the archetypal body repeats. Unlike the other

11 See above, pp. 150-54.
modes of bodily experience, which are based on various notions of ongoing unity, the ethical body is based on difference. Rachel learns this mode of being in the world through her relationships with Terence and Helen. The novel begins and ends in a procession: it opens with Helen and Ridley walking arm in arm through London and expands in its ending to include all of the characters in the hotel as they head to bed. Unlike *Clayhanger* and *Portrait*, which begin and end with their artist-protagonists, *The Voyage Out* neither begins nor ends with the consciousness of Rachel.

What Woolf offers that is new in the genre is the possibility of an artist whose creativity is based in action and relation rather than in solitary vision. Although artists abound in her later novels, their development qua artist is never again central. This is due, in part, to the fact that Woolf also expands the notion of art to an aesthetics of everyday life. The fundamental nature of any embodied consciousness is creative. Whereas Bennett and Joyce end their novels with their artist-protagonists—Edwin surrendering to Hilda and Stephen readying for flight—Woolf’s novel continues for two chapters after Rachel’s death. Neither the novel nor life hinges on Rachel’s consciousness. Art is not the special province of isolated, visionary artists. The novel ends with the consciousness of St. John Hirst observing the different movements and sounds in the hotel’s main hall “drawing together” and “combining” “into a pattern before his eyes.”  

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12 *The Voyage Out*, p. 352.
This is reminiscent of Woolf’s description of art in “A Sketch of the Past”:

“Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art.”\(^{13}\) Hirst has as much access to the creative pattern of life as does Rachel. In a letter to Lytton Strachey, Woolf describes the novel: “What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again—and the whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled.”\(^{14}\) The actual fact of death, that Rachel can die, opens the possibility of a real life.

If we return now to the definition of the Künstlerroman, we can see more clearly Woolf’s innovation. The two chief characteristics of the artist novel are that the novel centers on the consciousness of the young artist figure and that the artist figure develops during the course of the novel. In The Voyage Out, Woolf challenges both of these propositions. The novel and life carry on after Rachel is dead. And Woolf’s subsequent novels do not center on the consciousness of any single protagonist. The very nature of narrative consciousness expands from being purely reflexive to being shared among characters. Thoughts, images, memories, and feelings are fluid, seamlessly passing

\(^{13}\) In Moments of Being, p. 72.

between various characters who have little or no direct contact with each other. In a way, each character assumes the role of artist and creator, culminating in the aesthetics of everyday life that comes to mark Woolf’s major novels.

Woolf also undoes the prevailing notion of development in this novel. Rachel develops not linearly but in fits and starts. She “falters” and “stumbles” her way to learning how to act and interact as an autonomous individual. That her final moment of development is death seems counterintuitive. Artist novels typically end in integration, withdrawal, or some uneasy mixture of the two. Given her developmental trajectory in the novel, that Rachel dies means that her embodiment is real. She does not drift off to the bottom of the sea with Sabrina; she simply stops breathing. Woolf displaces development from the social register to the ethical one.

Love and Death

Considering war, history, and human agency in “September 1, 1939,” Auden writes, “Hunger allows no choice / To the citizen or the police; / We must love one another or die.” In this poem, personal love is identified with physiological need, which is beyond individual choice. Auden later rejects this poem and these lines in particular
as dishonest. We can read the development of the relationship between love and death along similar lines in these novels. Through his sense of “the exquisite burden of life” with Hilda, Bennett conveys a notion of personal love as biological imperative. Edwin cannot help himself. He is as beholden to his physical need for Hilda as he was to his imaginary flights of vision. Loving Hilda is a matter of Edwin’s physical survival. This is the world of relationship as a function of physiology and evolution. Joyce, on the other hand, flatly rejects the physical necessity of both love and death. Stephen is subject to neither. Rather, both are so many “nets flung at [the soul] to hold it back from flight.” The world and others are banished from the creative act, which is a function of a visionary consciousness “liberat[ing] from the personalised lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts.”

Like Edwin, Terence considers love a bulwark against death. Confronted with Rachel’s illness, he cannot fathom “what they meant by saying that she had a chance of

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15 See Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden*, pp. 324-30. Mendelson’s exposition of this shift in Auden’s thinking has suggested the chapter titles in this dissertation.

16 Much like Darwin’s *The Temple of Nature*, which begins with the “long nerves” of “sensation” that lead to emotions of “volition” and, finally, to mental “associations.” Quoted above, p. 52.

17 *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 136.

life [...] knowing as he did that they were engaged.” Terence’s mode of love is based primarily on merged union (rather than differentiated union), so it seems unthinkable to him that Rachel might die while he continues to live. Because Rachel’s development is one of increasing differentiation, both love and death have bodily implications for her. Her death is not fading out of existence, as is Stephen’s metaphorical death. Her love is not surrender into undifferentiated union, as is Edwin’s capitulation to Hilda. Nor is love, as Terence finally conceives it, a barrier against death. Rachel both falls in love and dies. Taken together, they indicate that her embodiment is complete. She is able to connect and she does so as a distinct, free person. Observing Terence as he sleeps, Rachel sees:

But all this was superficial, and had nothing to do with the life that went on beneath the eyes and the mouth and the chin, for that life was independent of her, and independent of everything else. So too, although she was going to marry him and to live with him for thirty, or forty, or fifty years, and to quarrel, and to be close to him, she was independent of him; she was independent of everything else. Nevertheless, as St. John said, it was love that made her understand this, for she had never felt this independence, this calm, and this certainty until she fell in love with him, and perhaps this too was love. She wanted nothing else.

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19 The Voyage Out, p. 328.

20 After Roger Fry’s death, Woolf writes in 1934, “I had a notion that I could describe the tremendous feeling at R.’s funeral: but of course I cant. I mean the universal feeling: how we all fought with our brains loves & so on; and must be vanquished. [...] I felt the vainness of this perpetual fight, with our brains & loving each other against the other thing: if Roger could die.” September 19, 1934. Diary, v. 4, p. 244.
This relationship of personal love to the embodiment of consciousness and to the freedom to create is a recurring theme in Woolf’s novels.

This dissertation proceeds along a number of different lines of inquiry—generic, philosophic, and narrative. Given that the literary genre of *Künstlerroman* is based on the eighteenth-century emergence of aesthetics, I argue that the genre bears the imprint of what has been excised from the philosophical field, namely, the body. Sensation and issues of embodiment dominate these novels, often as obstructions to the free reign of a solipsistic consciousness and, finally, as the solution to the genre’s chief dilemma.²²

Another thread in this dissertation is the dueling aesthetics of materialism and idealism. These novels show that a simple allegiance to sensory experience fares no better in the drive to create than does a simple allegiance to solitary consciousness. Neither Edwin nor Stephen is able to bridge the gap between self and world through a creative act. Most critics that write about the body consider it along certain lines—as pure physiology, as an intersection of historical categories, as the bearer of archetypal patterns, as a discursive sign. Although all of these are valid ways of conceiving the

²¹ *The Voyage Out*, p. 298.

²² Although I have focused exclusively on Bennett, Joyce, and Woolf, my sense is that these issues extend to the genre as a whole. One way to augment the study would be to extend the range of novels that are considered. A broader sampling, in time and region, would likely reveal further and new patterns having to do with these issues of embodiment.
body, none of them allows a sense of creative agency. Woolf presents the possibility of an ethical aesthetics, one that considers embodiment a constitutional component of consciousness and, in doing so, resurrects the original sense of aisthesis as knowing through the senses. Gone is the Cartesian possibility of a disembodied consciousness reflecting on its own solitary existence or the existence of an outside world. By asserting the lived experience of the body as a fundamental characteristic of consciousness, Woolf gets beyond the dualism—of mind and body, of self and other, of subject and object—that plagues the genre and the field of aesthetics.

She does this not in abstract theory, but in the narrative practice of writing _The Voyage Out_. Rachel’s development from self-involved adolescent to engaged woman proceeds in fits and starts. This is the ethical mode—trial and error. Development is not the result of evolving, or struggling against fixed categories, or repeating established patterns, or endlessly deferring meaning, but the fruition of acting as a distinct self and interacting with distinct others. In the process of working this out, Woolf discovers what becomes the signature narrative style of her later fiction—a roving, shared consciousness that moves freely between characters, creating a sense of union that is not based on insensible merger and a sense of particularity that is not based on self-enclosed reflection.
I had originally intended this dissertation to span the 1910s artist novels, the 1920s marriage novels, and the 1930s death novels of all three writers. There is a natural development of embodiment that happens as we follow the issues that arise in these Künstlerromane into marriage and, eventually, death. Although it has not been possible to do that here, it seems to me productive to consider questions of embodiment, of love and death, and of an ethical aesthetics in the context of these authors' later works. These artist novels depict the beginnings of a sense of self in relation to the world and to others. The marriage novels test this sense of self in an actual relationship. And the late novels consider embodiment against the limit of physical death.

Also, as I’ve worked closely with The Voyage Out, my interest in the exact nature of consciousness in Woolf’s novels has been renewed. In this first novel, there is a particular relationship between self-consciousness and other-consciousness that comes to characterize all of Woolf’s fiction. In The Voyage Out, embodiment is the pivot or hinge or mediator between the two kinds of consciousness. This meeting of self and other in embodied consciousness seems to be at the heart of Woolf’s enduring sense of an aesthetics of everyday life. Which aesthetics is at the same time an ethics, not withdrawn from the world of action, interaction, and significance.

23 That is, Ulysses (1922), Riceyman Steps (1923), and To the Lighthouse (1927), as well as Finnegans Wake (1939) and Between the Acts (1941). Bennett, alas, does not have a 1930s death novel.
One of the chief characteristics of this embodied consciousness is the sense of creative agency. At the heart of this creative agency is consciousness that is shared without being collective and that is autonomous without being separate. Woolf not only undoes the idea of the isolated artist in the very genre created to convey that notion, but also she resurrects the original sense of aesthetics as an embodied relationship with the world and with others. In her literary practice, she gets beyond the isolated, centered, and reflexive Cartesian cogito without, in the process, having to sacrifice human agency.24

Against Descartes, Woolf suggests that we cannot proceed causally and directly from consciousness to things. Against Kant, Woolf insists that res cogitans and res extensa are not two separate realms, that human consciousness is not other than the thing itself. It is in this sense that, "Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and

24 The emerging field of post-human studies also poses a challenge to the idea of a centered, omniscient human consciousness ever reflecting on an outside world. These thinkers operate under the general term “speculative realism,” with Graham Harman and Levi Bryant more specifically espousing an “object-oriented ontology.” Objects (human, inanimate, animal, abstract, digital) are absolutely withdrawn from self- and other-knowledge, and collisions between them become various sorts of uncanny performance. What I have described as the ethical dimension of conscious experience in Woolf, where self and other are identical without being the same and different without being separate, gets beyond the Cartesian cogito without rendering all interaction therefore “speculative.” See Quentin Meillassoux, After Finitude; Graham Harman, The Quadruple Object; Levi Bryant, The Democracy of Objects. The journal New Literary History dedicated a recent issue to the implications of this thinking for literary studies. 43:2 (2012): pp. 183-308.
emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself."^{25}

^{25}“A Sketch of the Past,” in *Moments of Being*, p. 72.
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Appendix A: A Selected List of Künstlerromane

Schlegel, Lucinde (1799)
Novalis, Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1802)

Staël, Corrine, or Italy (1807)
Stendhal, Life of Henry Brulard (1835-36)
Balzac, Lost Illusions (1837-39)
Sand, Consuelo (1842)
Flaubert, L’Éducation Sentimentale (1869)

Chopin, The Awakening (1899)

Browning, Aurora Leigh (1856)
Pater, Marius the Epicurean (1885)

Mann, “Tonio Kröger” (1903)
Hesse, Peter Camezind (1904)

Rolland, Jean-Christophe (1904-12)
Proust, À la recherche du temp perdu (1913-27)

Richardson, Maurice Guest (1908)

London, Martin Eden (1909)

Bennett, Clayhanger (1910)
Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (1913)

Cather, The Song of the Lark (1915)
Dreiser, The Genius (1915)
Maugham, *Of Human Bondage* (1915)
Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)
Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (1915)
Lewis, *Tarr* (1918)

Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929)

Mann, *Doctor Faustus* (1947)
Appendix B: Narrative Modes of Describing the Body

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural</th>
<th>Historical</th>
<th>Archetypal</th>
<th>Semiotic</th>
<th>Philosophical</th>
<th>Ethical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>body</td>
<td>mind</td>
<td>neither body nor mind</td>
<td>both body and mind</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>sensation</td>
<td>categories</td>
<td>myth/pattern</td>
<td>signs</td>
<td>relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>evolves</td>
<td>struggles</td>
<td>repeats</td>
<td>withdraws</td>
<td>is absorbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>evolution</td>
<td>conflict</td>
<td>repetition</td>
<td>delay</td>
<td>cessation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>physiology</td>
<td>impersonal forces</td>
<td>cycles</td>
<td>language</td>
<td>being/nonbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>cause &amp; effect</td>
<td>historical progress</td>
<td>prescribed patterns</td>
<td>ceaseless reference</td>
<td>total awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>no beginning or end</td>
<td>static now</td>
<td>outside of time</td>
<td>endless deferral</td>
<td>no time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>infinite horizontal extension</td>
<td>separating boundaries</td>
<td>original</td>
<td>imaginal</td>
<td>absolute vertical depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>one process</td>
<td>one type</td>
<td>one source</td>
<td>one play</td>
<td>one instant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personal love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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