

The Modernist Playground:
Ludic Gestures, Literary Games

By

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I dedicate this work to all of those who—whether locked out,
shooed away, or never shown its whereabouts—have never known
the pleasures of the modernist playground.

May I always work to keep its gates open.

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Introduction

Ludic Modernism

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh [*sachaq*]:
the Lord shall have them in derision.

-Psalms 2:4

The Laughter of God

When David foretells God's contemptuous laughter at the "kings of the earth," he uses the word *sachaq*, the same that later describes the house of Israel singing, dancing, and playing music before God.¹ Zechariah uses *sachaq* for children playing in the streets of Jerusalem, while an older form, *tsachaq*, conveys the dancing around the Golden Calf, as well as Isaac's "sporting" with Rebekah (Zech. 8:5; Ex. 32:6; Gen. 26:8). More darkly, when the armies of David and Saul meet at Gibeon, each sends out twelve young men to "play" [*sachaq*] to their deaths (II Sa. 2:14). The same word encapsulates the derision of a vengeful deity, artistic performance, orgiastic frenzy, and both the prelude to procreation and its opposite: ritual murder.² *Sachaq* is most commonly rendered as "play," and with the capacious definition embraced by ancient Hebrew culture, Samson's story cuts even more starkly to its double-edged nature. Sold out to the Philistines by his lover Delilah, blinded, and shorn of his talismanic hair, Samson languished in prison while a feast to Dagon was prepared to celebrate his capture. "Call out for Samson, that he may make us sport," the Philistine leaders declare, "And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars" (Judg. 16:25). "Sport," here, is also *sachaq*, reducing the Nazarite hero to the plaything of his

¹ Psalms 2:2-4; II Sa. 6:5 and 6:2; I Ch. 13:8 and 15:29. All Biblical citations are to the KJV.

² The earlier form appears throughout Gen. 17 and 18, where Abraham and Sarah laugh at the idea of God granting them a son in their advanced age. Gen. 21:6 reveals the etymological link between *tsachaq* and their son's name, Isaac (Yitschaq): "And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:6). "*Tsechoq*" and "*sechoq*" offer other instances of "to laugh" in Job, Ecclesiastes, and elsewhere. See Brenner 39-52. I am grateful to Lewis Freedman for corroborating my usage of Hebrew.

enemies. The riddler Samson, however, turns their play to his advantage through language, asking his attendant to place his hands on “the pillars whereupon the house standeth.” Praying for strength, “that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes,” he destroys their house from its foundations, freeing Israel from their rule (Judg. 16:28).³

Samson emerges from the “prison house” with language, summoning the last of his “sweetness” to avenge the theft of light by pitting his own law against that of the Philistines (Judg. 16:25; 14:14). There is much in his example and in the fluid sense of play entertained in the Hebrew Bible that will bear upon my exploration of modernism: play as simultaneously serious and frivolous, productive and wasteful, rational and irrational, controlled and controlling, mediated by law and direct and visceral; and not least, the exercise of artfully linguistic play as a form of social agency. Discussions of play are particularly prone to such binary oppositions. This dissertation openly embraces that temptation, but only to argue against binary thinking, and without seeking to define “play” in itself or at large. Indeed, Robert Rawdon Wilson is hardly the only critic to observe that a history of the typologies of play “would prove to be virtually coextensive with Western thought” (8). Even a partial bibliography would reveal a ludic influence on psychology (Millar, Bateson, Winnicott), education (Piaget, Sutton-Smith), economics (von Neumann and Morgenstern), cultural theory (Huizinga, Caillois), and most Western philosophy after Heraclitus, to list a mere few marquee names.

In the face of such panoply, this dissertation describes how play functions in the works of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, taking, in each case, a ludic metaphor as a guide: Toys, Labyrinths, Masks, and Puppets, respectively. Play has not only

³ Judg. 16:26-31. For each use of *sachaq* that I have cited, Jerome’s Vulgate renders a form of *ludus*, except for the moments of laughter, which are forms of *rideo*, and the “sporting” between Isaac and Rebekah, which is a form of *jocus*. See my discussion of Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, below, for the historical shift from *ludus* to *jocus*.

preoccupied writers and critics across genres and historical periods, it can plausibly claim to be “cognate with aesthetic production,” in Isobel Armstrong’s recent formulation of an old theme.⁴ Armstrong defines play “not as a simple binary set against work, not as a hierarchy of activity (as in Schiller) subordinating work, not as an epistemological hierarchy subordinated to knowledge (as often in Kant), but as a form of knowledge itself. Interactive, sensuous, epistemologically charged, play has to do with both the cognitive and the cultural” (37). But for one caveat—writing about play encourages caveats as much as binaries—Armstrong’s definition could stand for my own (actually, the first caveat for anyone browsing theories of play ought to be *caveat emptor*). In order to delineate what I call “ludic modernism,” I turn to the work of the intellectual historian Mihai Spărosu, who describes play as inherently bifurcated between two “mentalities.” Called “prerational” and “rational,” these mentalities, and the forms of play that they produce, have been locked in a centuries-long struggle for cultural primacy, shifting and hiding, colliding and overlapping. They are not strict binaries, nor dialectical syntheses, and despite the prefix “pre-,” they are not a teleological sequence. A rough analogy would be that the prerational and rational are two sides of one coin, but even here one must understand their interplay not as either/or—as if seeing one negated the existence of the other—but as a holistic both/and combination, in which the prominence of one is simply a different aspect the other. The defining feature of ludic modernism is that it deploys, in both form and in content, this bifurcated definition of play. I devote the latter half of this Introduction to outlining Spărosu’s theories. In short, this project is less concerned with defining the essence of play than with the ludic practices and implications of modernism. Put baldly, it seeks to be more playful than pedantic—wistfully acknowledging that a playful dissertation is an unfulfilled ideal, and hardly an achieved reality.

⁴ Huizinga’s “All poetry is born of play” is the classic phrasing within twentieth-century “play theory” (129).

Before summarizing the applicable aspects of play theory up to and including Spariosu, I briefly frame the project within a relevant strain of contemporary criticism. Since the dissertation is concerned with *how* modernists played as much as *why* they played, each chapter focuses on issues of form as much as issues of history and context. The project is “formalist” insofar as it approaches particular works as sites and instances of play rather than as naïve products of their historical moment or passive vehicles of ideology. For example, I argue that Joyce modeled part of the formal structure of *Ulysses* on a board game called *Labyrinth*. And yet I hope to show that it is precisely in and through the ludic that these authors not only demonstrate their awareness of contextual discursivity—Joyce played that board game with his daughter Lucia while trapped in Switzerland during a trench war that raged as a consequence of the great games of politics—but that the play of their artworks is the ground of their engagement with history, context, politics, and ideology. By attending to aesthetic particularity, the project broadly accords with the “new formalism” and “new aestheticism” of recent literary studies, to which I now turn.

The New Formalism, The New Aestheticism

From a commonsensical—and often a philosophical—vantage, play is freedom and fun; hence the critical tendency to look past the play of modernism while glancing from Victorian leisure to postmodern *joi de vivre*. Despite the modernist injunction to “make it new,” and the critical truism of modernism as a radical break, the preponderance of work on the ludic in the nineteenth and later twentieth centuries reflects a larger continuity of culture through play. At least since the rise of the new modernist studies in the late 1990s, it is no longer tenable to set a dour and reactionary modernist seriousness against a correlatively critical and oppositional play

present only in postmodernism or in its avant-garde antecedents.⁵ Postmodernism's height coincided with a period in which criticism came to see aesthetics, broadly understood, as tantamount to ideology. Such a view arose in Marxist-inflected poststructuralism as much as in what Marjorie Levinson describes as "new historicism's denunciation of form as an ideological mystification" (559). As Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz put it in their oft-cited review, the new modernist studies arose as a corrective to so-called "ideology critique" at its most reductive, seeking to sharpen modernism's cutting edge and restore its "virtuous badness" (8). Concurrent with the new modernist studies have been turns to both aesthetic autonomy and to aesthetic form, identified as the "new aestheticism" in the United Kingdom, and more recently, the "new formalism" in North America. Although it is a rather niggling distinction, this dissertation's vocabulary and philosophical archive align more closely with the former. In both camps, the claim of novelty intimates nuance. Whether under the guise of aesthetics or of form, critics are paying "new" attention to artworks themselves (or claiming to), while retaining the increased self-awareness, historical perspective, and expanded canon earned throughout the 1970s and 80s. My summary here is swift and schematic, intended to establish certain points of connection with, and a frame for, the vocabulary of ludic modernism.

⁵ By defining the modern as "disenchantment of our culture with culture itself," Lionel Trilling presaged the quarrel between modernism and postmodernism, noting the irony of teaching such disenchantment (3). Raymond Williams later diagnosed its mid-century co-option: "modernism quickly lost its anti-bourgeois stance, and achieved comfortable integration into the new international capitalism" (35). Postmodernism became counterculture, raising the "pop" instead of democratizing access to "high" art, while, to Matei Calinescu, "the internationalization of the concept" of postmodernism opened avenues for postcolonial writers (301). Many hallmarks that Ihab Hassan ascribes to postmodernist practice will be reclaimed for ludic modernism: play, chance, participation, irony, and indeterminacy (91-92). So thorough is the identification of play with the postmodern that much of the work applying theories of play to literature at all endorses Hassan's definitions, if only tacitly (Bohman-Kalaja, Bruss, Burke, Edwards, Gascogne, Mesch, Miller, Motte, Tiffany, Wilson, et al). Or, as J. Jeffrey Franklin has it in his book on Kantian play in Victorian literature, "*postmodern theories are about play*" (10, emphasis in original). Matthew Kaiser lauds the Victorian construction of "leisure" for granting access to "a parallel universe, a ludic microcosm . . . which eventually displaces [the] world" (2). The "unsettling ludic potentiality" Kaiser identifies in the Victorian period is largely a rational one, which will be surpassed by ludic modernism's prerational aspects (9). The "avant-garde" has long been a critical term of opposition against "modernism." Poggioli, Bürger, Perloff, and Eysteinsson are representative, and I return to theories of the avant-garde throughout the dissertation.

“The Left takes up Kant” is a blithe but broadly accurate slogan for the new aestheticism. Introducing the first volume to survey the field, Stewart Martin writes that it is “characterized by the increasing recourse to a philosophical tradition of Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetics by influential critics and theorists on the Left; a recourse that revises the Marxist tendency to identify aesthetics and its characteristic concerns of autonomy and value with ideology” (3). Conveniently enough for my own framing, that volume carries the title *The Philistine Controversy*, after a 1996 *New Left Review* article by Dave Beech and John Roberts, arguing that an adequate understanding of the “philistine” must accompany any redefinition of the aesthetic. They mark Christian Lenhardt’s translation of Theodor Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1984) as the causal factor in the revival of aesthetics, calling Adorno “the conscience of our political and aesthetic crisis (17).⁶ Beech and Roberts’ central stance, which pits them “against the conventional idea that the autonomy of art means its isolation from everything else,” is no longer controversial, but their desire to reclaim the “voluptuous” pleasures of the body from a purely cognitive and ascetic aesthetics will inflect my understanding of prerational play (15).⁷

A more representative sampling appeared in 2003, codifying by its title *The New Aestheticism*. John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas argue that aesthetics provides the vocabularies and categories most proper to studying art, claiming that recent “theoretical analysis has tended always to posit a prior order that grounds or determines a work’s aesthetic impact, whether this is

⁶ My own citations to *Aesthetic Theory* are to the Hullot-Kentor translation (1997). Beech and Roberts’ chief interlocutors are Fredric Jameson (*Late Marxism*), Terry Eagleton (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic*), and Andrew Bowie (*Aesthetics and Subjectivity*), but they note a burgeoning roster across disciplines, including J. M. Bernstein, Peter Osborne, Mike Sprinker, T. J. Clark, Charles Harrison, and Paul Wood. Since they wrote, Andrew Goldstone’s *Fictions of Autonomy* (2013) and Hugh Grady’s *Impure Aesthetics* (2009) have been exemplary in modernist and Shakespeare studies, respectively. See Grady’s introduction for an excellent survey.

⁷ They contend that “the body in the philosophy of aesthetics is emptied of the contingencies and conflicts of the everyday: those quotidian pleasures and brutalities produced by the functions, experiences and encounters of the commodified body” (14). Responding to Jacques Derrida’s similar rejoinder to Kant, Isobel Armstrong remarks, “it is actually a fairly common twentieth-century move to find Kant wanting in a response to the sensuous life of the body, a taboo on the animalistic at the core of his work,” citing Dewey, Adorno, Lefebvre, and Bordieu (50).

history, ideology or theories of subjectivity. The aesthetic is thus explicated in other terms, with other criteria, and its singularity is effaced” (Joughin and Malpas 1). This is a necessary recognition in light of what will be my overarching claims about play, the superficial nonseriousness of which can be (and has been) mistaken for ideological quietism.⁸ When they defend aesthetic autonomy, writing, “it is art’s very ‘alienation’ and ‘isolation’ that provides the grounds for its political and philosophical potential in modernity” (11), they are channeling Adorno, who writes: “art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful,’ it criticizes society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it” (*AT* 226). Although Adorno’s aphoristic concision leaves quibble room—If a masterpiece exists in a forest and no one is around to read it, does it still criticize society?—ludic modernism will extend his insight, showing that art’s anti-instrumentalism can also question and redefine what is “useful.”⁹

Joughin and Malpas link art’s anti-instrumental protest to Jürgen Habermas’ progressive understanding of Enlightenment ideals, in which “reason becomes self-legislating and future-oriented: giving itself the rules for its own development and systematically discarding the beliefs and mystifications that held it in check in the past” (9). They call for a recognizably post-foundational understanding of aesthetics that continues the “unraveling of metaphysical ‘givens’ undertaken by contemporary theory” (2). In what I will discuss as playing prerational games on

⁸ Caroline Levine expresses the equivalent “new formalist” claim: “The Marxist emphasis on aesthetic form as epiphenomenal—as secondary—has some distorting effects. First, it prevents us from understanding politics as a matter of form, and second, it assumes that one kind of form—the political—is always the ground or root of the other—the aesthetic” (26).

⁹ Adorno elsewhere alludes to the ludic, calling autonomous opposition the “lightheartedness” of art: “A priori, prior to its works, art is a critique of the brute seriousness that reality imposes upon human beings. Art imagines that by naming this fateful state of affairs it is loosening its hold. That is what is lighthearted in it; as a change in the existing mode of consciousness, that is also, to be sure, its seriousness” (“Is Art Lighthearted?” 248).

reason's playground, ludic modernism will give a fuller account of the mechanism by which self-legislating and future-oriented reason can shake its own metaphysical foundations, thereby carrying through on the best aspects of ideology critique. Joughin and Malpas find it "no coincidence that the aesthetic has remained irreducible within modernity, and thus has appeared in a range of different guises always as a 'surplus' to the organising drive of instrumental reason"

(8). Andrew Bowie reads art's surplus as something that can transcend even the subject of aesthetic experience, potentially remaining outside of language altogether:

all art is situated in social contexts that involve links between cultural production and mechanisms of power. What matters, though, is the realisation that there are dimensions of cultural articulation which transcend what we can say about them, which are not necessarily usable for ideological purposes, and which are crucially connected to the ways we try to understand ourselves as subjects. ("What comes after art?" 78)

Bowie's insistence that aesthetics can help to define the self are all the more urgent given the dearth of other options for resisting, revising, and even transcending, ideology. Aesthetic surplus is also implicit in Beech and Roberts' paean to voluptuous pleasure (which, to be sure, is contra Adorno: "The bourgeois want art voluptuous and life ascetic; the reverse would be better" [AT 13]), but it is also play. To shift the metaphor, where the most reductive ideology critique slams the door shut on aesthetics, the irreducible pleasures of art seep back in through the play of loose hinges. Even so, not all play resists instrumental rationality—the stock market is a game—and my account will focus these authors' optimism for the surplus value of art.¹⁰

The surplus or excess that these writers invoke is linked to the fundamentally egalitarian nature of aesthetic autonomy, which has yet been historically fluid—buried, ignored, misread, and strategically refashioned across the ideological spectrum. Beech and Roberts find a public-

¹⁰ Victor Turner follows Brian Sutton-Smith (and implicitly qualifies Mikhail Bakhtin) to find a ludic element in the surplus arising from "liminal" situations, from rituals to games to art. Out of such "seedbeds of cultural creativity," new "symbols and constructions then feed back into the 'central' economic and politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raisons d'être*" (28).

spirited and eminently accessible interpretation in early Romanticism, when “the achievement of artistic autonomy was to be found in aesthetic immediacy, ‘forms of expression directly understandable without convention and without previous knowledge of tradition’” (39; quoting Rosen and Zerner 18). Freed from the aesthetic prescriptions of Church and State, artworks could be autotelic, relying on their own internal logics. In Beech and Roberts’ account, that freedom was quickly co-opted—not unlike, a century later, midcentury modernism—by “official institutions,” betraying the early ideal and engendering a narrow conception of autonomy as “isolation.” This would become synonymous with strong reading of *l’art pour l’art* and “high” modernism itself. Their argument recalls Peter Bürger’s contention that “The category ‘autonomy’ does not permit the understanding of its referent as one that developed historically”; itself an insight of Adorno’s (whom Bürger misreads on this point): “Autonomous art was not completely free of the culture industry’s authoritarian ignominy. The artwork’s autonomy is, indeed, not a priori but the sedimentation of a historical process that constitutes its concept” (Bürger 46; Adorno, *AT* 17). Ludic modernism will reframe this discussion by emphasizing the propositional nature of autonomy as a form of *as-if* play—that is, the aesthetic correlative of a scientific hypothesis. Without getting ahead of myself, it is worth noting here that Spariosu calls autonomy a playground upon which “alternatives to reality can be proposed, tested, adopted, and rejected at will.” Aestheticism, he writes, might itself be “only a strategy in the ceaseless agon that literature carries on with other stretches of discourse” (*Dionysus Reborn* 27; hereafter *DR*).¹¹

¹¹ Isobel Armstrong similarly rebukes Eagleton for misreading Kant: “he does not pause to consider that the Enlightenment move towards parity and exchangeability also instigates the idea of the vote, democracy, and representation, but hurries on to the marriage of ideology and the aesthetic,” ignoring “the *propositionality* of reason, raising the individual to the universal, generalizing concrete particulars and short-circuiting the conceptual” (33; emphasis in original). Except for a few passages in the Woolf chapter, my invocations of Kantian autonomy are to his aesthetics, not to his pointedly political work. Beech and Roberts rightly warn that reading aesthetic autonomy as “isolation” can lead to equally reductive notions of individual freedom: “the Romantic conception of autonomy

The insistence on autonomy as historically contingent shows a shared aversion to reinscribing as “universal” the idiosyncratic values and conditions of Kant’s initial exposition. Joughin and Malpas credit ideology critique for showing the false equation of the “disinterestedness” of personal and aesthetic autonomy and purportedly “universal” values. They write, “Theories of textuality, subjectivity, ideology, class, race and gender” have shown traditional “notions of universal human value to be without foundation, and even to act as repressive means of safeguarding the beliefs and values of an elitist culture from challenge or transformation” (1).¹² Understood strictly as isolation, aesthetic autonomy can quickly become a form of gatekeeping, guarding the status quo with the watchful eye of the universal. Joughin and Malpas call for “a dialectical conception of aesthetic autonomy” that could avoid an “inadvertent convergence between the anti-aestheticism of recent cultural theory and the complacency of the old-style aestheticism it would ostensibly seek to displace” (7). “The survival of literary texts over a period time,” they continue, “is less a product of their ‘timeless’ significance and more directly related to their ability to sustain interpretations which are often either contestable or politically opposed” (8).¹³ It is this enduring quality that exceeds ideological encapsulation, even as it allows for potentially progressive revisions to aesthetic categories.

Bowie makes two further distinctions that clarify this dialectical conception of egalitarian autonomy. The later nineteenth-century notions of autonomy that held up the self-understanding of the bourgeoisie as “universal” also enforced an ensuing “elitism” by blunting the aesthetic

emerged as a specific critique of art’s cultural domination through tradition, and therefore its libertarian impulses become deeply ambivalent outside that context” (40).

¹² They implicitly follow Bürger’s contention that what Kant calls “universal” is merely a reflection of a narrow bourgeoisie that found itself “universal” against the aristocracy (43).

¹³ Less diplomatically, Adorno calls invocations of “timeless” art “drivel” (*AT* 254). With Beethoven in mind, Bowie writes of the “enduring” power of art: “not the ‘eternal’ or ‘timeless’ power, as though (yet another reduction) the choice in art were between mere transience and absolute eternity” (“Confessions” 84).

with “official culture” and institutions. If in Kant, autonomy is theoretically available to all, in the world it is anything but. To borrow a phrase from Virginia Woolf, access to art is—even today—largely limited to the sons of educated men and a few of their sisters. In consequence, Bowie warns against complacently accepting propositional logic when it is unsupported by social realities, concurrently emphasizing the need to ensure that social realities fulfill the promises of logical propositions. With our historical and material moment so radically different from Kant’s, we must recognize new forms of “elitism.” In “a Western world where the best cultural products are widely available in affordable form via mass reproduction,” Bowie writes, “The way in which such elitism continues is now more likely to be through the failure to provide the right kind of access to great culture in education” (“What comes after art?” 76). Or, as Adorno puts it, “The elitist isolation of advanced art is less its doing than society’s” (*AT* 254).

The second point that Bowie makes follows from this defense of full and open education. If we should be careful to conceive of autonomy in contextually aware ways, we should also accept that what constitutes art will not remain static. Bowie reads the history of modernity as a process of increasing inclusion that readily accords with my own emphasis on the ludic—and commonsensically frivolous—aspects of modernism:

Far from the domain of modern art being . . . an exclusion zone, its history—from, for instance, Beethoven’s ironic inclusion in the late works of compositional elements which effectively destroy much of the previous point of the forms in which he is composing, to Kurt Schwitters’s use of bus tickets, and beyond—has been a history of *inclusion*, of involving more and more intractable material from modern society in the name of the refusal to let art become mere culinary pleasure. If anything gets excluded, it is actually the no longer valid aspects of the art of the past. (“Confessions” 93; emphasis in original)

The modernist injunction to “make it new” is a process of sifting and incorporation, a burden it transforms into a legacy of largesse.¹⁴ Bowie, however, sidesteps canon formation and attendant issues of definition in his appeal ensuring that everyone can access “great” culture, so there remains a danger of admitting bourgeois universalism through the back door (“What comes after art?” 76). I will only be able to account for my own view of ludic modernist inclusivity by way of conclusion to this dissertation, but here I will conjecture a broad and slightly colloquial proposition: so long as a work of art is fun to play with, it will have enduring value. The question of educational opportunity is, of course, beyond the scope of this project, but each chapter that follows will betray a double movement, wherein even as ludic modernists makes old forms new, they invite and encourage ever-more players into their games.

Within the new aestheticism, Isobel Armstrong has also examined play, under the definition with which I opened. Her project is to map out a “radical aesthetic” based in “the components of aesthetic life . . . that are already embedded in the processes and practices of consciousness—playing and dreaming, thinking and feeling.” While I focus on specifically modernist play, subsuming thought and feeling under its respective rational and prerational manifestations, my account accords with her claim that “these processes—experiences that keep us alive—are common to everyone, common to what the early Marx called species being. That is why they can become the basis from which to develop a democratic aesthetic” (2-3).¹⁵ In short: “Everybody plays,” and while she relies on Kant, she insists that “Unless both thought and the

¹⁴ Adorno addresses this as “conservatism” that yet “does not simply deserve oblivion”: “Every artwork today, the radical ones included, has its conservative aspect; its existence helps to secure the spheres of spirit and culture, whose real powerlessness and complicity with the principle of disaster becomes plainly evident” (*AT* 234).

¹⁵ As will become clear, the “prerational” as I adapt it from Spariosu is distinct from psychoanalytic accounts of “dreaming” and the “irrational.”

passions are fully engaged the energies of play recede” (59).¹⁶ She quotes the psychologist D. W. Winnicott to align play with aesthetics: “The place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing.”¹⁷ For Armstrong, then, “our play is play, not simply subversive linguistic play, but the transformation of categories, which constitutes a change in the structure of the thought itself: it is not only an aspect of knowledge but the prerequisite of political change” (41).¹⁸ Ludic modernism likewise wields a productive power to reshape categories of knowledge.

The confident assertion that “everybody plays” rings of the universalism from which I just recoiled. Although I will note moments where my reading of ludic modernism can be responsibly translated (even in spite of Spariosu), it is beyond scope of this dissertation to carry notions of play beyond its immediate archive. My primary goal is to reclaim play for the core of modernism, where it has been only intermittently addressed, accepting that I might be charged with trafficking in relics of the “old” aestheticism. In light of Susan Stanford Friedman’s call to recognize plural modernities, I am consciously approaching “*one* articulation of a particularly situated modernism,” which I openly acknowledge to be “an important modernism but not the measure by which all others are judged and to which all others must be compared” (*Planetary*

¹⁶ Armstrong is moving toward “Affect Theory” when she wants to “dissolve” the “traditional distinction between affect, or the emotions, and knowledge” (59). Although I do not employ its vocabulary or archive, my own emphasis on the prerational immediacy of experience is broadly sympathetic to and relevant for Affect Theory, as well as related critical lenses, like Richard Shusterman’s “somaesthetics,” Hugh Grady’s “impure aesthetics,” Sianne Ngai’s aesthetic categories—particularly the “zany,” which parallels prerational play—and feminist ethics of care and virtue ethics, all of which seek to validate epistemologies beyond the purely cognitive.

¹⁷ I. Armstrong 40; Winnicott 118. For the rhetoric of the aesthetic as a “space” of opportunity, see also Turner’s notions of the liminal and liminoid, as noted above, 28; 52.

¹⁸ In one of the few book-length works to engage the ludic within modernism, Paul B. Armstrong similarly argues for the power of modernist play to challenge and sharpen processes of thought. He follows Hans-Georg Gadamer and Wolfgang Iser to see the act of reading as “a potentially open-ended and to-and-fro activity” (xi). Situating these poststructural-hermeneutical accounts of play against modernism’s reaction to the “crisis of liberalism,” Armstrong argues that the free play between readers and writers can become training for democratic engagement. He is similarly concerned with the effects of instrumentalized education.

70; emphasis in original). Given the historical elision of modernist play, I see all the more reason to reclaim this archive for egalitarian ends.¹⁹ Theories of play, moreover, are overwhelmingly derived from Western intellectual traditions. The late Brian Sutton-Smith (across disciplines, the most influential recent play theorist) cites Clifford Geertz to argue that many play concepts are limited to Western notions of a “bounded self” that is, itself, by no means universal: “In much of the world, the self is defined primarily not in terms of its own experience but as an aspect of collective or tribal life” (Sutton-Smith 192). While I argue in my Eliot chapter that *The Waste Land* explores a collective and un-bounded conception of self, the dissertation accedes to Spariosu’s own acknowledgment of the boundaries of the philosophical canon upon which its ideas of play rest (*DR* 27-28). Stein, Joyce, Eliot, and Woolf are clearly in dialogue with that canon. Perhaps it is a nearly universal truth that “everybody plays,” but this project only validates such a claim within the historical and discursive limits of its particular modernism.

Armstrong’s desire to move beyond the “simply subversive linguistic play” of Derridean and de Manian deconstruction is another reminder that I impute to modernism many aesthetic traits that a previous generation of critics might have found in postmodernism (41). The postmodern reaction to (misconstrued) modernist elitism was to elevate the pop, which must now be balanced by democratizing access to the sort of aesthetically enriching and non-instrumental education that has historically been reserved for a narrow elite. This is to reap the inclusive gains of ideology critique and yet attempt to bridge the chasm that opened during the now-lost culture war, in which neoliberal dogmas of deregulation ever-more efficiently articulated education and

¹⁹ And thus, to emphasize its “virtuous badness” (Mao and Walkowitz 8). Deepika Bhari finds the new aestheticism valuable for postcolonial studies, albeit with due irony at the institutional demand for novelty: “Old wine in an old bottle to be sure, but with a new label, since novelty or its semblance is the supreme mark of value in a capitalist marketplace and critical shifts rarely occur without an appeal to the charms of novelty. What may *be* new here is a will to escape the paralyzing polarization between aesthetics and politics, which can be effected in part by the willingness to consider a scrupulous redefinition of both terms” (65).

cultural production as appendages of the market. In my view, the propositional ideal of aesthetic autonomy means little when it is undermined, empirically, by the closing of those avenues that lead toward aesthetic experience.²⁰ The authors under discussion presage many of those aspects of ideology critique that the new aestheticism retains: Stein challenges the hierarchies inherent to patriarchal rationality and uncovers the contingency of its definitions of utility; Joyce's embrace of prerational chance undermines the authority of dogmatic rational play, even as he subtly explores the consequences of doing so; Eliot laments the isolation and atomization of the modern individual, exploring alternatives that look to the past to enliven the future; Woolf turns reductive ideas of autonomy on their head, showing how rationality can become a prison. Yet however differently, for each of them the subversions of play are neither simple, nor wholly negative. With the new aestheticism, ludic modernism embraces the progressive and self-correcting promise of the Enlightenment, unraveling metaphysical givens on an aesthetic playground. Ludic modernism can help us begin to imagine freedom from instrumental utility; freedom from the rhetoric—and, dimly, the reality—of winners and losers; freedom from games like the stock market, and thus freedom from the need to distinguish fair play from foul; freedom to roam, finally, in the open air of free play.

My sketch of the new aestheticism has highlighted its emphasis on the body and the non-cognitive or a-rational; how the autonomous singularity of particular artworks can create a surplus to instrumental reason; and the egalitarian potential of play, which remains blocked by a social order organized by private profit. The common factor in all of these accounts is a return to

²⁰ In a forthright footnote, Joughin and Malpas write, “during the moment of ‘high’ theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the rising stock of non-traditional cultural critique in the academy effectively expanded at an inversely proportional rate to its ability to intervene in, let alone stem or prevent, the ravages of capital’s advance on the public sphere” (17). In other words, the philistine controversy and the internecine debates over aesthetics and ideology were insufficiently attuned to the dangers of Reagan, Thatcher, and their philistine followers.

Kant's notion of aesthetic autonomy (indeed, there is a sort of competitive Kantianism at work in the new aestheticism), here in its most compact formulation:

In a product of art one must be aware that it is art, and not nature; yet the purposiveness in its form must still *seem to be* as free from all constraint by arbitrary rules *as if* it were a mere product of nature. On this feeling of freedom in the play of our cognitive powers, which must yet at the same time be purposive, rests that pleasure which alone is universally communicable though without being grounded on concepts. (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 185; my emphases)

"Play" suffuses Kant, not only in the pleasurable dance that the artwork engages with the intellect, but in the propositional and provisional basis of aesthetic freedom. Art plays at being disinterested, plays at freedom from arbitrary constraints, plays as nature does naturally. Although Adorno, for his part, occasionally recognizes this "*as-if*" character of aesthetic play, it remains consistently under-theorized, and remains, moreover, only half of Spurius's more nuanced conception of play.²¹ The new aestheticism broadly frames this project within contemporary literary criticism, within which I show the congruence of modernism and the ludic.

From Play Theory to Ludic Modernism

Setting aside its oxymoronic moniker, the corpus of contemporary "play theory" begins with Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture* (1938). For all intents and purposes, however, it all too often ends there as well. Huizinga's central claim is that human societies develop from playfully agonistic roots, becoming more complex until "the old cultural soil is gradually smothered under a rank layer of ideas, systems of thought and knowledge,

²¹ In a characteristic series of pseudo-paradoxes on the relationship between aesthetic form and social content, Adorno writes, "Whenever art seems to copy society, it becomes all the more an 'as-if.' . . . Form works like a magnet that orders elements of the empirical world in such a fashion that they are estranged from their extra-aesthetic existence, and it is only as a result of this estrangement that they master the extra-aesthetic essence" (*AT* 226). The culture industry, in turn, exploits the power of form, combining "slavish respect for empirical detail, the gapless semblance of photographic fidelity, with ideological manipulation" (*AT* 226-27).

doctrines, rules and regulations, moralities and conventions which have all lost touch with play. Civilization, we then say, has grown more serious” (75). The metaphor suggests that the hidden ludic roots of “civilization” hold fast beneath so many discursive language games and self-perpetuating logics. Despite a regressive view of cultural development, Huizinga suggests that as ritual, science, and law become more “serious,” “only poetry remains as the stronghold of living and noble play” (134).²² Separateness from life becomes a hallmark of play generally: “play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding . . . it is different from ‘ordinary life’” (28). By walling play and poetry off from daily life, he reinforces a reductive understanding of Kantian autonomy and disinterestedness as isolation.²³

Huizinga’s work is most valuable for cutting through commonsensical notions of the ludic to highlight its historical and etymological capaciousness. He refers in passing to the passage I cited from II Sam. 2:14, in which two factions of men representing David and Saul’s armies are sent to “play” [*sachaq*] before their generals. Twelve men from each camp “caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow’s side; so they fell down together” (II Sam. 2:16). Ancient Hebrew culture was not alone in sanctioning ritualized killing as play. To take just one example, the Latin *ludus* encapsulated both gladiatorial contests inside the Coliseum and impromptu games of dice on the streets in its shadow. *Ludus* and *ludere*, however, were supplanted in the Romance languages by derivatives of *jocus*, with its limited sense of “joking and jesting” (*jeu/jouer, gioco/giocare, juego/jugar*, etc.) (Huizinga 35-36).

²² This has prompted as assiduous a critic as George Steiner to proclaim “all literature is play”—indicating the widespread abstraction inherent to dealing with the concept (“Introduction” 12).

²³ As recently as the Winter 2009 issue of *New Literary History* dedicated to play, Herbert F. Tucker repeats these reductions: “Play is what isn’t serious and doesn’t count; and it is also what makes life worth living, precisely insofar as it dodges the calculus of utility” (v). Despite the hint of Adorno in that last clause, Tucker is seemingly unaware of play’s prerational manifestations.

Although Huizinga's analysis ends there, Samson's story in Judges suggests that *ludus* carried the sense of "mockery" at least as late as the fourth century: Jerome's Vulgate uses *illudo*, instead of *rideo*, to translate "*hatal*" (mockery) in Judg. 16:10. Etymologically, at least, play became the frivolity we most readily acknowledge it to be only by losing its central inflections of ritual, danger, and consequence. Huizinga never acknowledges that play's semantic dissociation from danger and mortal consequence might contradict his claim that civilization grows more "serious" by the same process. Ancient cultures accepted deadly activities as playful: "the plain fact is that play may be deadly yet still remain play—which is all the more reason for not separating play and contest as concepts" (41). The reconciliation of apparent contradictions and this inclusive baseline understanding of play are central to ludic modernism.²⁴

As I have intimated, a great deal of the play theory that follows on Huizinga's heels treads a similarly Kantian line—across disciplines. As I have also intimated, I cannot trace each furrow in the field here, although I will consistently cite and note relevant connections to other writers. Two central concepts link Huizinga to Spariosu. First, although he does not put it in these terms, Spariosu proceeds from the contention that civilization begins in play to craft a genealogy of play within Western culture. But rather than accept that systems of thought, moralities, social conventions, and the like have "lost touch with play," he codifies these categories as so much contingent "rational" play (Huizinga 75). This is essentially a poststructuralist move. Second, he does not separate play and contest, but in fact argues that prerational and rational play mentalities are locked in a contest or *agon* with each other.

²⁴ Roger Caillois schematized the various types of play that Huizinga identifies, using four categories: *agôn* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry*, and *ilinx* (vertigo or movement). In each category, a specific game or type of play might run between the poles of *ludus* (controlled by rules) or *paidia* (free and childlike). Thus chess would fall under the realm of *agôn*, tempered by *ludus*, while children frolicking with abandon would be *ilinx*, tending toward the pole of *paidia*. Like Huizinga, Caillois subtly separates the abstract concept of play—which in whatever guise would be pure *paidia*—from games, which are circumscribed, restricted, and set apart. Despite the clarity of his categories, Caillois rests on similarly shaky ground to Huizinga in the sociological application of his schema.

Crucially, however, the marriage of play and contest in Spariosu's work is diagnostic and descriptive, not a polemical endorsement.²⁵ In *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse* (1989), he views play not as the "sum total of its interpretations," nor as a "dialectic of temporality and permanence," but as

an incommensurable, discontinuous series of interpretations engaged in a supremacy contest. The history of what we call "play" in the Western world is, then, a history of conflict, of competing play concepts that become dominant, lose ground, and then reemerge, according to the needs of various groups or individuals contending for cultural authority in a given historical period. (*DR xi*)

After openly acknowledging the (ludic) contingency of play, Spariosu presages the new aestheticism when he adds, "Therefore, my intention here is not to offer yet another definition of play as 'universal' phenomenon, but to show how any definition of play functions in the concrete, historical context of our culture" (*DR xi*).²⁶ My own intention is to adapt his philosophical and intellectual history to the concrete function of play in modernism. Spariosu concentrates on six categories in which the *agon* between mentalities plays out: power, Being, chance, mimesis, *as-if*, and freedom (*DR 12*). Because each of my ludic touchstones (Toys, Labyrinths, Masks, and Puppets) takes up different manifestations of play, I include detailed discussions of the appropriate categories in the individual chapters. In order to minimize unnecessary repetition, the following summary of Spariosu's schema focuses on the historical developments of "power" and "mimesis" across the prerational and rational mentalities.

²⁵ In criticizing Huizinga, Sutton-Smith (who elsewhere writes admiringly of Spariosu) clarifies: "Huizinga's thesis is also a particularly agonistic and machismo view of play history. His definition of play primarily as contest reflects the widespread male rhetoric that favors the exaltation of combative power instead of speaking comprehensively about play itself" (79-80).

²⁶ Spariosu's later works, *God of Many Names: Play, Poetry, and Power in Hellenic Thought from Homer to Aristotle* (1991) and *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality, and the Study of Literature* (1997) (hereafter *GMN* and *WWO*, respectively) replace the terms "prerational" and "rational" with "archaic" and "median." In the latter, he speculates beyond the power-oriented mentality coextensive with Western thought, proposing an alternative "irenec" or peaceful mentality. Although I do not pursue the connection in much detail, this irenic view accords with egalitarian potential of play referenced earlier. While I will refer to Spariosu's entire oeuvre, I retain the early terms of prerational and rational play.

Practically speaking, some repetition is unavoidable, but my impulse is to outline the holistic system here, while keeping the more detailed theoretical components of individual chapters discreet and self-contained enough that continual reference back to this Introduction will not be necessary.

Spairosu begins with Greeks, where the milieux of Homer, Hesiod, and Heraclitus share a prerational play mentality. Broadly speaking, in a prerational society, power is immediate and physical; law is customary and justified by might; religion is hierarchical, centralized, and violent—an extension of human society; language (like being) is concrete, practical, and performative. With the advent of a rational mentality, such as that which developed in fifth-century Athens, power becomes mediated and shared; written law co-exists with and supersedes customary law, while morality tempers might; gods become abstract, removed, impersonal, impenetrable, and religion increasingly monotheistic; language becomes abstract and logical, writing takes precedence over speech (*DR* 7-8). In each case, the difference between mentalities turns on the mediation of the prerational by the dictates of what is called “reason.” Put another way, whether in terms of epistemology, ontology, or aesthetics, the prerational mentality admits immediate experience with less interference from abstract thought and social discourses—Huizinga’s hallmarks of “civilization”—whether philosophical or literary, legal or ideological.

Huizinga glimpses the separation between the physical immediacy of prerational power and the mediation of rational laws when he reminds us that even a death sentence handed down by a judge rests upon the contest of two parties before an arbiter (76). In recognizing the mediation of rational justice over archaic might, Huizinga intimates a bifurcated conception of play without identifying it as such: “We moderns cannot conceive justice apart from abstract righteousness, however feeble our conception of it may be. For us, the lawsuit is primarily a

dispute about right and wrong; winning and losing take only a second place. Now it is precisely this preoccupation with ethical values that we must abandon if we are to understand archaic justice” (78). For Spariosu, it is less a matter of “abandoning” ethical values than of recognizing that representational laws are entwined with what had once been prerational and performative. Certainly, there are social benefits when laws mediate physical power, but in a point that I will expand further, such justice transforms physical coercion into rational ideology—which can be no less coercive in practice.

Spariosu illustrates the Greek shift from a prerational to a rational mentality with a series of etymological distinctions, beginning with “play” itself:

the Hellenic notion of play—which originally (for instance in the Homeric epic and in Hesiod) is inextricably linked to the notion of immediate physical force, as in such words as *agon* and *athlon* (competition, contest)—gradually loses this link until it becomes *paidia*, a word that initially denotes only the harmless play of children and then becomes, in Plato, a philosophical term for nonviolent cultural play in general. (*DR* 6)

The prerational immediacy that is muted in the shift to purportedly benign *paidia* appears in starker terms with the correlative change in notions of power. Spariosu writes, “Whereas in such Presocratic thinkers as Heraclitus power may still be conceived of as “that which arises spontaneously” (*phusis*), as the violent, arbitrary, and ceaseless movement or *play* of physical Becoming, in Plato and his followers it largely turns into “that which is,” or the abstract, ideal, and immutable order of transcendental Being” (*DR* 6; emphasis in original). This disjunction between “becoming” and “Being” is reflected in ontology. Heraclitus’ fragment 52 reads: “Lifetime [*aion*] is a child at play, moving pieces in a game. The kingship belongs to the child.”²⁷ The invocation of child’s play reflects a cosmology of arbitrary chance and change that

²⁷ *DR* 13; *GMN* 66. Brooks Haxton’s rendering is “time is a game / played beautifully / by children” (Heraclitus, *Collected Wisdom* 51). G. T. W. Patrick has: “Time is a child playing at draughts, a child’s kingdom” (Heraclitus, *Fragments* 103).

is a far cry from the ethereal realm of Platonic Ideals. Commenting on his translation of *aion*, Spariosu reinforces Plato's signature reemphasis away from the immediate toward the abstract: "*aion* may have originally meant something like 'vital force.' It is, perhaps, only later that Plato redefines *aion* to mean 'the immutable eternity of the Forms,' thus further obscuring the fact that his idealist philosophy is rooted in a mentality of power" (*GMN* 66). In this example, a rational play mentality has the capacity to smooth over the chance and contingent as natural and proper.

When Heraclitus elevated the violent play between gods and men and the arbitrary flux of fate to cosmic principles, he was following the lead of the poets. Spariosu discusses Homer and Hesiod, here, in terms of play-as-freedom, citing the Homeric ideal of *charme*, the battle-lust that takes over a warrior in *aristeia*, a single-handed tour-de-force (*GMN* 9-11). The only limitation to the pleasure one might take in such violent freedom are the limits of one's power. Presaging Heraclitus, Homer describes Apollo's destruction of a Greek rampart as effortless child's play, as gods love to play with mortals:

in one sweep
he leveled it, as a boy on the seashore
wipes out a wall of sand he built
in a child's game: with feet and hands, for fun,
he scatters it again.
(*Iliad* XV.419-23; *DR* 22)

The hierarchy of archaic Greek culture inheres off of the battlefield, as gods revel in such freedom in their dominion over the *basileis*, *basileis* over men, men over women and slaves, each according to his *moira*, which is here one's contingent fate, but which will become one's share or lot in life (*GMN* 27-28).

In turn, Hesiod's conception of power manifesting as fate hinges on competing notions of *eris* or "strife." *Works and Days* opens the door for a rational mentality that would begin to mold the physical and naked contingency of power into subtler manifestations. To Hesiod, "Two

strifes exist,” one praised and one blamed, as one “makes battles thrive, and war,” while the other has been “set in the roots of earth” by Zeus as an “aid to men” (lines 12-21). This latter

. . . urges even lazy men to work:
 A man grows eager, seeing another rich
 From ploughing, planting, ordering his house;
 So neighbour vies with neighbour in the rush
 For wealth: this Strife is good for mortal men—
 Potter hates potter, carpenters compete,
 And beggar strives with beggar, bard with bard.
 (*Works and Days* lines 22-28)

Hesiod pits the prerational notion of strife, in which the play of becoming drives war and fate, against a nascent rational notion of strife, literally and figuratively contained in and harvested from the soil. “Good” *eris* is strife as rational play, what we might recognize as “competition,” or a superficially peaceful and economically productive *agon*—good and productive for whom remaining unspoken. Spariosu glosses this passage in terms that are slightly anachronistic, but which work well for carrying his schema forward historically: “we discern in Hesiod the dim beginnings of a dialectic of play and work, which has its origins in the contest between aristocratic, prerational and middle-class, rational values . . . Hesiod also begins the long process of separating play from unmediated power and violence, a process that will be completed by Plato and Aristotle” (*DR* 14).²⁸ By beginning to separate play from work, Hesiod also makes it possible for a rational mentality to begin to suppress prerational play on other fronts, as Plato will condemn poetry as bad imitation in its own *agon* with philosophy (*Republic* X.607b).

I address the workings of power and ideology as they manifest in Plato’s linkage of *paidia* and *paideia* (education) in the next chapter, but the *agon* between philosophy and poetry so central to Plato’s thought will bear upon the entire dissertation. Spariosu’s treatment of the

²⁸ The description of the rational mentality as “middle class” clearly inheres in the modern period, although Spariosu does not seem to imply a correlation—however apt—between contemporary “wage slaves” and the Greek *douloi* (slaves) of his examples.

central concept of “mimesis” recalls the widespread distinction between representational and performative aesthetics. Just as “play” narrows from *agon* and *athlon* to become *paidia*, *mimesis* changes over time, from an expansive prerational form—“mimesis-play”—to the more prevalent, rational “mimesis-imitation” in Plato (*DR* 18). In archaic Greek poetry and thought:

the *mimesis* semantic group was employed in a ritualistic-dramatic context, designating a performative function that we moderns associate with play. Consequently, this semantic group, at least before Plato, should not be understood as conveying the idea of imitation in the sense of “representation or reproduction of an original or model,” but rather the idea of “miming,” “simulating,” or even “presencing” (invoking, calling something forth). (*DR* 17)

Prerational mimesis-play foregrounds the performative interplay of poet and auditor, artist and viewer, creating the meaning of the work between them: “The archaic audience totally identifies with the performer through mimetic participation (*methexis*), which is a kind of hypnotic trance eventually leading to catharsis or a pleasurable relief of pent-up emotions” (*DR* 19). Spariosu traces various moments of *methexis* across Hesiod, the *Illiad*, and the *Odyssey*, writing, “Because it combines the auditory-visual with emotion-action and collective participation, mimesis-play gives the bard considerable power over his audience, which he can move at will to laughter or tears, to pleasurable composure or violent emotion” (*GMN* 19). Participation, identification, and performative catharsis are suppressed in Plato’s translation of mimesis into duplication.

Although mimesis-imitation seeks to re-present an original or “true” nature, the mediation of rational play limits it to a certain version of “that which is.” The representational medium, as an intermediary, is neither neutral, nor transparent, but participates in creating the “nature” it purports to faithfully represent. For Spariosu, Platonic mimesis-imitation “‘modernizes’ poetry, turning it into ‘literature’ and assigning it a new function: to aid philosophy in supporting the new rational values,” demonstrating thereby the manner in which the rational play mentality

comes to prominence in its *agon* with the prerational (*DR* 18).²⁹ Because the vocabulary of “performative” and “representational” aesthetics has wide currency, I will often use these terms interchangeably with “mimesis-play” (and “*methexis*”) and “mimesis-imitation,” respectively.

It should not go without noting that reading Homer or Hesiod in a paperback translation rather mutes whatever *methetic* immediacy to which they might be due. We turn prerational play into its rational counterpart by squeezing the experience of sung poetry into literature. Be that as it may, it is likewise indicative of the mentalities’ proximity that Hesiod himself recognizes two notions of *eris*. This is, again, a crucial aspect of Spariosu’s thought: the “mentalities” coexist despite differences in their prominence, reflecting larger values. His discussion of Odysseus also captures the distinction. Less physically aggressive, dominant, and in some ways, less “heroic” than Achilles, Odysseus “is praised as being *aristos* [noble; wise] in counsel . . . because of his ability to bring about, through skillful manipulation or cunning (*mētis*), his own party’s success in war or peace” (*GMN* 4). Spariosu points out that the *aretē* that Odysseus displays carries an archaic sense of “prowess in battle,” as well as the “virtue” and “excellence” with which it is more commonly associated (*GMN* 3). Intellectual prowess slowly overtakes physical power as the nobler virtue, while the underlying level of *agon*-istic competition remains.³⁰ In Spariosu’s telling, the case of Odysseus demonstrates the Homeric tradition’s awareness of Greece’s changing culture: citizens were becoming more necessary than heroes.

²⁹ This is one of the many moments where the prerational rings of poststructuralism (here, Derrida), reinforcing Spariosu’s contention that it can be seen as the “other” of Western metaphysics (*DR* 3). Jeffrey Perl makes the same point about the *Ion* in different terms: “Philosophy began as a hostile metapoetry—Plato’s *Ion* is the classic document” (80).

³⁰ Spariosu tacitly agrees with Adorno and Horkheimer’s reading of Odysseus as a prototypical bourgeois, ordering his men to stop their ears to the Sirens’ song like a factory owner reserving the ambivalent allures of art for himself (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 25-27). He distances himself from their account, however, because of their “implicit distinction, characteristic of Marxist theory, between power and domination.” To Spariosu, domination is simply a naked form of power, which “by its very visibility, covers up other, more occult forms” (*GMN* 33; 57n.).

These summaries of mimesis and power within prerational and rational play mentalities are only two of the areas that Spariosu examines, but they reappear in each of my subsequent chapters. The wider goal of Spariosu's project is to demonstrate how the cultural shift that Odysseus marks has been repeated in Western thought. Whereas Cartesianism had deemphasized any form of play, modern philosophy saw a renewed rational—and, as noted, eminently cognitive—play mentality with Kant. Here the pleasure we take in the apprehension of art, like the play of ratiocination through which reality is understood as subjective experience, rests upon “this feeling of freedom in the play of our cognitive powers” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 185). Schiller expanded Kant's position to claim “man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays” (107). Schiller thus reinforces the ontological dimension of play, but by appealing to the controlled mediation of reason, eschews the constant flux of Heraclitan becoming.

Where Kant and Schiller thought of play in relation to rational epistemology and ontology, Nietzsche returns to prerational values. In a slim, posthumously published volume called *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche summarizes pre-Socratic philosophers from Anaximander to Parmenides to argue for a Heraclitan worldview.³¹ He writes, “in this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence” (*Philosophy* 62). If one were to press Heraclitus on his philosophy, Nietzsche contends that he would respond: ““It is a game. Don't take it so pathetically and—above all—don't make morality of it!”” (*Philosophy* 64). Nietzsche recognizes that discursive systems and logics—essentially the whole range of discourses that Huizinga would cite as markers of

³¹ Marianne Cowan dates the work as coterminous with *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche, *Philosophy* 4). Although I cannot take up the distinction here, aspects of Spariosu's schema recall Nietzsche's Dionysian/Apollinian binary.

“civilization” and what Spariosu would call rational play—are language games.³² Although Spariosu refers to post-Nietzschean prerational play as the “other” of Western metaphysics, the more recently popularized term “postfoundational philosophy” also captures the tenor of the distinction (*DR x*, 3). Against various metaphysical and rational appeals to purportedly “immutable” truths, the twentieth century has seen a range of thinkers assert the contingency of once-stable categories. Elements of a prerational mentality are thus evident in such differing bodies of thought as Wittgensteinian philosophies of language, poststructuralism from Heidegger and Eugen Fink to Derrida, Deleuze, and Lyotard, and the neopragmatisms of Richard Rorty and Richard Shusterman. While critics of modernism have long found inspiration in these thinkers, Spariosu’s work is valuable for bringing disparate philosophical ideas and different conceptions of play together under one rubric—at least as much as possible for such a slippery concept, as he concedes, “indeed, play transcends all disciplines, if not all discipline” (*DR xi*; 165).

Spariosu’s typology is invaluable to my conception of ludic modernism because it is essentially a meta-theory of play: considered and schematic enough to capture the ideas of Freud and Piaget alongside those of Nietzsche and Kant, yet pliable enough to bend to literary-critical practice. Let me stress yet again, however, that the terms “prerational” and “rational” must not be taken to imply a teleology in which prerational play is somehow more “primitive” or “childlike” than its more “civilized” or “adult” counterpart. The terms are convenient labels for my project, carrying implicit scare-quotes with them to highlight their contingency. Alternatives to “prerational,” such as “irrational,” “a-rational,” “non-rational,” or “anti-rational” do not escape

³² Eugen Fink later echoes the Nietzschean-Heraclitan formulation: “Play is a basic existential phenomenon . . . We play at being serious, we play truth, we play reality, we play work and struggle, we play love and death—and we even play play itself” (“Oasis” 22). The holistic absorption of the individual in play runs throughout poststructuralist thought. James Hans follows Hans-Georg Gadamer to express the opposite pole from Huizinga: “The activity of play does not concern itself with an instrumental attitude toward the world; there is no sense in which the player is a subject opposed to or separated from an object or objects” (*Play* 7).

the superficial tinge of teleology, nor does shifting the central term to “logical.” There are moments throughout this dissertation where other distinctions for prerational and rational play would be entirely appropriate: emotive and reasoned, physical and mental, chaotic and systematic, transgressive and normative, progressive and regressive, free and rule-bound, engaged and autonomous. Indeed, these terms are current in many theories of play, in whatever discipline and no matter how broadly or narrowly conceived. As I mentioned, Spariosu himself eventually turns to “archaic” and “median” play. Each of those alternative pairings, however, reinforces binary thinking, and I retain “prerational” and “rational” not only because they can encapsulate those other terms, but because they encode—by virtue of keeping “reason” as the central concept—the crucial recognition that these types of play are linked and do not constitute an incompatible binary.

Before concluding this Introduction with summaries of the chapters that follow, I want to glance at a similar theoretical model from Jean-François Lyotard, in order to distinguish where my own vision diverges from Spariosu’s. Lyotard has advanced a similarly dualistic sense of play in contemporary culture as Spariosu, although neither cites the other’s work. His well-known description of “metanarratives” conceives of the social discourses that Spariosu calls products of rational play as Wittgensteinian language games. For Lyotard, such rational play is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) “modernist,” while the “postmodern condition” consists of “incredulity toward metanarratives” (*Postmodern* xxiv). Incredulity is less the outright rejection or elimination of metanarratives, than it is learning to accept their historical and social contingency. This holds for the grandest narratives in both the arts and the sciences: “we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse . . . the principle of consensus as a criterion of validation

seems to be inadequate.” Where consensus implies a rational mentality, Lyotard offers “paralogy” for its prerational counterpart, casting it in terms of playing a game: “Paralogy must be distinguished from innovation: the latter is under the command of the system [metanarrative], or at least used by it to improve its efficiency; the former is a move (the importance of which is often not recognized until later) played in the pragmatics of knowledge” (*Postmodern* 61).

Paralogy is thus a means to introduce new rules into language games, shaking the metaphysical givenness of their foundations, as it were. For my purposes, this is slightly better put in a nearly coterminous work, *Just Gaming*, a series of dialogues between Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud in which Lyotard distinguishes between what he calls “Kantianism” and “Paganism.” Here is a selective, but representative, example of the pagan stance:

It is not a matter of privileging a language game above others. That would be something like saying: The only important game, the only true one, is chess. That is absurd. What is pagan is the acceptance of the fact that one can play several games, and that each of these games is interesting in itself insofar as the interesting thing is to play moves. And to play moves means precisely to develop ruses, to set the imagination to work. . . . one has several kinds of games at one’s disposal. There are even some that are not invented yet and that one could invent by instituting new rules . . . one can introduce into the pragmatics, into our relations with others, forms of language that are at the same time unexpected and unheard of, as forms of efficacy. Either because one has made up new moves in an old game or because one has made up a new game. (*Just Gaming* 60-61)

The abstraction in Lyotard’s description is at variance with Spariosu’s minutely-documented method, and the labels “Pagan” and “Kantian” limit their applicability as a meta-theory of play. Lyotard’s acknowledgment of playing multiple language games at once, however, will be important for my account. Ludic modernists exploit such multiplicity, realizing that rational-play discourses can be understood metaphorically as language games. Their aesthetics reflect this realization, and their works explore possibilities for new moves and new games.³³

³³ To be sure, the creation of new aesthetic “language games” is not limited to modernism. For example, by moving from octave and sestet to quatrains and couplet, Elizabethan poets created a new form or “game”: the Shakespearean

In short, ludic modernists engaged in rational and prerational play at once. Often this takes the form of playing prerational games on reason's playground, but what we will find is that ludic modernism is not a holistic embrace of either mentality. It is the strategic invocation of prerational play to explore possibilities that lie outside of existing rational logics, recognizing all the while that rational play is indispensable. I can put this more directly by borrowing Stephen Dedalus's description of Catholicism as "an absurdity which is logical and coherent" (Joyce, *Portrait* 215). Religious dogmas—as distinct from religious belief—are the products of rational play, yet viewed from the position of an agnostic, they are irrational. Coherence does not preclude contingency, and to whatever extent that an "irrational" dogma is internally consistent, we might call it "rational." This is, in part, a manifestation of an "*as-if*" play mentality. Like a scientific hypothesis on its way to experimental proof, the epistemological systems of rational play can provide intellectual scaffolding for action.³⁴ Insofar as the ludic modernists in this dissertation variously uphold the "rationality" of what might otherwise appear "irrational," my literary-critical project goes beyond Spariosu's schema.³⁵

The paradox of the logical absurdity captures the simultaneity of rational and prerational play, locked in their *agon*. Injecting prerational elements into rational play enacts what Lyotard calls "paralogy," effecting a pause in the well-oiled machinery of some discourse in order to ask after its ends, assumptions, and elisions. Whereas the total embrace of a prerational mentality

sonnet. What distinguishes ludic modernism is not only the prevalence of the practice—"make it new" is the criterion, after all—but its manifestly ludic basis; its figurative, thematic, and even literal, use of play and games.

³⁴ I approach Spariosu's treatment of *as-if* play more thoroughly in the Eliot chapter. Spariosu derives the term itself from Hans Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of "As If"* (1924).

³⁵ In *The Wreath of Wild Olive*, Spariosu approaches fiction in similar terms, showing how a range of both modern and postmodern writers "constantly question the dominant values of their culture, pointing to imaginative alternatives that would radically transform it" (*WWO* 211).

would throw the epistemologically-useful baby out with the rational bathwater, the ludic modernist invocation of the prerational is a check against the blind acceptance of rational discourses as necessarily progressive.³⁶ To return to the new aestheticism's anti-instrumental protest, ludic modernism seeks to keep reason "self-legislating and future-oriented" by "giving itself the rules for its own development and systematically discarding the beliefs and mystifications that held it in check in the past" (Joughin and Malpas 9). The authors under discussion understand how the outcomes of rational play are never neutral: as Stephen Dedalus realizes, in the Ireland of 1904, Catholic dogma works to the benefit of the priests and the British alike. Where Stein will find reason itself skewed toward educated men, and where Woolf will rail against their sons, Eliot—the consummate son of an educated man—is keenly aware of how modernity's social discourses affect all members of a society. Ludic modernism, then, is neither a matter of playing within reason, nor playing without, but playing to keep the game going.

The Players and their Games

Of the four chapters, the first, "In the Nursery of the Avant-Garde: Gertrude Stein's Toys" most directly engages child's play. The toys of the title are invoked broadly, signaling their ambivalent status as superficially-frivolous playthings that can yet impart serious ideology. The chapter relies on the Platonic conception of education (*paideia*) as a species of play (*paidia*) with an indispensable power to shape individuals and their categories of thought. Punning on the "nursery" as the site of such power and such essentially pedagogical transmission, I trace the complex development of what Stein called the "maternal ideal" from her medical school career through "Melanctha." Stein's ludic modernism already appears in that early work, as a set-piece

³⁶ Again, as Spariosu insists in framing *Dionysus Reborn*, the *agon* between the play mentalities is not a "dialectic of temporality and permanence" (xi).

between reason and emotion. I briefly track her aesthetic play through intervening works like *The Making of Americans* and *A Long Gay Book*, before examining what I call the linguistic “toys” of *Tender Buttons*. Stein enjoins her readers to play with the imaginative possibilities of these undisciplined works, undermining the hierarchies that inhere in discourses from grammar to gender. Whereas the common critical understanding of Stein’s work casts her—on her own prompting—as an avant-garde “outlaw,” intent on escaping (if not destroying) the schoolroom of the nineteenth-century, the chapter suggests that playing with Stein’s toys is an enriching and constructive process: an education in the prerational meant to nurture the future.

Chapter two, “Weaving with Ariadne’s Thread: The Labyrinths of *Ulysses*” begins with a child at play with her father: Lucia Joyce, in Zürich, sitting over a board game called *Labyrinth*. While Frank Budgen long ago suggested that this *Labyrinthspiel* (labyrinth-game) inspired the “Wandering Rocks” episode of *Ulysses*, I take it as an homage to Joyce’s self-appointed aesthetic godfather, Daedalus, and as critical license to read two genera and several species of labyrinth into the novel. I describe a series of internal allusions that both recreates the game board of the *Labyrinthspiel* within *Ulysses* and lays out a thread of Ariadne running through it, in the form of a trail of breadcrumbs. The contingent performativity of this prerational play has a rational counterpart, however, and the chapter goes on to describe the trail of crumbs as more ordered patterns that replicate not just a board game, but the famous labyrinths of Chartres Cathedral and of Minos’ Crete. Following the thread through these labyrinths squares the circle of Christian and classical traditions, while my reading of this manic Daedalean strategy revitalizes the enervated Joycean metaphors of epiphany and transubstantiation as essentially ludic, arguing that they constitute a secular and aesthetic salvation through play.

Where the Joyce chapter invokes both prerational and rational labyrinths, the third chapter, “Playing with Masks: T. S. Eliot Beyond the Primitive” tracks Eliot’s shift from a poetics of rational-play social masks—rendered with Laforguian irony—to the cubist-inspired, prerational mask of *The Waste Land*. I show how Eliot developed his ludic modernism in his early poetry, particularly in “Portrait of a Lady,” prior to his well-noted assimilation of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s anthropology. Exposure to Lévy-Bruhl’s theories about the formation and continuity of communities provided Eliot with a ready vocabulary to graft onto his bifurcated play, culminating in *The Waste Land* (1922). The chapter takes up the play of mimesis within aesthetics (as alternately imitation or *methetic* performativity) and within epistemology and ontology, in the form of *as-if* play. Clarifying Lévy-Bruhl’s theories against Spariosu’s, I read *The Waste Land* as Eliot’s mask and prerational “representation” of himself, worn in and as a ritual performance of cultural renewal that combines cubist form with informed primitivism.

I hear in Eliot’s work a call not only to recognize the wasted land of modernity, but a prescription for healing individuals within the poet’s community at large—for the sake of the individual and the community alike. Chapter four, “The Shadow on the Wall: Virginia Woolf’s Platonic Puppetry,” finds similar concerns in two of Woolf’s late works: *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*. The chapter traces the ludic rhetoric of the former, as Woolf argues that the discursive logics leading British society are not strictly rational, but forms of emotion. Woolf suggests that individuals can be blinded by, and bound into, rational-play discourses. Reading the ludic traces of *Three Guineas* within *Between the Acts*, I argue that the novel presents its flat characters as “puppets,” captivated and pulled about like so many marionettes. Rational play, in this conceit, can turn autonomous individuals into automata. Woolf’s play with autonomy extends to aesthetics, and I read *Between the Acts* as a metafictional indictment of the extremes

present in both the rational and prerational play mentalities. Positioning her art, in part, against the pageantry of the artist-figure Miss La Trobe, Woolf suggests that lopsidedly prerational play cannot cut the puppets' cords. Her own means of freeing her puppets consists of rewriting the foundational reflection on the power of reason to pull individuals into collective harmony: Plato's Allegory of the Cave. I describe Woolf's recasting of the Allegory, arguing that her prerational play questions the ideological ends of reason, redirects individuals' sight, and liberates them for the good of the community.

The Conclusion opens with a coda to the Woolf chapter, reading the social vision of *Between the Acts* through the lens of her late essays in order to explicate the progressive potential that inheres in ludic modernism: what I will call "collective autonomy." I then conclude with a summary reflection on how the new aestheticism responds to the historical failure—or, more charitably, the unrealized potential—of Woolf's vision, which I read as a heuristic for contemplating the free and egalitarian play of the modernist playground.

Chapter One

In the Nursery of the Avant-Garde: Gertrude Stein's Toys

And *en passant*, let me suggest what an excellent basis “Mother Goose” makes for stories, when a mother’s wits fail under the insatiable demands for “a story, a new one, something we have never heard before.”

-Mary Blake (*Twenty-Six Hours a Day* 129)

Introduction

Consider Mark Tansey’s “The Triumph of the New York School” (1984), where the warriors of the European avant-garde cede the field to the younger generation of G.I.s (see Figure 1). Tansey was a critical darling of high theory, and one of the delightful ironies of his *faux-grisaille* canvases is that they rely on representational aesthetics to explore the various artistic, critical, and institutional histories which spent the better part of a century beating ever again that purportedly dead horse: representation. It seems as if all of the ranks are drawn up to see the pact, Picasso and Duchamp across from Pollock and de Kooning. There is a nod to the progression of technology, a subtle indication that civilization marches forward like that column of troops just visible in the distant, wasted landscape. What roots will clutch the stony rubbish they traverse? The camera’s lens is fixed on the artist’s easel like the barrel of a gun. The tradition of painted landscape itself had already been laid waste and rendered background by the European avant-garde. Gertrude Stein famously called them “outlaws,” fighting against their time until suddenly becoming “classics,” with “hardly a moment in between” (“Composition” 514). At the armistice, the pen sheaths the sword in seconds. Far from sitting astride the dead horse of representing reality, Tansey only claims to represent a discourse—Stein’s, in fact—a narrative that, however contingent and self-serving, continues to inflect our critical reality. He does so while taking from his subject the crucial observation that to represent reality was always

to represent a discourse. Art remains war.¹ And at the risk of extending too far the rampant anachronisms, Picasso's ostentatious fur coat can appear less as the uniform of a free-flying pilot dropping bombs on the trench-bound than as a gender-bending provocation. Of course warriors must be male, Tansey whispers with a wink at all that virile bonhomie, daring us to ask: Where, in this little window on our critical reality, do we find the mother of them all, Gertrude Stein?

I turn to Tansey as my own provocation because his literal depiction of "the avant-garde" reminds us of the weight that that label is unable carry; it raises the question of how the avant-garde does not simply destroy the old, but bequeaths the field to the new. In Stein's terms: How do newly-promoted classics beget new outlaws?² While the metaphor of the avant-garde captures an artistic outlaw's status as a sort of warrior, this chapter picks up two prominent themes of Stein's early career to tell a story that we have never heard before.³ First, I sketch the theoretical landscape of the chapter, drawing upon Mihai Spariosu's account of play as power, as noted in my Introduction. I trace Plato's subsumption of the physical and potentially violent power of unmediated play (*agon*; later, rational *paidia*) into the play of education (*paideia*) in a reiterative process of rational mediation whereby power becomes manifest as ideology, its potential for violence covered by a rigorous sheen of reason. Steeped in medical and scientific methods, Stein was just as methodical in her literary experimentation. Accordingly, the narrative I construct proceeds through various trials, beginning with artifacts of her late medical school career and her

¹ Thus, compare "The Triumph of the New York School" with its precursor, Diego Velázquez's "The Surrender of Breda" (1635). As Stein would write, "Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition" ("Composition" 513).

² I leave open the question of whether Tansey himself was ever similarly an "outlaw" or is today a "classic." He has claimed an interest in artistic "nurturing": "I like the idea of reverse deconstruction, which is construction" (Hoban).

³ The critical view of Stein as a warrior of the avant-garde is at least as old as her self-promotion as an "outlaw" in "Composition." It is now a critical truism, as in the title of Sarah Bay-Cheng's *Mama Dada*. For a clever summary of how the 1930s avant-garde thought Stein had lost her edge, see Schoenbach (1-4).

early literary efforts in order to dwell on the ludic modernism of “Melanctha.” To be sure, Stein’s ludic modernism is apparent in her avant-garde aesthetics, but her playfulness is likewise and consistently manifest through her complex and idiosyncratic ideas about maternity, social convention, and education. I follow these themes and their ludic undercurrents through *A Long Gay Book* before turning briefly to their culmination in *Tender Buttons*, which I read as a series of verbal toys put to use in a new sort of *paideia*, now reinvigorated by prerational play. In my view, Stein is not just a warrior proudly declaring the *fin* of the *fin de siècle*, she is also the Mother Goose of Montparnasse in a richer sense than that pithy label recognizes.⁴ She redefines Plato’s educational framework to become a radically different sort of mother, working in the nursery of the avant-garde, teaching her heirs to toy with reason itself.

By introducing the metaphor of the nursery, in no way do I mean to impose a regressive framework on Stein’s early career, but merely to work from her own vocabulary and explication of the roles available to her, first as an aspiring doctor and later as an aspiring writer. Following Stein’s reading of Otto Weininger, I will suggest that we might reverse Sarah Bay-Cheng’s recent definition of her as “Mama Dada”—the mother of the Dada movements—to also see her as a dada-mama: a Weiningerian manly woman whose literary career metaphorically undermined and redefined the role of the nursery.⁵ Insofar as I see Stein laying bare the ideological inflections of reason, my approach accords with Lisa Ruddick’s argument that Stein

⁴ I have been unable to track its precise source, but “the Mother Goose of Montparnasse” has been colloquial at least since F. W. Dupee quoted it in his “General Introduction” to Stein’s *Selected Writings* (ix). Bob Perelman calls it a “journalistic insult,” albeit one containing some truth (134). Stein was familiar with *Mother Goose*, citing its inspiration in *Everybody’s Autobiography* (297). Richard Bridgman sees it and *Through the Looking Glass* as the source of a tangent in the *Narration* lecture, when she suddenly breaks off into a parlor game, claiming “I love my love with a b because she is peculiar” (259). Laura Frost reads the same moment as Stein’s “game with herself,” adding four other occasions on which she played it (84).

⁵ Bay-Cheng focuses on Stein’s plays, finding her “the first genuine avant-garde dramatist of her country.” She continues, “the history of experimental theater and drama in America is virtually inconceivable without her influence” (2). She credits the phrase “the mama of dada” to Samuel Sillen, in his 1937 review of *Everybody’s Autobiography* (Bay-Cheng 177, 3n.).

“denaturalizes” patriarchal language, “showing how the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’ are violently made” (2). She posits Stein’s “recovery of the forbidden body of the mother,” which I echo momentarily by reading what Stein calls the “maternal ideal” as an updated form of archaic Greek *aristeia* (138). Ruddick reads a political bent in Stein’s literary experimentation, although as Barbara Will has shown, few of Stein’s aesthetic and political commitments were straightforward (Will, *Unlikely*). This chapter retreats from the military connotations so prevalent in criticism of the avant-garde to examine Stein’s similarly complicated sense of nurturing.

My inclination to move beyond the vocabulary of the avant-garde at its most literal accords with recent work on Stein. Lisi Schoenbach, for example, has turned to pragmatism for a moderated alternative to the avant-garde glorification of the radical break. She relies on pragmatism’s understanding of habit, finding that “pragmatic modernists” like Stein, Henry James, and Marcel Proust “understood themselves to be embedded within institutions, and they emphasized education over conversion, recontextualization over defamiliarization, continuity over rupture” (5). Stein’s strategic literary repetitions arise from her recognition that one cannot “dispense with habits of thought and action altogether.” Rather, Stein works to “foreground habit as a subject of investigation, and habituate her readers into her own peculiarly Steinian forms of logic” (50). My own account will build on Schoenbach’s understanding of habit and habituation, offering play as an alternative way to differentiate Stein’s openly irrational forms of logic from the stultifying, rational habits she sought to recontextualize. Likewise, Laura Frost has recently understood Stein’s later work through a figure slightly closer to play: pleasure. Frost revisits the critical truism of an avant-garde seeking to *épater le bourgeois* by reading Stein’s delightful difficulty as a “testament to modernism’s radical redefinition of pleasure”—a redefinition Frost sees as Freudian “unpleasure” (88; 23ff.). By reading Stein’s experimental oeuvre as a form of

tickling, Frost highlights how both are “intimate, playful, erotic, regressive, reflexive, aggressive, and pedagogical” (87). She assigns a playful utility to tickling, citing its evolutionary purpose as a “mock form of fighting,” which despite Stein’s varying ambivalence toward her reception, can be nonetheless productive (76).⁶

Pleasure and pain are not mutually exclusive, just as habits are not always strictures to be broken and tossed aside completely. Following Schoenbach and Frost, I exploit the similarly bifurcated nature of play, which can be rational—presenting itself as familiar, stable, and immutable in its logic—and prerational, potentially undermining rational pleasures, habits, and beliefs. Where the avant-garde artist destroys with godlike glee, Stein nurtures with ludic aesthetics. Art becomes that fairy tale realm whispered about in nursery stories, a realm where the limits of the possible are the limits of the imagination: where toys become real.

From *Agon* to *Paidia* to *Paideia*

The key theoretical concepts of this chapter are notions of play as either freedom from constraint or within rational constraints, especially as rational impositions on freedom are propagated through education. To briefly recall the summary of play and power from the Introduction, Spariosu argues that with a prerational play mentality, power is “conceived of as ‘that which arises spontaneously’ (*phusis*), as the violent, arbitrary, and ceaseless movement or *play* of physical Becoming,” hence the link with Heraclitus and other pre-Socratic thinkers. With the rational mentality of “Plato and his followers it [power] largely turns into ‘that which is,’ or

⁶ Frost defines tickling as “mock fighting” out of a summary of evolutionary psychology, but the more relevant touchstone for tickling and play is Gregory Bateson, who suggests that play is metacommunication, or a frame for action. He writes, “the essence of play lies in a partial denial of the meanings that the actions would have had in other situations” (116). Like “horse play,” tickling is “mock” fighting insofar as it is framed as such. Context is likewise important for literary play, and in my view, the rhetoric of avant-garde militancy distorts the ludic.

the abstract, ideal, and immutable order of transcendental Being” (*DR* 6). A key term for this chapter is *aristeia*, which in Homer, at least, is the exercise of nakedly physical power and skill, “a hero’s single-handed tour de force whereby he proudly displays his fighting skills over the entire battlefield” (*GMN* 9). Although *aristeia* is a gamble with life and death, it is “first and foremost a highly ritualized agonistic game,” which, conceptually, is the kind of “delightful and exhilarating activity that modern theorists usually associate with physical play” (*GMN* 9-10).⁷ Earlier I cited Apollo’s destruction of Argive defenses like a child at play, under the sway of *charmē* (battle-lust), rather than rational faculties. Spariosu highlights the connotation of *aristeia* over the battlefield context of his example—“The analogy of divine and child play in an agonistic context, then, appears for the first time in Homer, suggesting the innocence, spontaneity, and exuberance of unmediated power”—thus emphasizing the “arbitrary, free, and effortless movement” of play (*GMN* 24).⁸ Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to *aristeia* in this conceptual/connotative sense of unmediated, exhilarating experience.

Again, the shift in the etymology of “power,” which itself marks a shift in cultural values, is evident as early as Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. Hesiod recognizes two types of *eris* (strife). On the one hand, prerational *eris* drives war and brings famine. On the other hand, rational *eris* drives men to compete peacefully for wealth. The separation of purposeful work and uncontrolled—even uncontrollable—play, of “good” *eris* from “bad,” turns on the question of

⁷ This interpretation recalls Roger Caillois’ category *ilinx*, exemplified by children running, twirling, and whirling (26), as well as Bateson’s “framing,” which allows action to be understood outside of the context of potential violence. Although the “violence” of the avant-garde is usually metaphorical, it is often conflated into something like Caillois’ *ilinx* or a non-violent *aristeia*. See the opening of the *Futurist Manifesto*, where Marinetti revels in the joy of the speeding automobile, crying “‘Let’s break away from rationality’” (285). Or *Blast*, whose manifesto “start[s] from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set[s] up violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes” (Lewis 30), despite earlier “Curs[ing]” play (Lewis 15). There is an inherently *playful* aspect the shift from naked violence to an avant-garde joy in physicality.

⁸ Discussing *charmē*, R. B. Onians credits F. M. Cornford for pointing out that the German *lust* retains a similar combination of desire and delight, as had the Anglo-Saxon *lust* (21; 3n.).

immediacy: the physical and violent strife of war is abstracted as socially-sanctioned “competition.” The layer of social sanction, as in the rational play of agrarian economics, constrains the arbitrary freedom of prerational play. Hence Hesiod discerns “the dim beginnings of a dialectic of play and work,” beginning “the long process of separating play from unmediated power and violence, a process that will be completed by Plato and Aristotle” (Spariosu, *DR* 14).

Within the Greek conception of what constitutes “play” itself, Spariosu describes the separation of *paidia* from *agon*, which is largely accomplished by Plato. He writes, “it is highly significant that *paidia*, children’s play, is absent from the Homeric text and becomes frequent only in fifth- and fourth-century works,” where it is etymologically linked to *paideia*, education. In a point to which I will return, he distinguishes male Homeric heroes from “women and (unheroic) small children,” continuing, “women and children are as a rule mere accessories to, rather than dynamic agents of, power (and when they are not, as in the case of Clytemnestra, Medea, and Hecuba, they are viewed with horror, as ‘unnatural’ freaks)” (*GMN* 20). In spite of the archaic connotations of play-as-*agon*, Plato cannot entirely jettison play as a concept, precisely because of its speculative power: “Socrates and Plato must separate play from violent *agon* or contest and subordinate it to the tasks of philosophy as the science of Being.” This separation is achieved through the trial of the poets. Far from banishing play from his Republic or his philosophy, Plato “wants to banish . . . its archaic forms or its connection with violent, immediate power. Socrates, therefore, retains the concept of play as *agon* in his ideal state, but in a logo-rational, nonviolent form reminiscent of Hesiod’s good *eris*” (*GMN* 171). Play becomes a work ethic. Education becomes the means by which its immediate, potentially violent, and crucially for Stein, potentially subversive elements are covered over by a rational play

mentality.⁹ As we will see, just as Plato must create a rational conception of play in order to harness its speculative power, even in her embrace of prerational play, Stein will hold on to the epistemological clarity that can arise when its immediate performativity is suppressed.

The *Republic* establishes guidelines for the only acceptable—because pedagogically and ideologically useful—nursery stories that children will be allowed to hear. Socrates says, “we’ll persuade the nurses and mothers to tell their children the [stories] we have selected, since they will shape their children’s souls with stories much more than they shape their bodies by handling them” (II.377c). Women are now partial, perhaps naïve, agents of power, the nursery an accessory to it. Socrates excludes “*any* stories about gods warring, fighting, or plotting against one another, for they aren’t true” (*Republic* III.378c; emphasis in original). Instead, poets, speakers, and education itself must propagate the view that “a god isn’t the cause of all things but only of good ones” (*Republic* II.380c; *GMN* 148). The *Laws* defends this censorship as utterly rational, since “man . . . has been created as a toy for God,” and should thus “spend his whole life at ‘play’—sacrificing, singing, dancing—so that he can win the favor of the gods” (VII.803c-e). Ritual, in which any lingering violence is distanced by symbolism, is a pendant to education. Both divine and human power are linked to *paideia*, as the character of the Athenian earlier contends that any education worthy of the name would ignore “training directed to acquiring money or a robust physique,” and instead produce “a keen desire to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled as justice demands” (*Laws* I.644a). Superficially, Plato’s appeal to the rational utility of pleasing the gods is meant to strengthen the holistic bonds of community

⁹ Jacques Derrida similarly finds that Plato “praises play ‘in the best sense of the word,’ if this can be said without eliminating play beneath the reassuring silliness of such a precaution. The best sense of play is play that is supervised and contained within the safeguards of ethics and politics” (*Dissemination* 156). In my account, reason starts to sound like a Foucauldian regime of discipline—and indeed, Foucault will enter through the brief discussion of Judith Butler, below.

and to promote virtue, justice, and peace. In practice, it is a matter of enforcing “correctly disciplined pleasures” (*Laws* II.653e). Plato justifies censorship to uphold his vision of truth and the structures of power that support it. Understood in this way, the rational “know thyself” is recast as our colloquial “know your role.”

Nietzsche would later point out that the justice Socrates invokes under the guise of the good is always defined by “‘the good’ themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good. . . . what had they to do with utility!” (461-62). He goes on, “The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should allow oneself to conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of the rulers: they say ‘this *is* this and this,’ they seal every thing and event with a sound and, as it were, take possession of it” (462). Spariosu, for his part, recognizes that Nietzsche was drawing upon prerational Greek values to respond to the rational mentality of the Enlightenment, although as the earlier invocation of Clytemnestra as an “unnatural freak” proves, reason has no monopoly on naming.¹⁰ The key point here is the way that “good” *eris*, or work, is separated from a prerational play that is then condemned as violent and arbitrary. Rational play tames the prerational, making it safe even as it advertises an enticingly utilitarian spin. Despite Socrates’ censorship—and because of it—as play becomes mediated and abstracted through reason, so too does violence. It is no longer nakedly physical, but rather the intellectual and ideological violence of contingent, if consistent, logics purporting to immutable universality. From the king’s Tyrian purple and the cleric’s white cassock, to the

¹⁰ *GMN* 47, 72n; 20. Spariosu strays into uncharacteristically feisty territory in framing Socrates’ occlusion of prerational play: “Socrates’ quiet concealment of these [*agon*-istic] principles under the transcendental values of universal good, love, nonviolence, and justice is the ultimate Sophistic political (if not philosophical) move: from Pericles to modern technocrats, rulers have always found it more convenient to rule in the name of an abstract idea (God, the People, Communism, Freedom, Equality, Justice, and the like) rather than in their own name, as surrogates or representative rather than as unmediated presences” (*GMN* 145). My reading of *Tender Buttons* will take up the rational evasion of “unmediated presence” in localized form.

financier's navy-and-pinstripes, the rationality of the powerful hides its daggers under many changing robes. My reading of Stein will see her less fraying at hemlines than rending seams, repeating Nietzsche's move of meeting Enlightenment rationality with prerational play, conducting her own spirited *agon* with *paidia*, via *paideia*.

Beyond her drive toward scientific, philosophical, and artistic inquiry, Stein had many reasons to quarrel with the disciplinary regimen of rationality. In Madelyn Detloff's characterization: "she is not heterosexual in a world where queerness is stigmatized, she is fat at a time when thinness is the fashion, she is Jewish in a time of intense anti-Semitism, she is gregarious and egotistical when women should be demure, she speaks about sex when she should be silent" (54).¹¹ In my reading, Stein creates and plays a paradoxical role that is metaphorically akin to the mothers and nursemaids Socrates employs. We will find her redefining what constitutes "good" *eris*, questioning what it means to be a middle-class bourgeois full of "right living," and exploring the bifurcated nature of play in her earliest works, before eventually enjoining her readers to play with her toys in the nursery of the avant-garde (*TMOA* 52).

The Exception in Every Generation

Despite my unease with Spariosu's anachronistic description of the Greeks' rational play mentality as "middle-class," during Stein's medical school career, a latent Platonism inhered in the bourgeois discourse on maternity, toys, and education (*DR* 14). One of the prototypical and most influential handbooks on children's education in the nineteenth century, Lydia Maria

¹¹ Detloff's framing risks trivializing the larger ideological import of Stein's play—unintended discipline, as it were—although issues of identity were clearly crucial to Stein's career. Ulla Dydo is more balanced, putting Stein's revolt in resonant terms: "the grammar of family living limited individual freedom and set firm rules for family members" ("To Have" 59). She goes on to establish Stein's avant-garde credentials as an artist who sought "raw experience, unfiltered by systems of interpretation and rules for composition," reflecting at length on writing as "the product of the grammatical interplay of attack and resistance" ("To Have" 60; 62).

Childs' *The Mother's Book*, links language instruction to toys, chaining both to their utility: "As soon as it is possible to convey instruction by toys, it is well to choose such as will be useful. The letters of the alphabet on pieces of bone are excellent for this purpose" (53). Along with the alphabet, Childs suggests that illustrations and engravings can play a positive role only if they follow the representational conventions of the Renaissance. She writes:

it is very important that disproportioned, badly drawn pictures should not be placed in the hands of children. No matter how coarse or common they are, but let them be correct imitations of nature. . . . the sort of pictures children are accustomed to see have an important effect *in forming their taste*. The very beggar-boys of Italy will observe a defect in the proportions of a statue, or a picture; and the reason is, that fine sculpture and paintings are in their churches, and about their streets. (Childs 55, my emphasis)

Proper taste and behavior are again linked to language and grammar in Mary Blake's *Twenty-Six Hours a Day*, another handbook aimed at helping mothers "solve some of the troublesome problems of a woman's life" (3). Blake suggests that "habits of neatness and order are something to be learned as well as Latin grammar, and for most people they are quite as difficult. The children will enjoy their play-place much better if their playthings are where they can find them. They will not play long in a room in hopeless disorder, though they will do their best to get it so" (166). Inculcating habits of neatness, asking siblings to put each other's toys in order—like intoning *ludo, ludere, lusi, lusus*—does a further service, insofar as it amounts to a "practical lesson on the rights of property" (Blake 173). Lest this all sound daunting, Blake cautions that "even well-taught children 'forget their manners' in the eagerness of their play" (177). In Childs and Blake, toys and education propagate multiple disciplinary regimes, from language, grammar, and representation, to power and order, propriety and property.

Stein herself highlighted such literature in an 1899 address to a Baltimore women's group. She opened her speech, "The Value of a College Education for Women" by denouncing

what could be called the modern mother industry.¹² Stein bristled that it was no longer enough “to simply feed and clothe children spank them when they are naughty give them castor oil when they are sick and send them to the nearest school when they are well” (“Value” 1). Instead, mothers are pushed by bourgeois opprobrium and convention into the logic of *paideia*. They must be knowledgeable experts in formerly unknown minutia, from worrying about prenatal care, to toddler discipline, to the later choice of schools and even specific teachers. The lecture recapitulated Stein’s reading of Charlotte Perkins (Gilman) Stetson’s *Women and Economics*, highlighting some of its most radical ideas. Stein separated an individual’s basic humanity from her “sex functions,” citing observations of other animals to suggest that “sex functions” ought to be strictly utilitarian, aimed only toward procreation—and certainly should not be an individual’s defining characteristic. In other animals, “the sex function does not interfere with the healthy development of the individual to fulfill the functions of a member of its race irrespective of sex. The mother only *becomes a female* during her motherhood she as [*sic*] not concerned with her sex at any other time” (“Value” 6; my emphasis). This is not so in humans. As Stein cites Stetson, because of the masculine logic of Victorian conventions and women’s correlative economic dependency, women have become “oversexed.”¹³

Like Stetson, Stein highlights the modern mother’s role in perpetuating these conventions: “Long before there is any rationality in making a sex distinction we force it on our

¹² Its outlines have hardly changed today. The manuscript of the speech (hereafter “Value”) is held in the Claribel Cone papers at the E. Kirkbride Miller Art Research Library, whose website offers photographs of the typed manuscript. The typing itself is rough, compounded by Stein’s idiosyncratic spelling, punctuation, and grammar. My quotations normalize spacing, and I have only adjusted punctuation according to Stein’s editing in pen and pencil. For the biographical background to the paper, see Wagner-Martin 46-47 and Wineapple, *Sister Brother* 117-19. I return to more contemporary views of toys in the discussion of *Tender Buttons*.

¹³ I will cite several other quotations from the talk before addressing its theoretical implications. For Stetson, “oversexing” is a result of the logic of marriage and family conventions. Stetson argued that “Man, in supporting woman, has become her economic environment” (38) Economic necessity thus combines with sex-attraction, such that women are “modified to sex to an excessive degree. This excessive modification she transmits to her children; and so is steadily implanted in the human constitution the morbid tendency to excess” (38-39).

children we try to make them into little men and women in their cradles at a time when they ought normally to be only human beings” (“Value” 6). She goes on,

so we have the curious picture of a sex characteristics [*sic*] highly developed not for the sake of perpetuating the race not for the sake of the race in any sense, but because of an overdeveloped sex desire that has turned a creature that should have been first a human being and then a woman into one that is a woman first and always and a human being only if it so happens the means have become and end it is like a man instead of eating to live living to eat. (“Value” 6-7)

Stein’s recapitulation of Stetson’s theories goes far to presage our contemporary theoretical discourse on gender and sexuality. The problem of over-sexing is indicative of how we understand the trappings of gender as socially constructed.¹⁴ Distinguishing “sex characteristics” from a person’s humanity recalls Judith Butler’s distinction, in *Bodies that Matter*, between the materiality of the sexed body and the performance of gender. Claiming that mothers force the sex distinction upon children in the cradle, and that the culturally-freighted category “woman” precedes one’s intelligibility as “human,” is to imply some of Butler’s starting points:

The category of “sex” is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” In this sense, then, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the *power to produce*—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus, “sex” is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. (Butler xi-xii; my emphasis)

For Butler, an individual becomes a subject through the materialization of sex. This happens performatively, through a “reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler xii).¹⁵ The central claim of Stein’s speech is that the “regulatory

¹⁴ This becomes clearer when Stein comments that the oversexed girl who goes from finishing school into society accomplishes “nothing in the wide world except the task of a peacock, the spreading of his tail before a wide audience” (8).

¹⁵ Reiterative practices, like the power of naming and those on display in Childs’ and Blake’s ideal nurseries (where properly representational art is “cited,” no less) are essentially what Schoenbach addresses under the banner of habit.

ideal” of Victorian domesticity, motherhood, and child-rearing—its *paideia*—has a chilling effect on “the individual and his claim to the fullest life within his reach” (“Value” 8).

I will return to both Butler and another crucial point from “Value” momentarily, but first I want to note Stein’s ambivalent defense of maternity in the talk, because rather surprisingly, she does not challenge the Victorian presumption that procreation is a woman’s “proper” duty. Instead, Stein finds *some* “rationality in making a sex distinction” (“Value” 6). She elaborated her basic position at the time in a paper drafted late in 1901, in response to a report of declining birth rates across all classes of American society.¹⁶ Titled “Degeneration in American Women,” Stein’s paper takes aim at the “voluntary type” of sterility “that is so markedly increasing in America” and which “is of course all due to moral causes and these are so numerous [*sic*] that one can hardly do more than give the headings” (412-13). Stein quickly dispatches the poor, blaming their moral failings on charity workers, who with “misdirected zeal and false ideals,” share “knowledge of prevention.” As for the upper classes, she lays blame under three headings: loss of the “maternal ideal,” modern child-rearing, and a disregard for “right living.” I will summarize each problem before showing their significance for my argument.

First, Stein blames the upper-class denigration of the “maternal ideal” on the “negation of sex” and the “tendency of the modern American woman to mistake her education her cleverness and intelligence for effective capacity for the work of the world. In consequence she

¹⁶ Stein was provoked by George Engelmann’s “The Increasing Sterility of American Women” in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Brenda Wineapple discovered the manuscript in the papers of Mary Mackall Gwinn Hodder (whom Stein would lightly fictionalize as Janet Bruce in “Fernhurst”). It was printed as an Appendix to *Sister Brother*, but has received minimal critical attention (see Bender *passim*; Schechter 54-64). On the paper’s background and discovery, see *Sister Brother* 409-10 and also Wineapple “Gertrude Stein.” For reasons of space and conceptual coherence, my focus on the paper will be narrow, although its polemical tone, blatant classism and racism, and implicit drive toward eugenics all present a fascinating—and disturbing—picture of Stein in her late twenties. Much of the rhetoric carries the whiff of what was a tumultuous moment in her life, as she was beginning to come to terms with her sexuality, increasingly disillusioned with medicine, generally listless, and caught in what Dydo calls the “grammar” of family living (“To Have” 59).

underestimates the virile quality because of its apparent lack of intelligence.”¹⁷ She continues, “All this of course leads to a lack of respect both for the matrimonial and maternal ideal for it will only be when women succeed in relearning the fact that the only serious business of life in which they cannot be entirely outclassed by the male is that of child bearing that they will once more look with respect upon their normal and legitimate function.” Stein next turns to the “modern morbid responsibility for offspring” and the “foolish conviction abroad that the parents can raise one or two children better than half a dozen can raise themselves.” Her target is again the late-Victorian *paideia*, which falsely equates “a knowledge of facts for training in method,” and thus “produces the type that is the terror to the trained professional mind, the intelligent mother” (“Degeneration” 413). Finally, as an antidote to the mediating influences of a woman’s college education and the discourse of children’s education, Stein advocates “right living,” which as Wineapple points out, will become a refrain of *The Making of Americans* (SB 410):

The American population seems to have completely lost sight of the fact that the exercise of ones [*sic*] normal functions of living, walking, talking, thinking, being, eating and drinking is an endless joy of a healthy human being. . . . No in the developement [*sic*] of the play instinct and the feeling of joy in the world one must look for a counteracting force against the prevailing pessimism and the consequent voluntary sterility. (“Degeneration” 414)

The “feeling of joy in the world” so crucial to “right living” is essentially the prerational play of becoming, and a paean to the energy, power, and freedom of *aristeia*, broadly understood.¹⁸

¹⁷ Wineapple attributes Stein’s cynicism about education to misogyny at Johns Hopkins, arguing that her difficulties there suggested a certain vacuity hiding behind lofty ideals (SB 152-54). In Stein’s “censure of women who chose not to bear children,” Wineapple sees a paean to creation at large—a point to which I will return (SB 291).

¹⁸ Stein had closed “Value” with an example of a bourgeois *aristeia*: a boating party comprised of herself and eleven other female medical students. The man renting their boats “was a little dubious and wanted to come along but we assured him we were accustomed to taking care fo [*sic*] ourselves.” They buy live crabs, row out to a farther shore, build a fire and roast the crabs. In this last, Stein is sure to note, they softened the virility of their adventure with an empathetic element: “Although medical students we objected to roasting them alive and so we neatly severed their brains from their spial [*sic*] cords not that we had ever heard of that performance perlimienary [*sic*] to crabcooking [*sic*] and then we roasted and ate our crabs” (11).

Insofar as they are centrally engaged with forms of play readily identifiable as either prerational or rational, these two artifacts of Stein's early intellectual career are foundational to her literary work. In "Value," Stein had argued that constructions of gender only serve to reinforce the dominant masculine logic and economy, implicitly linking gender performance to both Kantian play—purposiveness without a purpose—and to the disciplinary regime of a rational mentality ("Value" 6-7; Kant *Critique of Judgment* 185). In "Degeneration," such oversexing is distinguished from "the serious business of life," which is both the "male" sphere of business and work, as well as the "female" capacity for procreation ("Degeneration" 413). Stein counters constructions of sex and gender as purposeless, rational play with the materiality of the body, invoking the "virile quality" of immediate, physical, female power (413). When she warns against the "intelligent mother" as one who "underestimates the virile quality because of its apparent lack of intelligence," Stein shows how a rational mentality suppresses the physical, denigrating her peers for facilitating that process.¹⁹ Prerational power is again invoked as "right living," the antidote to the morbid discourse of a mediating *paideia*. Her starting principle in both pieces is that childbirth is an area where women cannot be "outclassed" by men ("Degeneration" 413). Understood in terms of play, Stein seeks to drop the pretenses of rational mediation and return the physical power of prerational play to women. What initially seems to be a revanchist gesture—pitting the "maternal ideal" against the purportedly liberating education of women (which is actually a form of regulating *paideia*)—is also, in my view, Stein's signature move: showing up to the rational playground with a prerational game.

¹⁹ Elsewhere than his discussion of Plato cited above, Spriosu claims that the "rational mentality represses its prerational counterpart, labeling it 'savage,' 'barbarian,' and 'primitive'" (DR 11). One might easily add, "emotional," "unintelligent," and "childlike." Likewise, Stein clearly intuits how what Nietzsche calls the "lordly right of giving names" extends to the sexing of children in the cradle (Nietzsche 462). I read "Melantha" as Stein's reworking of these binaries.

The ludic, proto-poststructural aspects of each piece carry a Butlerian understanding of the reiterative structures passed on through generations. While excoriating those of her peers who have abandoned the maternal ideal, however, Stein suddenly offers a forceful caveat:

Of course it is not meant that there are not a few women in every generation who are exceptions to this rule but these exceptions are too rare to make it necessary to subvert the order of things in [*sic*] their behalf and besides if their need for some other method of expression is a real need there is very little doubt but that the opportunity of expression will be open to them. (“Degeneration” 413)

“Degeneration” has only been known for twenty years. Read in retrospect against her biography, this declaration is hardly surprising coming from the woman who boldly asserted her genius alongside that of only Picasso and Alfred North Whitehead (*ABT* 5). By donning the mantle of the “exception” (cousin to Butler’s “abject”), Stein can both uphold a prerational understanding of the maternal ideal as unmediated joy in the power of procreation, and yet exempt herself from it.²⁰ Stein recognizes before Butler that since an individual is part of a generation, and thus beholden to reiterative discourse, one’s sex “is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration” (Butler, xix). By embracing her abject status—which, again, reads like an early invocation of her “genius”—Stein stakes a claim to a power that might destabilize such reiterations. Like all ludic modernists, her exemption hinges on the need for expression: her political agency turns on her aesthetics; and her aesthetics, she must have begun to sense, would inevitably need to be shocking to Childs, Blake, their ilk, and the very beggar-boys of Italy alike.

Love as Contest

²⁰ For Butler, the heteronormative “exclusionary matrix” that forms subjects requires a separate “domain” of those who do not belong: “The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject . . . the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection” (xiii). Stein’s play implies a more empowered inhabiting of her abject role.

The expanding sense of play that Stein carried out of her medical school career and through the protracted and difficult years of transition led right into her early literary efforts. Stein's first foray as a writer of fiction, the manuscript "Fernhurst," displays the scornful tone of "The Value" and "Degeneration," often nearly verbatim. The narrator opens with salvos against "college women" "protected all their days from the struggles of the larger world [who] lived and died with the intellectual furniture obtained at their college—persisting to the end in their belief that their power was as a man's"—rather, that is, than accept the power of the maternal ideal (*Fernhurst* 4). Of this hypothetical woman, the narrator concludes, "I am for having women learn what they can but not to mistake learning for action nor to believe that a man's work is suited to them because they have mastered a boy's education. In short I would have the few women who must do a piece of the man's work but think that the great mass of the world's women should content themselves with attaining to womanhood" (4-5). This basic schema, implanted wholesale from the earlier writing, is understood as a game when Nancy Redfern—a typical college woman with a boy's education—never realizes that her husband's chivalry merely masks the inequality of their relationship. She is revealed as "an inferior who could not learn the rules of the game" (28).

The geometrical calculations of Stein's next literary effort, *Q.E.D.*, suggest not just a love-triangle, but also a chess match. Adele (Stein herself) consistently understands her relationship with Helen (May Bookstaver) in terms of jockeying for position in a game (*Three Lives and Q.E.D.* 201; 202-03; 211; 222). The novella rehearses a number of ludic themes that get more literary treatment in *Three Lives*, but which are still notable. First, Adele is consistently tempted by the allure of the physical. This is largely a matter of her coming into her homosexuality, which challenges her moral and intellectual categories. She is ambivalent to an

early kiss from Helen: “Suddenly she felt herself intensely kissed on the eyes and on the lips. . . . ‘Well!’ [Helen] brought out at last. ‘Oh’ began Adele slowly ‘I was just thinking.’ ‘Haven’t you ever stopped thinking long enough to feel?’” (186). For weeks, Adele reflects on having glimpsed something beyond intellection, and although she “did not lose the sense of having seen,” her “insight did not deepen. She meditated abundantly on this problem and it always ended with a childlike pride in the refrain ‘I did see a little, I certainly did catch a glimpse’” (186). For all of Adele’s convictions, she experiences sexual arousal with childlike naïveté. On the steamer, she is initially presented with an innocent earthiness. Mabel and Helen find her “prone on the deck with the freedom of movement and the simple instinct for comfort that suggested a land of laziness and sunshine.” Adele “nestled close to the bare boards as if accustomed to make the hard earth soft by loving it. . . . ‘How good it is in the sun’” (179). Her physical delight in the natural world periodically quells the despair caused by Helen.²¹

At the close of the first section, Adele’s childishness is construed in a manner that recalls Socrates’ restrictions on storytelling. It is neither the Earth, nor conversation, nor reflection, which first allows her to begin to make sense of her “insights,” but literature:

Later on she was lying on the ground reading again Dante’s *Vita Nuova*. She lost herself completely in the tale of Dante and Beatrice. She read it with absorbed interest for it seemed now divinely illuminated. She rejoiced abundantly in her new understanding and exclaimed triumphantly “At last I begin to see what Dante is talking about and so there is something in my glimpse and it’s alright and worth while” and she felt within herself a great content. (187)

Although she “loses herself completely,” nearly straying from her rational faculties, the new life promised to Adele by her encounter with Dante remains sanctioned for its purity and

²¹ Soon after, Adele languishes “on the hill-side at Tangiers” and then in the Granada sun (186-87). Later, she pines for Helen, “lying on the green earth on a sunny English hillside . . . She saved herself from intense misery only by realising that the sky was still so blue and the country-side so green and beautiful. . . . Again and again she would bury her face in the cool grass to recover the sense of life in the midst of her sick despondency” (203-04).

heteronormativity. In its “divine” illumination, the story appears immutable, and is thus authorized as a utilitarian guide to love. Her reading, in other words, replicates the value of literature within Platonic *paideia*. As the lesbian love triangle progresses, however, Adele finds that her experience cannot be integrated into this approved narrative. That narrative fails months later, before Adele leaves again for Europe. Finding no solace in Helen’s embrace, and “with a deep breath of resolution,” Adele claims, ““What foolish people those poets are who say that parting is such sweet sorrow”” (201). To Helen’s agreement, she replies ““Then why do they put it into the books?”” (202). Her question implicitly criticizes the individual ramifications of rational play discourses that, in Socrates’ phrase, enforce “correctly disciplined pleasures” and mitigate “deviancy” (Plato, *Laws* II.653e).

The tension between sanctioned morality and the physical fact of lesbian sexuality climaxes in the final section of the novella. Adele and Helen are back in New York, in agreement that “they were very near the state of perfect happiness,” a euphemistic counter to Adele’s apparent dread of “losing herself again with Helen.” As they are “lost . . . in happiness,” however, the tension reasserts itself (207):

It was a very real oblivion. Adele was aroused from it by a kiss that seemed to scale the very walls of chastity. She flung away on the instant filled with battle and revulsion. Utterly regardless of Helen she lay her face buried in her hands. “I never dreamed that after all that has come I was still such a virgin soul” she said to herself, “and that like Parsifal a kiss could make me frantic with realisation” and then she lost herself in the full tide of her fierce disgust. (207)

For Adele, the rational heteronormativity that renders Helen’s kiss revolting is simultaneously the epistemological scaffold necessary to thought and action:

“You see” she explained “my whole trouble lies in the fact that I don’t know on what ground I am objecting, whether it is morality or a meaningless instinct. You know I have always had a conviction that no amount of reasoning will help in deciding what is right and possible for one to do. If you don’t begin with some theory of obligation, anything is

possible and no rule of right and wrong holds. One must either accept some theory or else believe one's instinct or follow the world's opinion. (208)

Adele concludes that "Their pulses were differently timed," and that the relationship cannot last (208). Stein's presentation of the impasse, however, shows the childlike Adele—predisposed to reveling in the physical world—conflicted in her needs. Without a "theory of obligation" of the sort gained by her *paideia* in Dante, Shakespeare, and Arthurian legend, Adele would be lost in relativism.²² With Helen, she is in a state of "oblivion," literally forgetfulness, as if in need of remedial education. Had she attempted to navigate prerational mentality, Adele might have blazed a path toward the safe acceptance of her instincts and her unsanctioned sexuality, but she cannot jettison the rational, no matter how arbitrary or devastating to her personal development.

In revising the strongly autobiographical *Q.E.D.* into "Melanctha," Stein expanded the register and breadth of her play even as she distanced herself from the narrative. In my reading of "Melanctha," Stein moves beyond the therapeutic working-through of the personal issues manifested by her affair with Bookstaver to model how prerational play might loosen the bonds that rational play imposes on individual freedom; or, to echo "Value," how unmediated prerational play might free the individual toward "his claim to the fullest life within his reach" (8).²³ The depiction of Melanctha Herbert and Jefferson Campbell through nascent performative aesthetics is Stein's first flirtation with ludic modernism. Their relationship stages the *agon* between prerational and rational play mentalities. Stein presents a series of binaries that spar like

²² The same impulse driving Stein to defend the maternal ideal makes it necessary to have a "theory of obligation." That impulse runs throughout Stein's early career. Reason appears as an epistemological scaffold—Spariosu's rational "*as-if*" play. My discussion of T. S. Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Burnt Dancer" contains more extended treatment of this idea, as Eliot, too, grapples with a relativistic world "beyond good and evil," so to speak.

²³ The bookending stories of *Three Lives*, "The Good Anna" and "The Gentle Lena," are likewise preoccupied with play, generations, and maternity, although I have omitted extended discussion of them for reasons of space. The latter story is further notable for its closing depiction of Herman Kreder as a Weiningerian "womanly man" *avant la lettre*: not just homosexual, but thriving in his life as both mother and father after Lena's death.

boxers meeting jabs with parries. Lisa Ruddick reads their affair as “a battle of rival modes of perception” (15), while Linda Martin-Wagner asserts that in the “dialogue” which constitutes the relationship, “the reader sees that Gertrude has constructed a classic philosophical discourse between reason and emotion” (79). To that basic distinction, I would add a number of terms: beyond “emotion,” Melanctha embodies feeling, play, undiscipline, the primitive, licentiousness, and wandering (etymologically constructed by a rational mentality as “error”)—knowledge of which paradoxically empowers her to be Jeff’s prerational teacher as the adult to his child. In turn, along with “reason,” Jeff, is thought, science, work or “good” *eris*, language, civilization, monogamy, all of which his rational mentality defines as worthwhile, steady, and moral, while denigrating their counterparts. These terms recur throughout, accruing gradations and emphases in their definitions. Indeed, the circling, thrust-and-parry nature of Jeff and Melanctha’s relationship, with its “prolonged present,” resists attempts at summary and precise quotation. As such, I focus on Jeff’s status as a student to Melanctha and on how his understanding of Melanctha as “a new religion” embodies the *agon* between rational and prerational mentalities (99). In Stein’s terms, Melanctha’s “negro sunshine” outshines the light of reason.

Stein introduces Jeff, who was “always very fond of reading,” with reference to his belief in regularity and the established morality that Stein’s earlier manuscripts attacked (72-73). He explains, “I don’t, no, never, believe in doing things just to get excited . . . instead of living regular and . . . decent living, the colored people just keep running around and perhaps drinking and doing everything bad they can ever think of, and not just because they like all those bad things that they are always doing, but only just because they want to get excited” (76). For Jeff, all action must have a rational end, exemplified by thrift, prudence, abstemiousness, and the hard work of “good” *eris*. To Melanctha’s objection that his worldview excludes “real, strong, hot

love,” Jeff replies “I am always so busy with my thinking about my work I am doing and so I don’t have time for just fooling, and then too . . . I really certainly don’t ever like to get excited, and that kind of loving hard does seem always to mean just getting all the time excited” (77). He clarifies his understanding of love in terms that reflect the divide in their mentalities:

I certainly do only know just two kinds of ways of loving. One kind of loving it seems to me, is like one has a good quiet feeling in a family when one does his work, and is always living good and being regular, and then the other way of loving is just like having it like any animal that’s low in the streets together, and that don’t seem to be very good Miss Melanctha, though I don’t say ever that it’s not all right when anybody likes it, and that’s all the kinds of love I know Miss Melanctha, and I certainly don’t care very much to get mixed up in that kind of a way just to be in trouble. (78)

Jeff’s definition of “animal” love describes the “wandering” and bisexual Melanctha’s “deviant” sexuality. Rather than bristle at his schema, however, Melanctha admits that it does explain his character, then demonstrates the contingency of his rationale: “you always looking as if you was thinking, and yet you really was never knowing about anybody and certainly not being really very understanding. It certainly is all Dr. Campbell because you is so afraid you will be losing being good so easy, and it certainly do seem to me Dr. Campbell that it certainly don’t amount to very much that kind of goodness” (78). Melanctha reveals what is subtly suggested by Jeff’s language. Though he claims he “certainly” knows two kinds of love, their definitions are couched in equivocal language. One only “seems” to be good, the other “is just like”—but not equal to—animal love, and does not “seem” good. His double-negative qualification in the antepenultimate clause leads to the acknowledgement that there is no “certainty” or truth of the matter, but only preference, as he would rather not “get mixed up in that kind of a way just to be in trouble.” In a decidedly unplayful stance, Jeff cannot accept the pleasures of a freer sexuality—defined by his rational mentality as “trouble”—as a proper end for action. Yet as Melanctha suggests, at some level, he is aware of how easily his morality might be challenged.

Melantha's response further sets up the terms of their ensuing *agon*. She establishes a continuum between thinking, knowing, and understanding—she will later add “seeing” and “feeling”—thereby suggesting that despite their denotative similarities, such words—and by extension, perhaps all words—carry a range of meaning and power, which are always inflected by usage and context. Put differently, by questioning Jeff's persona as one who thinks, yet may not know or understand, Melantha reveals his knowledge to be not fixed and immutable but reiterative and performative.²⁴ In this early moment, Jeff is receptive to the possibility that there may be multiple ways of loving and multiple ways of knowing the world: “‘Perhaps you are right, Miss Melantha’. . . ‘Perhaps I ought to know more about such ways Miss Melantha. Perhaps it would help me some, taking care of the colored people, Miss Melantha. I don't say, no, never, but perhaps I could learn a whole lot about women the right way, if I had a real good teacher’” (78). It is thus Jeff who proposes a course of *paideia*, asking Melantha to be his prerational teacher and guide in love.²⁵ Crucially, he makes the suggestion in the service of his medical and social concern for his community, following the Platonic understanding of *paideia* as that which aims for the good, but yet which defines “good” *eris* as productive competition, thereby leaving his rational epistemology fundamentally intact.

Their conversation dwells on how the language available to them may not allow for an education. Jeff says, “‘I certainly do wonder, if we know very right, you and me, what each other is really thinking. I certainly do wonder, Miss Melantha, if we know at all really what each

²⁴ My sense of the performative is indebted to Cyrena N. Pondrom, who looks at a later moment to show how the words “*always*, *sure*, and *really* steadily shift in meaning with each repetition and thus perform the beginning of dissolution in the relationship” (“Meaning” 115). Likewise, see Marjorie Perloff's tracing of how “wander” shifts in emphasis and meaning across the story, suggesting, “words are no measure of feeling” (*Poetics* 93-95).

²⁵ This is a good example of Stein's ambivalent punctuation, as one can also read that last sentence as “I don't say no, never, but [rather,] perhaps[.] I could learn . . .” The playful ambiguity on Stein's part suggests that openness to new and contingent possibilities can be couched in and hidden by everyday language.

other means by what we are always saying” (80). Although the rational-play epistemology of language may turn out to be inadequate, Melanctha offers an alternative epistemology of the body, which Jeff understands as play. The narrator reveals that Jeff, long aware of his attractiveness to women, would occasionally “play a little with them.” Now, though, “He was not sure he knew just what it was that Melanctha wanted. He knew if it was only play, with Melanctha, that he did not want to do it. But he remembered always how she had told him he never knew how to feel things very deeply” (81).²⁶ True to form, Jeff quickly sets aside thoughts of play—however tempting—and “took out his book from his pocket, and drew near to the lamp, and began with some hard scientific reading” (82). The prerogative of difficult, scientific work briefly wins out. Momentarily, the lamp casts its light on the start of their *paideia*. Jeff is “almost certain, it was no game she was playing,” as Melanctha “began to lean a little more toward Dr. Campbell, where he was sitting, and then she took his hand between her two and pressed it hard, but *she said nothing to him*. She let it go then and leaned a little nearer to him. Jefferson moved a little but did not do anything in answer” (82, my emphasis). Melanctha initiates a physical form of communication that might function without language. We might say that she does so “naturally,” or even “unthinkingly,” although those terms must be taken neutrally, as the prerational must be understood without rational-mentality biases.²⁷ Jeff’s reticence recalls the dialogue from *Q.E.D.*: “‘Well,’ said Melanctha sharply to him. ‘I was just thinking began Dr.

²⁶ The passing reference to Jeff’s manipulation of his attractiveness as play intimates that he has entertained “animal” love in the past, disregarding the double-standard of judging Melanctha for the same. Such indifference toward those excluded and denigrated by moral categories—who bear the brunt of ideological violence—is endemic to a rational mentality. A similar hypocrisy surfaces again later when Jeff attempts to shame Melanctha for her sexual experience, as if invoking Nietzsche’s “lordly right of giving names” cited above: “I had a good right to know about what you were and your ways and your trying to use your understanding, every kind of way you could get your learning” (95). Melanctha makes no such inquiries into Jeff’s past, and neither the source nor validity of such “rights” ever bothers him. The question of rights eventually opens a damaging rift (108).

²⁷ The narrator of *The Making of Americans* puns on Melanctha’s understanding of sexuality as a game: “Melanctha . . . had no responsibility, it was because she was so game that she did it” (447).

Campbell slowly, ‘I was just wondering,’ he was beginning to get ready to go on with his talking. ‘Don’t you ever stop with your thinking long enough ever to have any feeling Jeff Campbell,’ said Melanctha a little sadly” (83). The narrator’s periphrastic description of Jeff “beginning to get ready” to speak deflates his impulse to put experience into language, while the recurring pun on “wondering” and “wandering” works on two levels: Melanctha’s body tempts him toward a knowledge that deviates from reason. The double negative in Jeff’s answer to her question—“I don’t don’t know”—suggests that his linguistic understanding is already under threat. The denotative capacity of language comes under further strain momentarily, and comically so: “I certainly do think I feel some, Miss Melanctha, even though I always do it without ever knowing how to stop my thinking.’ ‘I am certainly afraid I don’t think much of your kind of feeling, Dr. Campbell” (83). Throughout, Jeff’s convoluted attempts to explain away the physical are met with Melanctha’s playful puns.²⁸

One of the first lessons that Jeff learns from his teacher is that truth might be multivalent. After Jane Harden reveals the extent of Melanctha’s wandering—what Jeff calls “her bad ways”—he reflects, “Perhaps [Melanctha] could teach him how it could all be true, and yet how

²⁸ The oil lamp in this scene joins a larger symbolic comparison of the rational and prerational that deserves mention, even if shoehorned into a footnote. Stein exchanges the lamp for firelight in two later moments in which Jeff’s doubts threaten the relationship (86; 104). To these scenes of cogitation, with distrust gathering in closed spaces like dust on a mantle, Stein contrasts their happiest moments of physical intimacy, which take place “in bright fields,” and where there is “warm sunshine to wander,” and finally in the “warm air of the sultry, southern, negro sunshine” (93; 96; 101). The language that would seem to debase “negro” sunshine throughout the text is a function of the rational mentality dominating the context in which Stein wrote. Her play with light and dark, interior and exterior, thought and touch, discipline and abandonment, however, clearly favors the prerational alternative. Natural, “negro” sunshine outshines the artificial lamp- and firelight of reason. Stein’s reclaiming the prerational has three further consequences: First, the evocation of Jeff and Melanctha’s various *loci amoeni* recalls *aristeia* and the joy in the physical familiar from Stein’s boating party, noted above. Second, we are reminded that as minds struggle, bodies meet. Stein thus doubly ironizes her status as the Jeff-figure. Not only does she subvert his puritan constraints on sexuality, but as a budding writer, she is aware that her novella is preoccupied with giving us a philosophical dialogue when there is, well, love to be made, within the work and without. Third, Stein nearly conflates lovemaking and philosophizing. As Jeff enters her life, Melanctha “was ready now herself to do teaching . . . [and] knew now what everybody wanted” (68). With the prerational and pastoral basis of their bliss, Stein links the *leisure* of a stroll-and-assignation in the park etymologically to both *license* (via Latin, *licere*) and *school* (via Greek, *skholē*: leisure, philosophy, the site of lectures), thereby bringing together the freedom of *aristeia* and the productivity of *eris* through *paidia* and *paideia*. Jeff is a medical doctor, not quite a doctor of philosophy; Melanctha is a Ph.D. of love.

he could be right to believe in her and to trust her” (91). The basis of his distrust shifts from revulsion at her reputation and at “animal” love to an explicitly epistemological problem: “he really knew he could know nothing. . . . he never could know what it was she really wanted with him” (98). As their relationship deepens, Stein describes Melanctha’s love as a drug: “And Jeff *took it straight* now, and he loved it, and he felt, strong, the joy of all this being, and it swelled out full inside him, and he poured it all out back to her in freedom, in tender kindness, and in joy, and in gentle brother fondling” (96; my emphasis).²⁹ Although now he can feel and is free to enjoy prerational being-as-becoming, this drug is true to Derrida’s warning that the *pharmakon* is both remedy and poison. The division between thought and feeling is soon revealed through the metaphor of reason versus religion, fact versus divine madness—this last so often interchangeable with poetic inspiration. Under her influence, Jeff revises his sense of love:

You remember, Melanctha, what I was once telling to you . . . about how I certainly never did know more than just two kinds of ways of loving . . . I got a new feeling now, you been teaching to me, just like I told you once, just like a new religion to me, and I see perhaps what really loving is like, like really having everything together, new things, little pieces all different, like I always before been thinking was bad to be having, all go together like, to make one good big feeling. You see, Melanctha, it’s certainly like that you make me been seeing. (99)

Stein again exploits the performative vagaries between knowing, feeling, and seeing.

Understanding Melanctha as a religion allows Jeff to substitute for his rational and language-bound epistemology another one based on physical revelation and feeling. Melanctha quickly asserts that she “always got strong faith in you, Jeff,” continuing a moment later, “I prove it to you now, for good and always,” as they “lay there a long time in their loving, and then Jeff began again with his happy free enjoying” (100).

²⁹ And of course, that the rational Jeff only knows that he does not know recalls Socrates’ apology. Melanctha’s loving and prerational mindset, which “fill” Jeff (i.e. Stein), prefigure the erotic undertones of *Tender Buttons*, where “filling” becomes a multivalent refrain.

As Jeff embraces Melanctha, he likewise embraces his status as pupil, a “good scholar” who “never play[s] hooky ever”—at least for a time (100). In relatively short order, his rational mentality reasserts itself. After learning from Jane Harden that Melanctha has been wandering, he writes his second letter to her, claiming “I don’t love you Melanctha any more now like a real religion, because now I know you are just made like all us others” (119). Jeff’s spiritual crisis provokes a return to “good” *eris*: “He knew he had lost the sense he once had of joy all through him, but he could work, and perhaps he would bring some real belief back in to him about the beauty that he could not now any more see around him” (121). Yet his work isn’t enough, as soon we find him behaving like a flagellant in the prerational church of Melanctha:

All that day long, with the warm moist young spring stirring in him, Jeff Campbell worked, and thought, and beat his breast, and wandered, and spoke aloud, and was silent, and was certain, and then in doubt and then keen to surely feel, and then all sodden in him; and he walked, and he sometimes ran fast to lose himself in his rushing, and he bit his nails to pain and bleeding, and he tore his hair so that he could be sure he was really feeling, and he never could know what it was right, he now should be doing. (122)

That Jeff dons the hair shirt of a flagellant is reinforced by the Biblically anaphoric “ands,” but this passage is remarkable for reiterating in miniature, within Jeff alone, the larger *agon* heretofore represented by him and Melanctha separately. The juxtapositions of work, thought, speaking, walking, and doubt with Spring, wandering, silence, rushing, and feeling culminate in the underlying epistemological question. Jeff has internalized the *agon* of the prerational and rational, which suggests that Melanctha’s lessons have opened his rational mentality to change, new possibilities, and the redefinition of erstwhile proper names.³⁰ The rational retains its edge, however, and his torment is only assuaged through recourse to language, as “that night he wrote it all out to Melanctha Herbert” in his third and final letter to her (122).

³⁰ Stein’s nomenclature consistently toys with propriety by performing alternating permutations on Jeff, Jeff Campbell, Jefferson Campbell, Dr. Campbell, Melanctha, Melanctha Herbert, etc.

She responds to his confession of doubt as any priest must, with forgiveness: “Love you, what do you think makes me always to forgive you” (124).³¹ At this point, however, Melanctha has not internalized the *agon* to the extent that Jeff has and continues in her wandering. Their relationship ends when he “just broke away and left her,” but not before the narrator reflects on a fundamental change in his mentality: “Jeff always would be loyal to her though now she never was any more to him like a religion, but he never could forget the real sweetness in her. . . . He never can forget the things she taught him so he could be really understanding” (128). The shift from the past tense “never could forget” to the present “never can forget” over the course of four sentences suggests that Jeff has been fundamentally changed by the encounter. Nor, moreover, is he the sole beneficiary, as although “Jeff never any more had the sense of a real religion for her. . . [he] always had strong in him the meaning of all the new kind of beauty Melanctha Herbert once had shown him, and always more and more it helped him with his working for himself and for all the colored people” (129). This is the last reference to Jeff in the story. It is symmetrical with the earlier moment in which he proposes their *paideia*, insofar as his encounter with Melanctha’s lessons and the “beauty” of her religion is to the benefit of his work. Melanctha, in other words, has expanded and revised the definition of “good” *eris*. Despite the pain and bleeding, heartache and rending of hair, the rational can benefit from the encounter with the prerational on its own terms and on its own ground—and not just for the transient pleasures of

³¹ Melanctha’s priestly role reinforces the allusion Martin Luther’s collaborator, the theologian and educational reformer Philip Melancthon, whose *nom de plume* is a Hellenization of his given name, Schwarzerd (“black earth”). See John Carlos Rowe for an excellent chapter on naming in *Three Lives*, as well as a useful corrective to strictly autobiographical readings of “Melanctha.” Rowe likewise points out the punning on Melanctha’s wandering and her divinity. In Jeff’s understanding of her “as religion, rather than merely a devout representative of the church, he reminds us of the Greek classical association of divinity with ‘wandering’ as suggested by the term for philosophical truth, *aletheia*, which is derived from the Greek roots *alea* and *thea* and may be approximately translated as the ‘wandering divine’” (Rowe 37).

springtime trysts.³² The fact that Jeff simply disappears from the story, which goes on to play with a second marriage plot before tossing that, too, aside, undermines any conventional narrative. Socrates, one imagines, would not admit “Melanctha” into his Republic. In refusing what Jean-François Lyotard calls the “solace” of good form, Stein embraces prerational aesthetics (*Postmodern* 81). She deflates our identification with the characters in order to emphasize a structural situation that, although it is often discussed in terms of race, class, and gender, also maps onto the *agon* between play mentalities.³³

I have argued that Jeff and Melanctha’s relationship stages that struggle. Stein casts their philosophical dialogue as a form of education or *paideia* that brings together disparate ways of knowing. I have called their competing epistemologies “linguistic” and “physical,” but Stein also uses the metaphor of religion, which again, can seem inherently irrational. Such is Jeff’s position at the start of the affair, as he says “And as for religion, that just ain’t my way of being good, Miss Melanctha, but it’s a good way for many people to be good and regular in their way of living, and if they believe it, it helps them to be good, and if they’re honest in it, I like to see them have it” (74-75). For Jeff, religion is valid when it has the utilitarian purpose of propping up a rational mentality. Stein’s metaphor, however, encourages us to see the prerational “religion” in which Melanctha instructs her pupil as an internally consistent epistemology, and thus “rational” in its way. Although he is certainly a conflicted rationalist, Joyce’s Stephen

³² Biographically, Stein similarly benefitted from the tumultuous affair with Bookstaver. The rational can also change the prerational, as Melanctha will go on to play a Jeff-like role in her relationship with Jem Richards. As Perloff argues, Stein’s prose “seeks to enact the rhythm of human change, to show how a relationship, any relationship between two people who are at once the same and different, evolves” (*Poetics* 93).

³³ Obviously my reading has emphasized play at the expense of race, class, and gender. Studies most relevant to these include Saldívar-Hull, North, DeKoven, *Rich and Strange*, Douglas, and Lemke. Stein’s self-consciousness about deflating conventions of the “story books” comes out early and explicitly in *The Making of Americans*, with a sardonic nod to Jane Eyre’s famous “Reader, I married him.” When Julia Dehning is introduced as a prototypical “American girl,” the narrator immediately warns: “truly she may work out as the story books would have her or we may find all different kinds of things for her, and so reader, please remember, the future is not yet certain for her, and be you well warned reader, from the vain-glory of being sudden in your judgment of her” (66).

Dedalus captures this point by calling Catholicism “an absurdity which is logical and coherent” (*Portrait* 215). The paradox of a logical absurdity is precisely what Stein is pursuing. Here it helps to recall that the subtitle of the story, “Each One As She May,” is not merely a reference to Melanctha’s origins as May Bookstaver, but also an embrace of multivalent truth and the attendant need to adjudicate differing rational systems. Stein, with her own rational play mentality, learned much from her burgeoning sense of the prerational. Her fascination with play thus far in her intellectual life is based in the need to find and promote ways of knowing and of being in the world beyond the discursive regimes available to her. She planned and crafted the *paideia* between Melanctha and Jeff throughout 1905. The following year she would come across a further touchstone in Otto Weininger, who would allow her to claim not just the status of the exception in her generation, but to participate in a maternal ideal after all.

Exceptional Conception: Stein as Dada-Mama

The ludic modernism of “Melanctha” exemplifies Stein’s bifurcated sense of play, stirrings of which are evident as early as her pitting the physicality of the maternal ideal against the rational mediation of the late-Victorian domestic economy and its *paideia*. After finishing *Three Lives*, Stein returned to *The Making of Americans*, notebook entries for which exist from 1903 (Katz, “Introduction” xxiii). In “Melanctha,” prerational play symbolically usurped the forms of education as a strategy to counter the constraints inflicted upon individuals, society, and culture by the ideological mediation of rational play, potentially mitigating those strictures in the process. In the longer work, Stein’s emphasis turned to the intergenerational aspects of education, which were inflected by her reading of Weininger, who validated and helped her extend her typological project of “realizing the whole of human being . . . the kinds in men and

women” (*TMOA* 493).³⁴ Here, I want to briefly address Weininger, *The Making of Americans*, and *A Long Gay Book*, with an eye toward Stein’s idiosyncratic maternal ideal.

Weininger opened *Sex and Character* by rejecting the categories of male and female, arguing instead for a new understanding of sex as a continuum between the idealized types “M” and “W.” From the vantage of sex, real individuals “may be regarded as swaying between two points, no actual individual being at either point, but somewhere between the two. The task of science is to define the position of any individual between these two points” (9). He then crafted a typology to accomplish that task. The implications of his single-sex theory were immediately attractive to Stein, as Weininger argued that homosexuality is not “acquired,” nor “inherited,” nor “pathological” (46). Rather, sexual preferences and practices need to be understood with that continuum in mind, and “sexual inverts of both sexes are to be defined as individuals . . . in whom there is as much maleness as femaleness, or indeed who, although reckoned as men, may contain an excess of femaleness, or as women and yet be more male than female” (47). The idea of being “reckoned” as male or female aligns with Stein’s example of forcing a sex distinction on children in the cradle (following Stetson and presaging Butler). Weininger’s schema offered Stein a way of understanding herself on his continuum as a “man-like woman.” His claim that “homo-sexuality in a woman is the outcome of her masculinity and presupposes a higher degree of development” provided purportedly scientific backing of her exceptional nature (2; 66).³⁵

³⁴ Leon Katz dates Stein’s reading of Weininger to the winter of 1907-08 (“Weininger” 8), while Wineapple sees Leo Stein acquiring the translation of *Sex and Character* in the spring of 1906 (*SB* 263). Like other critics, both agree Weininger helped consolidate Stein’s views of “bottom nature” (*TMOA* 165). Wagner-Martin cites Stein’s notebooks, where as early as 1903 she was making diagrams not just of her friends’ “bottom nature[s]” but also their “sexual base[s]”: “she listed Mabel Haynes as ‘masculine’ . . . but described her own nature as ‘pure servant female. I like insolence [*sic*] I find it difficult to work up energy enough to dominate” (63).

³⁵ One of his examples is George Sand, and recall that *Three Lives* was initially titled “The Progress of Jane Sands being the history of one woman and many others” (*SB* 222). Jane Sands later appears in *A Long Gay Book* (17).

The few superficially progressive aspects of Weininger's single-sex theory rapidly run off of their rails, but in a direction that was nonetheless useful for Stein. "Emancipation," he claims, "is not the wish for an outward equality with man, but what is of real importance in the woman question, the deep-seated craving to acquire man's character, to attain his mental and moral freedom" (65). Although Stein saw women's economic dependence as historically contingent, Weininger shared with her the recognition of a maternal ideal, arguing that "the woman is devoted wholly to sexual matters, that is to say, to the spheres of begetting and of reproduction. Her relations to her husband and children complete her life, whereas the male is something more than sexual" (88-89).³⁶ Women, for whom "thinking and feeling are identical," lack the capacity for genius: "Woman, in short, has an unconscious life, man a conscious life, and the genius the most conscious life" (100; 113). Barbara Will has amply demonstrated the utility that Weininger's conception of genius had for Stein, citing notebook entry from 1907-08: "Picasso and Matisse have a maleness that belongs to genius. Moi aussi perhaps" (Will 58). Will argues that "By laying claim to 'genius,' Stein is able to type herself, but in a way that allows her to shed the ties of what had earlier constrained her claim to authority."³⁷ Weininger showed multiple ways to escape the selfsame maternal ideal that Stein had advocated for others, letting her claim exceptional status as a manly woman and thereby authorize the expression of her genius. Moving from "Value" through "Degeneration" and "Melanctha" to her reading of Weininger helps us shift our conception of Stein from "Mama Dada" to dada-mama.

³⁶ Weininger's idealism thus parallel's Plato's, taking that which is historically and socially contingent as immutable or natural, then hiding the attendant manifestation of power (mediated as ideology) behind a sheen of rationality.

³⁷ Of Weininger's larger impact, Will concludes, "*Sex and Character* may have helped Stein rethink her own 'characterology' [in *TMOA*] for a time, providing her with new analytical categories and terms, but the lasting effect of Weininger's text lies in enabling her to move beyond her typology" (65-66).

Again, Stein's sense of *paideia* is carried through "Melanctha" into what I will call the "toys" of *Tender Buttons*. Her longstanding, related concern for generational inheritance suffuses *The Making of Americans*. It appears in an anecdote she formulated in a 1903 notebook manuscript and later revised to open the novel:

Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard. "Stop!" cried the groaning old man at last, "Stop! I did not drag my father beyond this tree."

It is hard living down the tempers we are born with. (3)³⁸

The physical brutality of a man dragging his father across the ground is an unmediated expression of prerational *aristeia*, both men seemingly resigned to the expression of *moira* (fate). The shock is only slightly mitigated by the subsequent knowledge that it is a ritual action. Indeed, the father's "moral"—the prescription of a boundary—describes the iteratively-produced and enforced limits of acceptable behavior. Such limits are culturally specific as well as disciplinary. That the characters are a man and his father reinforces the patriarchal basis of the economy and inheritance. That they are in an orchard owned by the father reinforces that a man's rights to property and to production extend even over nature. The simplicity of the father's response suggests an implicit rationale, as if the son need not question the logic of passing by this tree or that with his father in tow. But as with any "logic," coherence does not preclude contingency (and the ancient pedigree of the individual ownership of land, evident in the first lines of *Works and Days*, cited above, certainly and unfortunately makes it appear "natural").

The anecdote is presented as a fairy tale, with "upon a time" implied by the opening "Once," while the setting recalls the ur-fairy tale of patriarchy: the Garden of Eden. Following Weininger's ostensible authorization of her artistic genius, Stein can open her novel as both the

³⁸ Steven Meyer traces the genesis of the anecdote from one of Stein's college themes to her source, Montaigne ("Of Habits"), who borrowed it from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*TMOA* xxxiv).

angry man, about to break his father's aesthetic restrictions and narrative traditions, as well as Eve, subverting the order of things with her own proverbial apple of knowledge.³⁹ The father's "groaning" echoes the *dénouement* of nineteenth century culture in the face of Stein's modernist experiment. The inheritance plot will not be the least of her apples to fall farther from the father's tree. This fairy tale opening is followed by a reflection on the relative youth of American traditions, which have taken "scarcely sixty years to create" (3):

Some of these our fathers and mothers, were not even made then, and the women, the young mothers, our grandmothers we perhaps just have seen once, carried these our fathers and our mothers in to the new world inside them, those women of the old world strong to bear them. Some looked very weak and little women, but even these so weak and little, were strong always, to bear many children. (3)

Out of the opening deflation of patriarchy comes the procreative power of the maternal ideal to create and populate a new world.

Stein closes the novel by asserting that her quasi-Linnaean and eminently rational project is possible, asserting "Each one of them, each kind of them is one that can have a description. Each one of each kind of them can have a description" (910). She would later claim that the decision to move on to *A Long Gay Book* came with that realization; that "it was possible to describe every kind there is of men and women" ("Gradual" 251). In other words, she stopped playing when she glimpsed the limits of her rational typology. Here, as in "Melanctha" and in her subsequent work, Stein presented a rational structure with prerational aesthetics. As Marjorie Perloff has it, her repetitive style is "set up so as to create semantic gaps," thereby denying the comforting closures of narrative form (*Poetics* 98). The presentation of a rational play mentality

³⁹ Ruddick notes another fairly-tale moment, actually beginning "Once upon a time," in *A Long Gay Book*. I cannot take it up, but Ruddick sees there a "preoedipal phase, before the female body was trivialized" (Ruddick 170; *LGB* 112-13). She misreads the precise nature of Stein's "hermetic" style, however, claiming it contains feminist "ideas so explosive and yet so preliminary that Stein felt safe with them only under the protection of a hieroglyphic style" (139). That "explosiveness" is the rhetoric I am trying to defuse, but while it is true that hermeticism can be a protective shield or mask, this misses the crucial fact that the anti-patriarchal aspects are *in* the performance; they are the "hieroglyphic style" itself.

through prerational play is a hallmark of ludic modernism. The aesthetics of *A Long Gay Book* follow suit, where Stein asserts that she wanted to turn from the individual types of *The Making of Americans* to the relationships between individuals. The relationship with which she “did however immediately begin again” was the maternal one, reprising the themes of “Value” and “Degeneration,” along with the competing epistemologies of “Melanctha” (“Gradual” 250).

Like “Melanctha,” *A Long Gay Book* opens with a birth: “When they are very little just only a baby you can never tell which one is to be a lady.” Being itself is immediately asserted to be a matter of becoming, as “lady” is a construct: ladies do not wander (nor, presumably, do they wonder much, either). Each individual’s social conditioning is a product of being “kissed and dandled and fixed by others who knew them” (13). The implication is that a baby is a blank slate. Stein recasts the “bottom nature” of *The Making of Americans* as a variable “fundamental nature”: “always there is mixed up with them other kinds of nature with the kind of fundamental nature of them, giving a flavor to them, sometimes giving many flavors to them, sometimes giving many contradictions to them, sometimes keeping a confusion in them and some of them never make it come right inside them” (16). This now-familiar theoretical terrain of being “fixed” by culture carries shades of Weininger, since the way one’s fundamental nature is flavored recalls the single-sex continuum.

The narrator proceeds in a typological manner, differentiating two categories of people based on their reactions to the knowledge of their infancy. In order to clarify a murky text, I will impose my terminology. Rational-type people are uncomfortable with the thought:

there are some who have from such a knowing an uncertain curious kind of feeling in them that their having been so little once and knowing nothing makes it all a broken world for them that they have inside them, kills for them the everlasting feeling; and they spend their life in many ways, and always they are trying to make for themselves a new everlasting feeling. (13)

The realization of a “broken world” or lost unity reinforces that one’s identity is constructed, at least partially, by forces outside of one’s control. This first, rational group tries to recapture their “everlasting feeling” through procreation, as “One way perhaps of winning is to make a little one to come through them, little like the baby that once was all them and lost them their everlasting feeling” (13). We learn momentarily, “Later in life when one is proud as a man or as a lady it is not right that they ever could have dandled and kissed and fixed them, helpless, just a baby. Such ones never can want to feel themselves ever to have been a baby” (14).

In contrast to the terror that rational-types feel, prerational-types need not actually procreate and “can win from just the feeling, the little one need not come, to give it to them” (13). These are “some who do not feel it to be bad inside them to have been a baby without any conscious feeling of themselves inside them, to have been a little thing and that was all there was then of them, they are some who have not any proud kind of feeling in them.” Rather, these prerational-types can accept, and even enjoy having had “others to feel gently toward them, who kissed and dandled and fixed the helpless bundle they were then,” and in contrast to the self-conscious pride of their counterparts, “They are those who are within them weak or tender as the strongest thing inside them and to them” (14). Winning through feeling is a form of prerational *aristeia*, albeit a softer manifestation than we saw in the orchard. This structural situation recalls Spariosu’s contention that a “rational mentality experiences the transition to mediated forms of power as a loss of presence and a yearning for (absolute) authority. The prerational historical past becomes idealized either in the sentimental notion of a ‘golden age’ or in the philosophical notion of a ‘totality of Being,’ of a ‘unity of world and self’” (*DR* 11). For Stein, a rational-type individual coming to terms with having been a baby must also see the “transition to mediated forms of power”—in this case, of being fixed in the contingent categories of “man” or “lady.”

The response she describes, of terror at this “broken world,” is precisely the idealization of what was actually a prerational past—baby-as-blank-slate—as a unified whole.⁴⁰ Likewise, when Stein comments that the prerational types who can accept this state of affairs are “weak and tender,” her vocabulary betrays a rational-mentality repression of the prerational as childlike.

Stein thus delimits two categories of people, based on how they accept the knowledge of having been “fixed.” She presents this binary in a stylistically disorienting manner. Her reliance on C. S. Peircian shifters like “some” and “they” introduces a performative dimension to her description, both between and within paragraphs. The reader comes to yearn for the lost unity of good narrative form, finding the opening of *A Long Gay Book* itself a “broken world.”⁴¹ It is clear, however, that Stein establishes the distinction at a broad level, with identifiably prerational and rational types. The pride that drives rational-types to have a baby is like that of Jeff Campbell, whose rational mentality can keep reasserting itself because it offers a way of knowing the world in a coherent and unquestioned manner. The “everlasting” or “conscious” feeling that is lamented and sought again is akin to a static and ethereal ideal of Being, as opposed to a fluid prerational sense of becoming, integrated with the world (13-14). As she had with Jeff and Melanctha’s playing at love, Stein presages Spariosu’s ludic schema by casting the search for lost unity as a game, as something that can be “won,” whether by rational-types through procreation or by prerational-types through “just the feeling” (13).

⁴⁰ With his invocation of a “totality of Being” and “unity of world and self,” Spariosu is clearly alluding to Heidegger. I cannot take up the connection between the latter and Stein, beyond noting that Stein’s sense of the certainty of sense perception unfolding in time likewise presages Heidegger, just as I noted Rowe’s reading of wandering and *aletheia*, above.

⁴¹ This disorientation is soon heightened by the reference to the proper names of what seem to be actual people, but who are denied the status of “characters” as one would expect in fiction. The confusion is compounded in the last third of the book by the inclusion of Stein’s later styles.

Whether or not one is terrified to play this game, “winning” must constitute the reconciliation of the ontological fact of being-as-becoming with the epistemological problem of understanding one’s chance and contingent origins. Despite Stein’s new terminology, this much has been consistent at least since the “theory of obligation” in *Q.E.D.* Here, Stein is more explicit that there are many ways to win, and that some are preferable to others. She writes, “There are many kinds of men and many kinds of women and each kind of them have a different feeling in them about the baby that was once all them. . . . Each one of the many millions of each kind of them have it in them a little to be different from all the other millions of their kind of them” (14-15). Given the millions of types of individuals, each with “different feeling,” Stein invokes a Badiouian sense of difference as the ground of experience: in his phrase, “Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*” (*Ethics* 25, emphasis in original). Stein continues, “but all of each kind of them have it in them to have the same kind of feeling about the little thing that was once all them” (15). Despite this infinite alterity, and despite the infinite difference between multivalent, competing and contradictory claims to the truth of Being, there runs the common thread of needing truth-claims in the first place. When she refers to the “same kind of feeling” each individual potentially has, Stein plays with the denotative slippage between feeling and knowing. We have the capacity to agree upon the rational systems that help us accept having grown up from a “little thing.” This is clearer in Stein’s rather morbid example of Hattie and Mrs. Claudel:

Hattie if she dreamed that her mother was dead would not put on mourning. Mrs. Claudel if she believed in dreams as much as Hattie and had dreamed that her mother was dead would put on mourning.

Some would be surprised that some could dream that their mother was dead and then not put on mourning. Some would be surprised that any one having dreamed that their mother was dead could think about then putting on mourning. (17)

One person’s logical absurdity is another’s ground for action. That Hattie might regard Mrs. Claudel as superstitious—rather than rational—does not invalidate the power of superstition, and

the potential remains that an infinite multitude might settle on a common superstition. So again, coherence need not preclude contingency.

The comparison of Hattie and Mrs. Claudel is simply another way of illustrating Stein's theoretical point that we live in a world where Being is becoming and where a baby's identity is fixed according to arbitrary convention. Similar conventions, like going into mourning, can be comforting and can guide later actions. Stein next reinforces that such conventions are not just taught; although they are products of *paideia*, they are also performed: "Any one being started in doing something is going on completely doing that thing, a little doing that thing, doing something that is that thing." Yet while some people (identifiable as her prerational-types) recognize that actions are taught, others (rational-types) deny any "teaching" and understand such interpellation as natural: "Some are ones being certain that any one doing a thing and having been started in doing that thing are ones not having been taught to do that thing, are ones who have come to do that thing" (18). The possibility that some conventions might be defended as "natural" turns on the relationship between tradition and reason. Stein describes the former: "Doing something is interesting to some when they are certain that all having been doing that thing have been completely dead and have not been forgotten." The pride of the rational-types reenters with the certainty that one's own idiosyncratic rational order is correct: "Doing something is interesting to some when they are certain that every one should do that thing" (19). As Socrates knew, tradition can ground and propagate reason as natural, certain, and immutable.

We are all born into traditions, "naturally" finding them coherent and rational in spite of the vagaries and differences in how we respond to our lack of choice in the matter. Without some scaffolding, no construction gets off the ground—even when the site is the self. Yet as Stein insisted in "Value," traditions and their conventions can go far to restrict "the individual and his

claim to the fullest life within his reach” (8). While one cannot escape epistemological necessity, the genius can hope to inflect traditions and the rationalities that they propagate, with an eye toward instituting new ones. Stein opens *A Long Gay Book* by restating these findings first under the guise of procreation, and secondly education, before approaching the strategy through which she engages her *paideia* in *Tender Buttons*: the questionable certainty of not just reason and rational systems, but of perception itself. She offers a fair description of Enlightenment science, writing, “A man in his living has many things inside him. He has in him his being certain that he is being one seeing what he is looking at just then. . . . This feeling of being certain of seeing what he is looking at just then comes from the being in him that is being then in him, comes from the mixing in him of being then one being living and being one then being certain of that thing” (*LGB* 20). “Certainty” is itself contingent upon one’s being—the culturally-conditioned mix of one’s flavors—as it is manifest in time, “just then.” It is folded into the experience of being as correct and natural. Stein recognizes the contingency of “being certain of seeing,” as “In all of the men being living some are more certain than other ones who are very much like them are more certain of seeing the thing at which they are looking” (20). Observation itself is gendered and the certainty one might have in reason is eminently masculine.

A Long Gay Book is dated 1909-12. As it progresses, it displays a range of distinct “styles” from this fertile period of Stein’s literary experimentation, from the early typologizing and repetition, to later nursery rhyme (“All the times that come are the times I sing, all the singing I sing are the tunes I sing” [107]), to the increasing insistence on the style, vocabulary, and thematic concerns of *Tender Buttons*: arranging, spreading, cutting, thickness, covering, and coloring, among others (*LGB* 82ff., *passim*). Within the narrative that I have sketched in this chapter, *A Long Gay Book* is the work in which Stein most clearly moves out of the early phase

of her writing and into the first triumph of her middle career.⁴² Whereas it opens with Stein's suggestion that a baby is acculturated by being "kissed and dandled and fixed," recall that for Socrates, mothers and nursemaids "shape their children's souls" with stories "much more than they shape their bodies by handling them" (*Republic* II.377c). Stein never chose to win back her "everlasting feeling" through physical procreation, and my argument is that she embraced her self-appointed exceptional status to exercise her maternal ideal as a dada-mama, crafting toys. As we have seen, education permeated her early work.⁴³ *Tender Buttons* will become an education in seeing the world differently, of seeing traditions and conventions—including not just reason and rational systems of thought (however necessary), but also one's actual understanding of sense perception—as mediated by rational play, and thus ideologically inflected. The poems themselves will become the toys through which Stein propagates this prerational *paideia*, creating a new tradition by which a new, non-patriarchal and self-critical "reason" might form the taste of a new generation.

In the Nursery of the Avant-Garde

The task of this chapter has been to affirm that the subversive power of Stein's work lies not only in its militaristic relationship to the past (where it is so often found), but also arises from her prerationally productive and playful sense of pedagogy. And so in a Steinian move of beginning again, I want to close by reflecting on the toy-like qualities of *Tender Buttons*. Roland Barthes' essay "Toys" (1957), offers a point of comparison because it describes mid-century

⁴² *A Long Gay Book* is widely recognized as a bridge. Bridgman declines to demarcate the appearance of later styles (102), while George B. Moore traces their genesis slowly (199-212).

⁴³ And permeates her late work, for that matter, from "Composition as Explanation" to her lecture series. Laura Frost argues, "Her line in 'Sacred Emily,' 'Tickle tickle tickle you for education,' brings to mind Darwin's and other scientists' speculations that tickling has a pedagogical purpose" (82). The content of education is likewise important, as "remembering reading" is crucial for situating oneself within society (*LGB* 25).

French toys as props in the rational-play ideology of consumer capitalism. He writes, “French toys *always mean something*, and this something is always entirely socialized” (53; emphasis in original). As mimetic objects in miniature, they re-present adult functions. Dolls, for example, are “meant to prepare the little girl for the causality of house-keeping, to ‘condition’ her to her future role as mother. However, faced with this world of faithful and complicated objects, the child can only identify himself as owner, as user, never as creator; he does not invent the world, he uses it” (53-54). Barthes laments the use of plastic in toys’ construction—“a graceless material, the product of chemistry, not of nature”—which has replaced wood, “an ideal material because of its firmness and its softness, and the natural warmth of its touch” (54). The “very material” of plastic toys “introduces one to a coenaesthesia of use, not pleasure. These toys die in fact very quickly, and once dead, they have no posthumous life for the child” (55). He derides the type of toy that prevails under a rational play mentality, where mimesis-imitation carries out disciplinary ends. The “goodness” of “good” *eris* is found in utility, which here consists of putting play to work supporting the economic and domestic order. Rational mediation even denies the tactile, physical pleasures of play, muting the joy of *aristeia*, broadly defined. In short, Barthes recapitulates the Socratic conception of *paideia* as I summarized it from Spariosu, as it is found again in Lydia Maria Childs and Mary Blake, and which Stein attacked in “Value.”⁴⁴ Here again, each individual is fixed, submitting at the price of self-expression. The child stops dragging his father at the prescribed tree. Consumption subsumes creation like a worm boring through an apple’s core. Lacking “posthumous life,” plastic toys reinforce the cycle of consumption and obsolescence that grounds a society—our own as much as Barthes’—that only

⁴⁴ Barthes’ critique of mimetic, utilitarian toys was echoed in America. Jacob W. Getzels and Philip W. Jackson find a “press of practicality” taking over the toy box. They write: “There is ample evidence that the criteria of factualism and usefulness—if you will, of vocationalism . . . are being insinuated into many childhood experiences once viewed as the happy hunting ground for ‘childish’ play” (121). See also Ogata on toys in the postwar period.

authorizes those dreams and fantasies that can be monetized, in which creativity is measured by quarterly report.⁴⁵

Under this rational regime, even the pictures and images of the imagination must be representational. Anything that looks “unnatural” must be useless or worthless, meaningless or nonsense. To cure our ludic malaise, Barthes prescribes a dose of prerational play. He argues that even an unrefined set of blocks is better than plastic dolls and fully-articulated replicas because it inculcates “a very different learning of the world” (54). With it:

the child does not in any way create meaningful objects, it matters little to him whether they have an adult name; the actions he performs are not those of a user but those of a demiurge. He creates forms which walk, which roll, he creates life, not property . . . [Wood] is a familiar and poetic substance, which does not sever the child from close contact with the tree, the table, the floor. . . . it can last a long time, live with the child, alter little by little the relations between the object and the hand. If it dies it is in dwindling, not in swelling out like those mechanical toys which disappear behind the hernia of a broken spring. (54-55)

This is a vision of a very different *paideia*, with a very different toy: formally unrefined and indefinable, it defies the regime of the proper name, risking worthlessness in favor of fluid inspiration; its medium is supple, earthy, tactile—tender, even—and with it, the expression and enjoyment of play is malleable from moment to moment, impossible to pin down or seal up.

As a critic and denizen of that exemplar of rational play—academe—Barthes is eminently serious. Despite the arty playfulness of his rhetoric and topic, his writing is a model of clarity and forthright in its mission to set play free. Extending such ruminations from high theory to art, however, one might end up with a toy that looks like this:

A TIME TO EAT

A pleasant simple habitual and tyrannical and authorised and educated and resumed and articulate separation. This is not tardy.

⁴⁵ The constricting *paideia* that Barthes describes is precisely what the new aestheticism seeks to overcome in its calls for open and egalitarian aesthetic education.

(Stein, *Tender Buttons* 472)

Like Barthes's ideal toy, Stein's "prose poem" refuses both of those categories, just as it refuses to represent the ritual to which it supposedly refers, shunning the proper names of breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It even refuses the chapter heading under which it is found within *Tender Buttons*: "Objects." I will look at its undisciplined language through a structuralist lens, tinted with ludic modernism. According to Randa Dubnick, *Tender Buttons* suppresses what Roman Jakobson called the "axis of combination," the grammar according to which words in a sentence are linked by the functions of parts of speech. Instead, Stein emphasizes the "axis of selection," choosing words from a wide lexical palette only to combine them in unsanctioned ways (Dubnick 14).⁴⁶ There is a subversive power to Stein's recombinations, which will run throughout my argument. Building on Dubnick's account, Pondrom argues, "The act of suppressing or greatly restricting the axis of combination has both aesthetic and political significance, since it refuses the traditional hierarchies of both the sentence and narrative structure and thereby simultaneously *performs* a challenge to cultural and political hierarchies more generally" ("Introduction" xxxiii). Rather than accept the hierarchies enforced by the rational order and authorized by tradition, Stein reclaims what Nietzsche called the "lordly right of giving names," laying bare our complicity in masking the contingent privilege that mediates prerational play (462).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Tender Buttons* thus reverses the strategy of her earlier prose works, which repeated and recombined a small number of words.

⁴⁷ I addressed perception in *A Long Gay Book*. Pondrom does so for *Tender Buttons*, claiming, these "small still lives" are "veritable manifestoes about the subjectivity of the act of perception, whether of writer or reader, and they convey their meaning, not by what they say but by what they do and what they force the reader to do. In the process they force us to recognize that language is not a transparent medium through which we see reality but approximations of meaning through customary, habitual and retrospective usage" ("Meaning" 118).

In terms of grammar, the first line of “A Time to Eat” is only the illusion of a sentence because it improperly combines eight adjectives and five conjunctions to link the article “A” to the noun “separation.” By “illusion,” I mean both that this looks like an example of rational play (a “prose poem”; a sentence) and also to pun on illusion as *in-ludere*: against playing. Stein is playing against a rationality that denies the illusory nature of its truths. Semantically, this “sentence” is nonsense. Since it lacks a verb, one might say that nothing happens, but in fact Stein shows that “what happens” in sentences is not the transparent representation of the world, but linguistic performance. The reader cannot readily see through this language, and with this heightened awareness of the prose poem’s material composition, is given an active role alongside Stein in creating meaning—calling it forth, in Spariosu’s phrase (*DR* 17). Like a child with a set of wooden blocks, the reader plays around with the building blocks of language, raising up and casting down forms, freely exercising her own imagination with the materials at hand, unconstrained by predetermined ends.

Stein breaks the seals on these words and opens them up to new possibilities, in effect testing her readers: What exactly do the proper names of pleasure, simplicity, habit, tyranny, authority, education, resumption, and articulateness denote? They do not represent “A Time to Eat,” although Ulla Dydo’s invocation of centripetal language suggests that they may simply refer to themselves, to language on a page.⁴⁸ Indeed, language can be “pleasant,” more so when it is “simple” and “articulate.” It is “habitual” and “authorized,” propagated through and by the “educated.” Its authority is “resumed” each time words are invoked under the aegis of the dictionary. But then there is that eighth term, “tyrannical,” and in the terms of my argument,

⁴⁸ Dydo uses Stein’s own term, “composition,” for such self-referentiality: “Words as signs refer to the world in which Stein lived. But in a composition, words refer to other words. They no longer point outward to the world, denotatively and centrifugally, but inward, centripetally, to one another” (“To Have” 71).

language can become a type of ideological tyranny that refuses to acknowledge the contingency of its habitual authority. Stein's linguistic play denies that linguistic authority is immutable. Reading "A Time to Eat" (as with much of Stein's oeuvre), one might wish that it were more invested in simplicity and articulateness—justifiably so. Yet there is a slight frisson of complicity when we consider that the authoritative definitions of what is simple or articulate—the ones we learned in school—are constructions of rational play, the linguistic correlative of plastic dolls and toy guns. The desire for proper simplicity and articulateness is a desire for rational mimesis-imitation, to ignore and elide the contingency of the proper name. And even as Stein's undisciplined use of adjectival forms exposes the contingency of these words' nominative denotations, that string of eight adjectives mediates between noun and article, delaying the definition of "A . . . separation." In modifying the word "separation" as authorized, educated, tyrannical, and so forth, this illusion of a sentence performs a prerational version of mediation.

Later, in the "Food" section, Stein turns to the most important sanctioned time to eat of the day, "Breakfast," to offer another figure for rational play: "What is the custom, the custom is in the centre" (483). Custom, habit, tradition, and reason each provide stable ground for action and knowledge.⁴⁹ They "center" us, but in Stein's performances, we learn that the epistemological benefits of centering come at the price of separation from experience. Jeff's reason initially causes him to recoil from the prerational bliss in Melanctha's touch. The last section of *Tender Buttons*, "Rooms," opens with the explicit prescription: "Act so that there is no use in a centre" (498). The first implication is that, regardless of whether centers are useful, the book asks us to act or perform as if they were not, to play at complete conversion to a prerational mentality. Indeed, such is the ultimate Dadaist action of throwing off the past and sense with it.

⁴⁹ She adds another term later: "what is ancient is practical" (500).

In my view, however, Stein's maternal ideal is more nuanced, suggesting instead we treat "use" and "centers" as equally arbitrary. If epistemological systems—logical absurdities—are necessary as well as useful, perhaps one might begin to reconceive of "utility" itself in a prerational manner, repeating Socrates' move of shunning the violence of unmediated physical prerational play while retaining play's productive capacity in a less-mediated form. "Less" mediated, yet not naïve: performative in such a way to expose the power that still inheres through ideology despite no longer being nakedly physical. This, I argue, is the pedagogical project toward which Stein puts her toys: inculcating a de-centered sight that could go as far as possible to approximate unmediated access to experience. There must be *some* mediation, as indeed, these are linguistic artifacts. The crucial distinction is that Stein's toys admit enough of the prerational in their malleable medium and their nonsensical refusal of representation that they can also counter the tyranny of reason that Socrates, for his part, embraces. Stein's lesson plan is to reveal, qualify, and strip away the ideologies that come with a "center." That she does so through her own *paideia* shows her turning the tables—or, in a more current cliché, flipping the classroom—putting patriarchal means to maternal ends. A toy gun already perpetrates a kind of ideological violence; it need not fire. But a tender button can be a trigger.

"A Time to Eat" closes with the sentence, "This is not tardy" (472). Although grammatically correct, it too refuses to represent, as "this" refers not to anything in the world or to the words of the previous statement. Instead, it is a metapoetic commentary on the timeliness of Stein's performance. It is just now or *modo*: modern. It is ludic modernism. By asking her readers to be creators and not merely users, by appealing to the unmediated experience of language and toying with its tactile material, we are taught that its authority is no less arbitrary, structurally, than defining a proper time to take food. Stein is prerationally performing the point

that she had made in rational language in “Value.” The convention of gendering children (“mak[ing] them into little men and women in their cradles at a time when they ought normally to be only human beings” [6]) and delimiting “A Time to Eat” are structurally equivalent. Both examples of rational play suggest “a man instead of eating to live living to eat” (“Value” 7). Rational mediation separates the individual from her humanity (and sustenance). Once we accept that *Tender Buttons* eschews the representation logic of rational mimesis-imitation in favor of the *methetic* immediacy of prerational play, the book’s aesthetic significance and its challenge to artistic categories and hierarchies are clear. Its challenge to “political hierarchies,” however, remains highly abstract. To cite any socio-political agency in the book is, almost necessarily, to accept such structural equivalences; hence the importance of my invocation of *paideia* as education: Stein wants to teach her readers to see the world differently. To import Isobel Armstrong’s vision for a “radical aesthetic,” Stein’s play “is not simply subversive linguistic play, but the transformation of categories, which constitutes a change in the structure of the thought itself: it is not only an aspect of knowledge but the prerequisite of political change” (41).

Much of *Tender Buttons* repeats the formula of “A Time to Eat,” linking a performance of the change in language that Stein seeks to effect through her pedagogy with a metapoetic emphasis that she is doing so. These emphases appear in varying forms: from the literal (“The change has come”), to the defensive (“not unordered in not resembling”), to the metaphorical (the many invocations of succession, widening use, diffusion, spilling, and spreading: “The difference is spreading”) (461).⁵⁰ The interplay of emphasis and performance that opens “A Substance in a Cushion” exemplifies power of Stein’s method to subvert categories of thought, despite suppressing of the axis of combination only slightly. First, the emphasis: “The change of

⁵⁰ Likewise, the third and final section of the book, “Rooms” similarly comments upon the performances in “Objects” and “Food,” albeit in a more complex manner.

color is likely and a difference a very little difference is prepared” (461). The hierarchies and inflections of rational play can be understood as “coloring.” In “Value,” Stein saw the categories of either “female” or “male” coloring an individual’s humanity even in the cradle. Jeff’s reason colors Melanctha’s “wandering” as a debased expression of sexuality. Likewise, “When they are very little just only a baby you can never tell which one is [going to be colored as] a lady” (*LGB* 13). Each of these colorations constitutes a manifestation of power. Stein wants to decenter our understanding by exposing the scaffold upholding the structure. Her *paideia* is announced even here: “a very little difference is prepared” indicates that she has prepared these toys to be performed in such a way as to change the coloration of language, to lay bare its inflections in order that we might see “colors” as arbitrarily chosen from a much wider and largely disused palette. If we learn the lesson of this nursery rhyme, it “is likely” that we will see differently.⁵¹

Thus the metapoetic emphasis. Stein next declares, “Sugar is not a vegetable” (461). This definition-through-negation has a positive counterpart in “Glazed Glitter”: “Nickel, what is nickel, it is originally rid of a cover” (461). The phrase “originally rid of a cover” deflates our expectations for a straightforward definition by foregrounding how the copula “is” delimits the possible identity of “nickel.” The effect is to suggest the extent to which the logic of proper grammar is responsible for “coloring.” As for its negative counterpart, within Linnaean classification, the facticity of the statement “Sugar is not a vegetable” is undeniable, but its strangeness as poetry is its power (indeed, reading “science” as poetry is a fair gloss on ludic modernism). The extraction of sugar from cane was always a process of human artifice. By Stein’s time it was utterly industrialized, with not only language, but also technology, global trade, and marketing mediating the noun “sugar” and its categorical complement “vegetable.” In

⁵¹ She returns to preparation-as-education in “Rooms,” writing, “A preparation is given to the ones preparing” (498).

each case, the copula “is” delimits both noun and category. But the poetry resists: who decides when the juice squeezed from a plant ceases to be that plant? How? What separates the vegetable matter of the stalky cane plant from the vegetable status of, say, a stalk of celery? However useful, at some level, the distinctions are imposed. How can one know the sugar from the cane? These are not saccharine reflections, as Stein’s playful performance of scientific fact as poetry demonstrates that reason works through categories, negations, and exclusions, delimiting not just the connotative “color” of a thing, but also its matter and being. Grammar serves as handmaiden to science, inflecting our knowledge of the very matter of sugar, like nickel before it. As Stein later writes: “a color is that strange mixture which makes” (485).⁵²

It is important to recall that in her own regimen of Victorian *paideia*, Mary Blake compared the order and neatness of properly controlled play to both Latin grammar and patriarchal rights of property (Blake 166; 173). Stein rejected such rational-play *paideia* in “Value” and “Degeneration,” blaming that sort of education for producing “the type that is the terror to the trained professional mind, the intelligent mother,” whose education has caused her to confuse “a knowledge of facts for training in method” (“Degeneration” 413). *Tender Buttons* continues these early preoccupations. Combining “sugar” and “vegetable” in the proper way, knowing that they “belong” in different categories, betrays training in facts, which under Stein’s anti-representational rubric, are of newly limited value. The performance of “Sugar is not a vegetable” seeks to substitute knowledge of facts with training in method, creating a Barthesian

⁵² I use “matter,” not substance, to recall Butler, who sees the materialization or “making” of sex performed through language. We are later given a metapoetic emphasis on the construction of gender: “The sister was not a mister. Was this a surprise. It was” (499). Here, as with the lady and man of *A Long Gay Book* or the baby of “Value,” rational mediation transforms physical matter. This is not unlike the Japanese practice of *boro* (in which the patching and mending of an object take over, becoming the object) evoked in “Glazed Glitter”: “There can be breakages in Japanese” (461); and again later: “No cup is broken in more places and mended . . . it shows that culture is Japanese” (470). Cooking plays a similar role throughout. As Stein insists in “Potatoes,” the action is all in the performance: “In the preparation of cheese, in the preparation of crackers, in the preparation of butter, in it” (490).

toy that is enjoyed not for imitating rational-play truth—creating a subject, in Butler’s formulation—but for the creative, performative construction of a more malleable and multivalent truth. By injecting prerational immediacy into a structurally Socratic *paideia*, Stein reveals the performative machinery of the word and world. In the case of sugar cane, that machinery is lubricated by the ideological and physical violence of industrial capitalism, marketing, and global trade. Stein’s response is more ludic than Luddite, however. To be sure, this is not exactly bearing a hammer against technology like an avant-garde warrior blasting and bombardiering, but following Schoenbach’s formulation, it is rather more pragmatic. Her toys let us revel in the soft malleability of wood, rather than the mediated sharpness of metal or sterile utility of plastic.

Even if Stein did not break the copula with a hammer—as Pound wanted to break the back of the pentameter—the copula remains a fastening together (*co-apere*).⁵³ Her toys leave us playing not with the hard rigor of scientific exclusions, but buttoning up language with the maternal *tendresse* of the domestic. Just as a button fills a buttonhole, Stein goes on to play with “filling” in numerous ways, often erotically, as in the punning and panting on “Alice” and “alas” in “Cooking”: “Alas, alas, the pull alas the bell alas . . . alas the little put in leaf alas the wedding butter meat, alas the receptacle, alas the back shape of mussle” (492).⁵⁴ Perloff follows Schmitz to highlight that the eroticism largely arises from the domestic setting “in which food and dressing and love rituals are occurring interchangeably” (*Poetics* 107). Any conception of the maternal ideal must admit sexuality, if not actual eroticism, and the poems themselves are the progeny that results. To Perloff’s list of domestic rituals, we must also add nursery education,

⁵³ Canto 81: “To break the pentameter, that was the first heave” (538). With its feminine ending, “Sugar is not a vegetable,” shows Stein’s preference for toying even with iambic pentameter.

⁵⁴ The eroticism that I suggested is winkingly suppressed in “Melantha” is one of the more overt aspects of *Tender Buttons*. Schmitz deals with Stein’s *entendre* well, although he reads the panting repetition of Alice’s name in “Cooking” as an “impatient lament,” rather than an entreaty (1212).

although again, this filling up of minds is also a feeling out of method. “Roastbeef” reflects: “The whole thing is not understood and this is not strange considering that there is no education” (478). The Victorian regime of a properly Socratic *paideia* is “no education” at all for filling the mind with the mere facts of ideology. At the end of “Mutton,” Stein states her method plainly: “Lecture, lecture and repeat instruction” (483). She closes the book with a further reflection, “translate more than translate the authority, show the choice and make no more mistakes than yesterday” (508). Her translation has taken the authority of purportedly rational orders and given it over to the performances of language and looking, leaving the reader’s individual creative and constructive choices open to revision in each performance.

Stein’s malleable language leaves open the empowering “semantic gaps” that Perloff identifies: “The poet wants us to be able to fill in the gaps in whatever way suits us” (*Poetics* 105-06). So again, each one as she may. There are many possible relationships to a carafe set on a table, which can dominate perception as much as a jar placed on a hill in Tennessee. As she writes toward the end of *A Long Gay Book*, “There is no interpretation”; there is only performance, since “interpretation” implies that language is a clear medium through which meaning is perceived (*LGB* 107). Earlier in “Roastbeef,” she writes, “All the time that there is use there is use and any time there is a surface there is a surface, and every time there is an exception there is an exception and every time there is a division there is a dividing” (478). The tautologies suggest a manner of seeing what is for simply what it is, the decentered sight that interrogates logical categories to shake off historically sedimented, hierarchical associations.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Pondrom goes just as far in her structuralist account, writing, “it is by manipulating both combination and selection that Stein undertakes to expose the fact that the processes of logical thought, which are implicit in the grammar of the sentence and are dependent on appropriate selection from the lexicon, are not ‘natural’ but are construction of the human mind” (“Introduction” xxxiv). Again, Stein is not wholly negative or “deconstructive,” since revealing logical processes to be constructed is not the same as trying to jettison all logic.

She revisits “use” momentarily: “There is no use there is no use at all in smell, in taste, in teeth, in toast, in anything, there is no use at all and the respect is mutual” (479). Any artist upholding play has cause to quibble with utility. By insisting that usefulness only inheres within the arbitrary logic of an absurdity, Stein pushes back against the apparent uselessness and irrationality of her work, subtly calling into question the “goodness” of “good” *eris*, the sort of play that has immediate and practical value.

The critique is next carried to mimesis itself, “Why should that which is uneven, that which is resumed, that which is tolerable why should all this resemble a smell.” Instead of resemblance, one should try to see what there is: “a thing is there, it whistles, it is narrower,” it is what it is (479). Insofar as it blurs Badiouian infinite difference, the rational prescription that mimesis must imitate and resemble, never perform, restricts aesthetic freedom—and is possibly, even, a form of violence: “A sentence of a vagueness that is violence is authority and a mission and stumbling and also certainly also a prison” (481). A sentence written or uttered under a rational-play mentality is “vague” insofar as its language only refers to the discourse in which it operates: a prison. These poems themselves are Stein’s attempt to spring herself and her readers from the prison of representation, yet even here, she recognizes that the opposite is true. Her sentences might become so vague, so unrecognizable in their prerational protest against the rational that she might stumble in her mission. The mistranslation of authority is a prison sentence of obscurity. Again, Melanctha’s touch offered Jeff not an escape from reason, but an alternative mode of understanding his own reaction to her. Stein makes this point in a more visceral and performative manner in *Tender Buttons* than in “Melanctha,” and the difficulty of the later text underlines just how hard it can be to revise one’s long-held epistemological categories, to step out of “center.” The ludic modernism of *Tender Buttons* consists in its playing

prerationally with rational forms. Returning to Kant's terms offers a readier philosophical vocabulary: "In a product of art one must be aware that it is art, and not nature; yet the purposiveness in its form must still seem to be as free from all constraint by arbitrary rules as if it were a mere product of nature" (*Critique of Judgment* 185). *Tender Buttons* suggests that even reason does not transcend "arbitrary rules," but is itself a "mere product of nature." The apparent uselessness, worthlessness, and nonsense—the disinterested purposiveness without a purpose—of Stein's toys turns on their refusal to imitate, suggesting that much of what is often taken to be nature is instead a product of art. Stein's subversion of the order of things does not produce disorder—as would a militaristic, avant-garde attack—only a different order. Breaking the rules is undisciplined only to those who follow them, to those who have a stake in defining the utility of reason to their own benefit. Stein's education, then, consists of teaching us how to use our toys anew. If she initially set out to free herself from the strictures of rationality, toward "the fullest life within [her] reach," her *paideia* ends not with the liberation of the one, but of the many, forming the taste of the future ("Value" 8).

Conclusion

Even from the first stirrings of Stein's artistic vocation, the toys with which she might play were inadequate to her imaginative and expressive needs. This chapter has tried to tease out one logical progression running through a complicated process. That is certainly ironic, given Stein's antipathy to narrative, but she recognized such a possibility in "Composition as Explanation," claiming, "one does not know how it happened until it is well over beginning happening" (514). My little logical absurdity has unearthed and emphasized the internal consistency of Stein's concerns for maternity and procreation as they manifest themselves in

works that let us relearn what we thought we knew about power and language, perception and being. As an individual whose abjection was multifarious, Stein reversed the regime of *paideia* inherited from Childs and Blake, upholding procreation and parturition as the right work of women by reconceiving the maternal ideal as the unmediated joy of prerational play. For herself, she would claim a different “power to produce” (Butler xii): that of the genius crafting prerational toys, putting the structures of reason to unreasonable ends. Spariosu describes how Platonic “good” *eris* carries violence and power in the guise of competition. Stein exploits this essentially playful, *agon*-istic basis of *paideia*. In yet another sort of prerational *aristeia*, she becomes a Presocratic sophist engaging in *agones logon*, what Spariosu calls a battle “waged with winged words rather than with deadly weapons” (*GMN* 58). As language is the agent of rational power, Stein’s battle is indeed with words. Like a great deal of ludic modernism—recall Fritz Senn’s description of *Ulysses* as a “consistently autocorrective work of literature” (121)—her fight is also pedagogical, inculcating a taste for the prerational. In redefining “good” *eris* to include the economically shunted and subordinated domestic work of play, she simultaneously proves herself a good middle-class bourgeois full of “right living” after all (*TMOA* 52). That such play is bifurcated is in part why her project appears paradoxical. In her panoply of bifurcations—reason and emotion, work and play, utility and uselessness—Stein wrings progressive ends from seemingly conservative means. Following Weininger, the list of binaries surely includes *dada* and *mama*. The performance of these paradoxes conflates art and life in a more holistic sense than even Peter Bürger recognizes. She does so not only under the banner of the avant-garde, but also that of ludic modernism. If her paradoxes are maddening, it is because Stein was playing us all along, playing a nurturing warrior, muting, massaging—filling—patriarchy with the maternal ideal: *mama* goosing *dada*.

Chapter Two

Weaving with Ariadne's Thread: The Labyrinths of *Ulysses*

[A] commitment to form is . . . a commitment to emancipatory, progressive political practices united with a scrupulous attention to ethical means. Insofar as formalism insists on paying attention to a way of being in the path rather than to where the path leads, it seems to be central to any notion of right action.

-W. J. T. Mitchell ("Commitments" 324)

Introduction

W. B. Yeats spun gyres and Wyndham Lewis whirled the Vortex. H.D. traced and retraced a palimpsest. Sigmund Freud toured the Eternal City. Virginia Woolf sailed the waves, while Joseph Conrad was lost in the fog. Stephen Dedalus imagined constricting "nets" in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (179). Modernist writers visualized many competing figures and patterns to capture the chaos of modernity, that ephemeral now at the cutting edge of history.¹ In *Ulysses*, Stephen names the nets of nation, language, and religion—history—the "nightmare from which I am trying to awake," against another visual metaphor: Mr. Deasy's straight line (2.377). As Deasy sees it, "All history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (2.380-81). Yet however epistemologically useful for wringing order from disorder, reason from irrationality, sense from nonsense, such figures are likewise impositions. Design is foisted upon confusion, not found there. Thus, the image matters. Deasy's line recalls Zeno's arrow, never quite arriving at its target, eternally suspended by his own practice of cutting up time into ever-smaller moments, converting it to shillings. Amenable as it is to action, neither Deasy nor his heirs today recognize the contingency of this teleology of progress (to say nothing of its collateral consequences). Deasy insists on the linearity of modernity's path with

¹ For recent overviews on geometric forms in modernism, see Hickman and Israel. For aesthetic form generally, see "The New Formalism, The New Aestheticism" section of my Introduction.

the same certainty that suffuses his letter about foot and mouth disease, about which he claims, “there can be no two opinions on the matter” (2.322-23). His surety, however, reveals one paradox of modernity: although we often accept as immutable our means of making sense of nonsense, we must acknowledge that they are not. Whether circular or linear, sinuous or static, such figures do not represent singular truths of history, nation, religion, and the like, but are instead pragmatic strategies for reconciling chance and design.

I argue in this chapter that Joyce embeds his own trademark figure within *Ulysses*, one that embodies the paradox of order simultaneously found in and imposed upon disorder—rules making a game of play. While it accords with Stephen’s famous surname and his conversation with Deasy, the figure I will follow is not a net, but something else in which the unwary and uninitiated might be trapped: a labyrinth.² Whereas, for Deasy, God is a manifestation of the straight-line of history, Stephen finds God in the ludic; in the “shout in the street” arising from their pupils on the playfield, playing at “the joust of life” (2.386; 2.315). Although I claim that Joyce followed his spiritual godfather in crafting a labyrinth, true to form, he does not settle for one symbolic register when two or more congrue. Accordingly, the figure I trace through *Ulysses* is multivalent, combining elements of prerational and rational play with two types of labyrinth: what Penelope Reed Doob calls “multicursal”—which have many paths, and are thus explicitly aleatory—and “unicursal,” which have one path, and are thus more ordered and controlled.

Joyce’s method is not just conceptually playful in its overlaying of labyrinths. It actually begins in play, with a board game called *Labyrinthspiel* that Frank Budgen claimed inspired the “Wandering Rocks” episode (Budgen 123; see Figure 2). In the first half of this chapter, I show

² Joyce adopted Daedalus as his spiritual and aesthetic godfather as early as the publication of his first story: an early draft of “The Sisters” appeared in *The Irish Homestead* on 16 August 1903 under the name “Stephen Daedalus.” See Ellmann 164 and Stanislaus Joyce 243-44.

how Joyce recreates this *Labyrinthspiel* within *Ulysses*. To do so, I trace a pattern of internal allusions to various types of bread, whose conspicuous placement recreates the layout of the game board. These “breadcrumbs” are comprised of Dublin street furniture, both material (Crossbuns, cakes, scones, the host of the Catholic mass) and immaterial (the *Paternoster*’s “Give us this day our daily bread”), which act as signposts at each “turn” in the labyrinth. Given that these “turns” are marked by crumbs of bread, a subsidiary conceit runs through my account, as readers who play along with this game might come to find the joust of life to be the staff of life, transmuting through Joyce’s art the minutiae of Bloomsday into their daily bread. Yet as ludic modernism, *Ulysses* combines the chance and aleatory aspects of the *Labyrinthspiel* with a more tightly controlled, rational-play metaphor. In the second half of this chapter, I explore the ways in which Joyce weaves the *Labyrinthspiel* of *Ulysses* into the long history of literary, artistic, and architectural labyrinths. In doing so, Joyce goes further than playing games and offering up our daily bread: he circles the square of classical and Christian traditions, leads us to a “new Bloomusalem,” and commemorates his literary founding of Dublin with a *lusus Troiae*, a game of Troy that offers a performative path to secular salvation through art and play (*U* 15.1544). To be sure, Joyce’s game does not manifest Deasy’s God, but just as the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is part of its own idiosyncratic path to salvation, the *Labyrinthspiel* reveals the sure hand of an artificer offering readers guidance, sense, and surety. Divine play bereft of blind dogma, it is a design amid disorder that yet recognizes the limits of its construction, claiming aesthetic salvation as the rightful power of ludic modernism.

Prompted by Joyce himself, critics have long used labyrinths, mazes, and the famous Athenian artificer to engage his oeuvre. We commonly refer to *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as

“labyrinthine” without further comment.³ In literature, in common usage, and in Joyce criticism, the figure has been less a metaphor for productive paradox than a catchall for confusion—synonymous with the “maze of distress” that impels the eponymous narrator to pray in “Eveline” (*D* 33). Recently, however, Andrew Gibson has taken the labyrinth as a structural metaphor within both *Portrait* and *Ulysses*. He situates the novels historically, showing how Stephen’s attempts to free himself from various contextual nets are consistently, if paradoxically, undermined. The labyrinth, “a figure for a complication that may conceivably admit of a solution but also may not, and, if it finally does, will do so only at the cost of a patient work of experiment and inquiry,” becomes a metaphor for Irish history (699). As he argues, “the labyrinth constitutes not just an allegory for reading *Ulysses* but an allegory of the political implications of the novel’s aesthetic strategies. So, too, *A Portrait* is not just an account of the making of the maker of labyrinths but already a labyrinth itself, albeit a comparatively simple one” (700). Where Gibson already sees the labyrinth as a Joycean analogue to Yeats’ gyres, my own account moves from his “allegory for reading” to map a labyrinth within *Ulysses* itself.

My description of the *Labyrinthspiel* derives its vocabulary from Penelope Reed Doob, because—pace Deasy—there can indeed be two opinions of the matter. Doob has argued that the figure of the labyrinth necessarily combines the competing perspectives of “maze-treaders” and “maze-viewers.” She writes, “what you see depends on where you stand, and thus, at one and the same time, labyrinths are single (there is one physical structure) and double: they simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos”

³ Stephen is often the focus for labyrinth symbolism, especially in early criticism (see Larbaud and Marichalar). In *Ulysses*, his mythical ancestry complicates his mental and physical state. Numerous critics have highlighted the irony that, back from Paris, he resembles Icarus more closely than Daedalus: George Geckle calls Stephen “a psychologically ruined young man, not a Daedalus, no longer even an Icarus, but a faithless lapwing,” Daedalus’s nephew Perdix (111). Joseph Heininger reads his entanglement in the “‘nets’ of the ‘reality of experience’” as proof of his “Icarian fall” (436). In his self-description as a lapwing, Margot Norris hears an admission that he is no longer a “rising star” (“Stakes” 25). I return to Stephen in the final section of this chapter.

(*Idea 1*). In Joycean terms, labyrinths encode parallax in their very definition and at every turn. What might appear irrational, chaotic, or contingent from one perspective appears rationally ordered and designed from another—a description that, not coincidentally, also describes the bifurcation of prerational and rational play. In another sense, such parallax is captured by Stephen’s conception of Catholicism as “an absurdity,” but yet one that is also “logical and coherent” (*P* 215). Instead of claiming, with Buck Mulligan, that we have “grown out of” paradox, Doob’s idea of the labyrinth recalls Bloom’s pointed observation that “dirty cleans”; what she calls “*concordia discors*” (agreeing disagreement) (*U* 1.555; 4.481; Doob, *Idea 2*). The *Labyrinthspiel* I describe is both the means by which Joyce renders his readers maze-treaders groping their way through the confusion of his work, as well as a guide, offering them the assured perspective of a maze-viewer, coolly appreciating the artifice to which I now turn.

The *Labyrinthspiel*

“Wandering Rocks,” claimed Frank Budgen, is “peculiarly the episode of Dublin. Not Bloom, not Stephen is here the principle personage, but Dublin itself” (123). It lacks a direct correspondence in Homer, may have been the last episode conceived, and is notable for its maze-viewer’s vantage.⁴ Budgen reflects on Dublin itself as a labyrinth, referencing a board game that Joyce and Lucia played around the time of the episode’s composition:

All towns are labyrinths in which for the townsfolk there are charted fairways; but we are strangers in the town and can find our way only by the exercise of attention and caution. While working on *Wandering Rocks* Joyce bought at Franz Karl Weber’s on the *Bahnhofstrasse* a game called “Labyrinth,” which he played every evening of a time with his daughter Lucia. As a result of winning or losing at the game he was enabled to

⁴ Ronan Crowley follows Luca Crispi and Michael Groden to see “Wandering Rocks” as “a centrepiece added to *Ulysses* that offsets the possibility of a centre by bringing the number of episodes up to an even number” (n.p.). One might call it the labyrinth at the center of a (unicursal) labyrinth, reached at the mid-point of a journey before egressing out again. See Morrison for the episode’s multifarious “centrality” (1-8).

catalogue six main errors of judgment into which one might fall in choosing a right, left or centre way out of the maze. (123)

The Zürich James Joyce Foundation now houses the game (Faerber and Luchsinger 84; see Figure 2). Ronan Crowley gives the rules: “The object of the game was to traverse the field and then return to the starting point, the player being occasionally obliged to miss a go or two when his (or his daughter’s) token was moved into a hexagon marked with one or two dots” (n.p.).⁵ I am not the first to take up Budgen’s suggestion that the game inspired Joyce. Clive Hart tried to identify those “errors of judgment,” but found only four reproduced in “Wandering Rocks” (“Wandering” 189). More recently, Anirudh Singh Katoch made explicit what Hart implied, arguing that the episode recreates the *Labyrinthspiel*, insofar as the process of following up on the false leads of the narrative interpolations replicates the “errors of judgment” in the game (449). Katoch anticipates, within the episode, the claims that I will make for the novel at large.⁶

Note that to win at the *Labyrinthspiel*, a player must balance the chance roll of the dice with a concerted strategy for moving through the maze. Not only is a player’s path beholden to her roll and her position on the board, her strategy is further constrained by the marked spaces that might give or withhold another turn, and which thereby command special attention. Those dotted spaces become points of reference, and a player’s path might be determined less by the shape of the labyrinth itself than by those spaces that demand the assimilation of strategy—an imposition of order—to the contingency of the dice. Where Hart and Katoch saw the board game applicable to “Wandering Rocks,” I will start with Gibson’s suggestion that a labyrinth can be an

⁵ The game’s out-and-back journey echoes Odysseus’ *nostos*, complete with arbitrary eruptions of chance. It is a multicursal labyrinth, as opposed to the unicursal type familiar from medieval churches and ancient examples. For Hermann Kern, whom I will cite further below, a proper labyrinth must be unicursal, while the *Labyrinthspiel* would simply be a “maze.” The distinction rests on Kern’s preference for visual depiction, whereas Doob includes literary and metaphorical labyrinths. For a diagram, see Kern 33.

⁶ The practice of reading “Wandering Rocks” as a microcosm of *Ulysses* is well established. See Gilbert 200; Knuth 10; and Morrison 5.

“allegory for reading,” moving on to trace the pattern of a *Labyrinthspiel* across the whole of the novel, more literally than allegorically. I will focus my account on the novelistic correlative of those marked spaces, which I will call “turns” in the labyrinth. My own readers must adopt, simultaneously, the vantage of maze-viewers reflecting on the whole of the novel—able to appreciate its design—and the vantage of maze-treaders within the work. From the latter perspective (akin to a token on the game board), the turns are less readily seen when immersed in reading. Each turn is comprised of a grouping of different elements, novelistic material as seemingly banal as teacakes or Banbury buns and as seemingly fruitful as Throwaway, the “rank outsider” of the Gold Cup, and the throwaway that proclaims “Elijah is coming” (12.1219; 8.13). Joyce accretes these elements in close proximity at various points in the text, always around a reference to bread. He thus leaves morsels scattered about the novel like a trail of crumbs, weaving an Ariadne’s thread into its fabric that, again and again, leads us to our daily bread.⁷

Finally, two longstanding Joycean tropes, borrowed from his Catholic background, bear upon my argument: transubstantiation and epiphany. Joyce aestheticized these religious concepts according to an idiosyncratic skepticism that Roy Gottfried calls his “misbelief.”⁸ Stanislaus Joyce recounts how James thought of his art metaphorically, as the transubstantiation of everyday life. Before Joyce first left Dublin, Stanislaus told his older brother that he planned to refuse his Easter duty, insisting that he did not believe in it. Joyce replied, “You mean that you don’t believe in transubstantiation.” Stanislaus’ account continues:

⁷ Leo Bersani describes a similar “spatialization of the text,” wherein words and themes become “a kind of electrical board with innumerable points of light connected to one another in elaborate, crisscrossing patterns” (165). Guillemette Bolens uses the “interlacing” of the Book of Kells to connect similar elements as my account.

⁸ Gottfried follows Joyce’s own characterization of himself as neither a believer nor a disbeliever, but as a “misbeliever”; a status that Gottfried claims “affords him possibilities of challenge, of openness, that all invigorate his artistic endeavors” (9).

Don't you think, said he [James] reflectively, choosing his words without haste, there is a certain resemblance between the mystery of the Mass and what I am trying to do? I mean that I am trying in my poems to give people some kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own . . . for their mental, moral, and spiritual uplift, he concluded glibly. (S. Joyce 103-04)⁹

Their conversation inspired the famous *non serviam* scene in *Portrait*, where Stephen calls himself “a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of existence into the radiant body of everliving life” (*P* 239; 221). My account of the breadcrumbs scattered throughout the labyrinth will find Joyce eager to appropriate the form of transubstantiation for his own ends, rejecting the dogma as doggerel while salvaging the design.¹⁰

That the artist's powers of transformation might elevate some everyday trifle into something transcendent likewise recalls the Joycean epiphany, which is so crucial to the theory of aesthetics in *Stephen Hero*. A “trivial incident”—on Eccles Street, no less—set Stephen to “composing some ardent verses,” inspiring him to collect such moments in book form (*SH* 211):

By epiphany he [Stephen] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. He told Cranly that the clock of the Ballast Office was capable of an epiphany. Cranly questioned the inscrutable dial of the Ballast Office with his no less inscrutable countenance:

—Yes, said Stephen. I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin's street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany. (211)

⁹ Wolfhard Steppe qualifies the popularity of this passage in Joyce studies, arguing that the caveat, “in my poems,” is literal and delimiting. Steppe makes this point in the course of debunking Joyce's purported borrowing of “epiclesis” from the Greek Orthodox mass as a metaphor for the mystery of artistic creation, claiming that the critical usage of the term is based on a misprint. (597-98). See also Schork, *Latin* 5-7.

¹⁰ Pericles Lewis argues that it is less God than his intercessors that fascinated Joyce: “What most inspires Joyce is the power of the priest to transform the everyday into the eternal by performing the sacraments, rather than the power of God that lies behind those sacraments” (179).

For Stephen, the artist's vocation is to save such trivial epiphanic moments from passing into evanescence like so many mere throwaways.¹¹ While the critical literature on the Joycean epiphany is vast, David Hayman has shown how Joyce used them as "allusive armatures or patterns" in *Portrait*, forming the book's "subliminal structure" ("Purpose" 625).¹² I see the older Joyce working with the ideas of transubstantiation and epiphany in a more playfully irreverent manner than Stanislaus and *Stephen Hero* suggest, making them central to his *Labyrinthspiel*.¹³

Even if the young Joyce's waxing philosophic about his pseudo-priestly powers of transubstantiation struck his brother as glib, the mature writer of *Ulysses* wasted no time reintroducing the theme. *Ulysses* opens with its glibbest character, Buck Mulligan, intoning a mock mass alternately in low slang and ecclesiastical Latin. His version of the moment of transubstantiation, in which the host is consecrated—"For this, O dearly beloved, is the genuine christine: body and soul and blood and ouns"—alludes to the Last Supper as recounted in Matthew 26 (*U* 1.21-22). Mulligan's irreverence is doubly ironic, for not only does his offering of shaving lather debase the Blessed Sacrament, his Biblical allusion does not have liturgical authority for the consecration ceremony, which belongs to Luke 22:19: "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."¹⁴ Perhaps unexpectedly, it is neither the Judas-priest Buck, nor Stephen, the priest of the eternal imagination, but the thrice-baptized Jew

¹¹ Joyce recorded numerous epiphanies, mining them throughout his career. Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain collected the manuscripts in *The Workshop of Daedalus*, noting instances where Joyce later reworked them. See Bowen, "Joyce," for a critical history through 1980. John Paul Riquelme and Vicki Mahaffey ("Joyce's Shorter") offer still-vital accounts of epiphany.

¹² Whereas Hayman's article is an exercise in Genetic Joyce Studies—hearing echoes of the surviving epiphanies as they were nuanced and developed in the fiction—my own approach to epiphany relies on the metaphorical structure rather than the manuscripts.

¹³ I address these dogmatic concerns in more detail in an article in *Joyce Studies Annual*, particularly with reference to criticism on the epiphany (Opest "Epiphanic").

¹⁴ All Biblical citations in English are to the KJV.

Leopold Bloom who first utters the Biblical passage that is dogmatically-sanctioned for transubstantiating bread. He does so at the end of “Lotus-Eaters,” in a scene that contains the first of the crumbs of bread for which we are searching, the first turn in the *Labyrinthspiel*.

After collecting and reading Martha’s letter in the first half of the episode, Bloom enters the church of All Hallows in Westland Row. He notes a notice on the door advertising a sermon by Father John Conmee, the headmaster of Stephen’s former school (5.321-22). Bloom enters amid a sodality mass, and while the priest dispenses the consecrated host, he reflects hazily on the theology of transubstantiation, thinking, “*Corpus*: body. Corpse. Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first. . . . Rum idea: eating bits of a corpse. Why the cannibals cotton to it” (5.350-52). He then recalls a connection between this Eucharist and the symbolism of manna in Judaism: “Something like those mazzoth: it’s that sort of bread: unleavened shewbread. . . . bread of angels it’s called” (5.358-60). This brief encounter with the daily bread of a few worshippers is thus on his mind as he finishes his morning errands. He leaves for Sweny’s chemist shop to buy Molly’s lotion and browses the selection of soaps: “Mr Bloom raised a cake to his nostrils. Sweet lemony wax” (5.512). As he leaves, Bantam Lyons takes a fateful look at his *Freeman’s Journal*, receiving the inadvertent tip on the Gold Cup when Bloom demurs, “I was just going to throw it away” (5.534). Bloom departs for the bathhouse, reflecting on a “Damn bad ad” announcing the cycling race at College Park (5.552). Finally, in anticipation of his morning bath, he thinks:

Always passing, the stream of life, which in the stream of life we trace is dearer thaaan them all.

Enjoy a bath now: clean trough of water, cool enamel, the gentle tepid stream. This is my body. (5.563-66)

That final line repeats Mulligan’s mock offering and consecration, and although Bloom is similarly profane in his reference, he uses the sanctified phrase from Luke.

Bloom's "offering" also echoes the mass he has just witnessed, which is the first liturgically-correct moment of transubstantiation depicted in *Ulysses*. The mass given for a local sodality and the advertisement for Father Conmee's sermon are fairly mundane examples of Dublin street furniture. With Joyce, however, the borders between pattern and coincidence, between significance and inconsequence, are seldom clearly delineated.¹⁵ A number of similarly evanescent details coalesce within the sixty-odd lines that close "Lotus-Eaters," the same everyday vulgarities that might comprise an artistic epiphany—if, according to Stephens' theory, they properly arrest the eye: the scent and color of lemon, Throwaway, bicycles, a "Damn bad" advertisement, and the two references to bread: a cake (here, of soap) and the secularized transubstantiation of Bloom's "This is my body." This particular collection of details marks the first crumbs in Joyce's trail of bread, the first turn in the *Labyrinthspiel*, grounding a pattern that will become increasingly apparent. That which might be taken for the unrelated, everyday stuff of life will come to cohere instead as the staff of life, forming a wanderer's potential salvation.

It is the mark of an emerging pattern—the second turn—that when we next find these same details in unlikely and incongruous concatenation at the opening of "Lestrygonians," they appear in the shadow of the Ballast Office clock; that is, in the precise location where Stephen theorized artistic epiphany to Cranly.¹⁶ The episode opens with Bloom regarding the lemon platt on sale at Graham Lemon's (8.3-4). As he turns away from the shop, "A sombre Y.M.C.A. young man . . . placed a throwaway in a hand of Mr Bloom," implicitly linking the racehorse Throwaway of the Gold Cup and *Freeman's Journal* with Dr. John Alexander Dowie, the self-

¹⁵ Phillip Herring notes that Joyce's "genuine skepticism about our ability to get at the truth except in fragments" is evident as early as *Dubliners* (3).

¹⁶ Their course in *Stephen Hero* presages Bloom's walk from O'Connell Bridge south along Westmoreland Street in what follows. Where they turn back north at Grafton Street, Bloom continues southward to Burton's and then on to Davy Byrne's.

styled second Elijah (8.5-6). The flyer insists that “all are washed in the blood of the lamb,” much as Bloom’s body was earlier washed in the stream of life (8.10-11). Walking toward O’Connell bridge, Bloom remembers Molly’s request for “Malaga raisins” (8.24). Passing Dilly Dedalus, he compares the difficulty of “the black fast Yom Kippur” to the closing of Lent with crossbuns on Good Friday (8.35-36). On the bridge, he teases the gulls by sending Dowie’s throwaway sailing on the Liffey: “He threw down among them a crumpled paper ball. Elijah thirtytwo feet per sec is com” (8.57-58). They take “Not a bit,” reminding him of a similar moment with “stale cake” thrown from the stern of a tourist ship (8.58-60). Bloom’s kindness then takes hold of him: “He halted again and bought from the old applewoman two Banbury cakes for a penny and broke the brittle paste and threw its fragments down into the Liffey” (8.74-76). The gulls’ opportunism leads him to compare the Banbury bun with “Manna” in the desert (8.79). His thoughts return to the “stream of life” as he wonders over the Liffey, “How can you own water, really? It’s always floating in a stream, never the same” (8.93-95). Then, a sudden shift of the mental current, to “All kinds of places are good for ads” (8.95-96). When Bloom raises his “troubled eyes” to the “Timeball on the ballastoffice,” the repetition of these details in such close proximity portends an epiphanic structure at work (8.96; 8.108-09).¹⁷

Here again we have a growing cluster of details: lemon, Throwaway, the throwaway advertisement, raisins, other ads, and a stream. They are aspects of both the external reality of city life and of Bloom’s thoughts.¹⁸ The point of connection between these particular details is

¹⁷ Bloom’s “troubled eyes” echo the same scene in *Stephen Hero*: Stephen “felt Cranly’s hostility and he accused himself of having cheapened the eternal images of beauty. . . . he felt slightly awkward in his friend’s company and to restore a mood of flippant familiarity he glanced up at the clock of the Ballast Office and smiled: / —It has not epiphanised yet, he said” (213).

¹⁸ Their proximity, therefore, is not merely a product of mnemonic association dictated by his stream-of-consciousness. Likewise, Joyce has not collected them as part of the Homeric correspondences, nor in support of the

that their conspicuous circulation draws attention to the crumbs of bread that Joyce has scattered in their midst. Where the first crumbs were a “cake” of soap and the “host” implied by Bloom’s “This is my body,” the second crumbs are Crossbuns, stake cake, Banbury buns, and manna. Joyce will vary and enlarge the specific set of details as the novel progresses, pulling in other associations even as the epiphanic structure—in which seemingly random items of Dublin street furniture reappear to highlight crumbs of bread—will mimic the pattern of the marked spaces on the *Labyrinthspiel* game board, similarly commanding attention and arresting the eye.

As Bloom leaves the bridge and Ballast Office behind, the remainder of “Lestrygonians” introduces new recurring elements. Josie Breen brings fleeting thoughts of both Martha’s letter and another “lady typist,” Lizzie Twigg, protégé of A. E. (8.202-308; 8.236-333). Reflecting on Irish nationalism, Bloom associates John Howard Parnell with the Dublin Bread Company (D.B.C.) tearoom and then the “Penny roll” that the Salvation Army rewarded to those who would stand witness to conversion (8.462-470). Moments later, John Howard Parnell actually passes by, followed shortly by A. E. and a woman whom Bloom takes to be Lizzie Twigg, “Beard and bicycle. Young woman” (8.523-24). He can scarcely believe it: “Now that’s really a coincidence: second time. Coming events cast their shadows before” (8.525-26).¹⁹ His formulation describes how these clusters of epiphanic details work throughout the novel. As we notice Throwaway, a bicycle, John Howard Parnell, or other *Labyrinthspiel* elements in close proximity, we are apt to find crumbs of bread in their midst. Bloom’s lunch in Davy Byrne’s bears this out. Nosey Flynn evokes Throwaway by imploring the publican for a lead on a horse

other well-known patterns suffusing the novel. That the Gilbert schema lists “Oesophagus” and “Peristaltic” as the episode’s “Organ” and “Technic,” respectively, only inflects the variety of breadcrumbs in this turn.

¹⁹ Bowen has shown that Bloom is mistaken. Joyce describes not Lizzie Twigg, but A. E.’s *Irish Homestead* colleague, Susan Mitchell (“Note”). Bloom’s misidentification does not affect the status of the breadcrumb. I thank an anonymous reader from *Joyce Studies Annual* for bringing Bloom’s mistake (and mine) to my attention.

and otherwise recommending Lenehan's picks (8.813-14; 8.828-32). Bloom, meanwhile, enjoys his sandwich of Gorgonzola on "fresh clean bread" (8.818). The cake and raisin elements appear in Bloom's reflections on his marriage proposal: "Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour of her spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy. . . . Pebbles fell. She lay still. A goat. No-one. High on Ben Howth rhododendrons a nannygoat walking surefooted, dropping currants" (8.887-912).²⁰ The memory fades into a realization of Molly's impending adultery. Moments later, Bantam Lyons arrives and admits to Flynn his belief that Bloom had given a tip on the race, reinforcing Throwaway's presence in this turn (8.919-1027).

The *Labyrinthspiel* pattern continues in "Wandering Rocks," when Father Conmee (whose sermon was advertised in "Lotus-Eaters") catches Lynch in the aftermath of his assignation with Kitty. Flustered, Lynch tips his hat to his old headmaster while "the young woman abruptly bent and with slow care detached from her light skirt a clinging twig" (10.199-204). Kitty thus shares an attribute with Lizzie Twigg. Both "twigs" foreshadow the crosstrees on the *Rosevean* (10.1098). At the same moment that Kitty picks the twig from her skirt, 3:29 p.m., "a skiff, a crumpled throwaway" sails by on the Liffey's stream of life: "rocked on the ferrywash, Elijah is coming" (10.753-54).²¹ The throwaway is thus linked to Lynch, Kitty, and Conmee, who, crucially, came upon them having just "read in secret the *Pater* and *Ave* and crossed his breast" (10.193). The *Pater* is adapted from Matthew 6:9-13, the third verse of which hides a crumb of bread: "*panem nostrum supersubstantialem da nobis hodie*" ("Give us this day

²⁰ Ellmann suggests that the seedcake, both here and as recalled by Molly (18.1574), is "parallel also to the host" (*Ulysses* 18). Richard Kearney goes further to suggest that *Ulysses* "may be read as a series of anti-Eucharists or pseudo-Eucharists leading . . . to a final Eucharistic epiphany at the close of Molly's soliloquy" "Sacramental" 190). In contrast to the *via negativa* Kearney sets out, I see a pattern of epiphanic moments that sketch a labyrinth.

²¹ All of the temporal references are from Hart, "Wandering" 216.

our daily bread”).²² Triads are rarely gratuitous in *Ulysses*, and not only is Matthew 6:11 the third line of the prayer, but Conmee is behind in his breviary: “Nones. He should have read that before lunch. But lady Maxwell had come” (10.191-92). Nones, the ninth hour of the liturgical day, just passed at 3:00 p.m. Dogmatically, the prayer’s efficacy relies on its timing, as the “close of the evening is a figure of anxiety, of temptation and inconstancy” (Parsch 37). The timing lends further irony to Lynch’s situation, since “Circe” will lead him into temptation, abandoning Stephen to return to Bella Cohen’s brothel with Kitty (15.4726-27). Across town, Boody Dedalus “blesses” the soup she and her sisters have received not from Simon Dedalus, but from charity. She breaks “big chunks of bread” and parodies Conmee’s *Paternoster* by reciting “Our father who are not in heaven,” moments before the throwaway appears, floating down under the Loopline bridge and past George’s quay (10.291-97).²³ Boody’s “sacrilege” and this first appearance of the throwaway in the episode are later in the narrative than Conmee and Lynch’s encounter, but earlier in time, at 3:26 and 3:29 p.m., respectively. Not only are they separated by three minutes; the third appearance of the throwaway is three minutes away.²⁴

Kitty and her twig are linked with more than Conmee’s *Paternoster* and the throwaway. They appear again just after the intrusion: “From a long face a beard and gaze hung on a chessboard” (10.440; 10.425). The gaze and beard belong to none other than John Howard Parnell, whom Buck and Haines come upon in the D.B.C. tearoom as they order scones, butter, and cakes—“damn bad cakes,” in Buck’s formulation, echoing Bloom’s judgment of the “damn bad ad” in “Lotus-Eaters” (10.1045-1058; 5.552). They thus verify Bloom’s earlier assumption

²² For the Vulgate quotations, see *Biblorum sacrorum*.

²³ The first line of the *Paternoster* is “*Pater noster qui est in caelis*” (“Our Father which art in heaven”) (Matt 6:9).

²⁴ I am stretching Hart’s schema a bit, as he gives 3:31 for the third appearance of the throwaway, but the numerological play is, I think, engaging enough to warrant it (216).

about John Howard Parnell's destination, with the correlative pun on Bloom's foresight (8.462-65). The twin intrusions of the chessboard and twig frame a reference to "draymen . . . loading floats with sacks of carob and palmnut meal" (10.434-35). Carob or locust bean is also known as "St. John's bread" (Gifford and Seidman 268). Meanwhile, as Buck and Haines settle into their tea, "Elijah, skiff, light crumpled throwaway" appears for the third time on the Liffey, now at 3:31 p.m., sailing eastward past "the threemasted schooner *Rosevean* from Bridgwater with bricks" (10.1096-99). By first sailing eastward, then westward, then eastward again past the *Rosevean* and out to sea, the throwaway's movement in "Wandering Rocks" models our recursive action of tracing the path of breadcrumbs through the *Labyrinthspiel*, from episode to episode (10.296; 10.753-54; 10.1096).

Where Lynch and Kitty's tryst is linked with the sea-bound throwaway in "Wandering Rocks," "Oxen of the Sun" links them to Throwaway by entwining Lynch's bragging to Stephen with Lenehan's summary of the race. The textual moment in which this crumb appears imitates the style of Walter Savage Landor, and because we move from one to the other on the "turn" of a phrase, the commingling of the narratives recalls both the method of the *Labyrinthspiel* and of "Wandering Rocks."²⁵ Lenehan's account of the race begins with a pun: "Madden had lost five drachmas on Sceptre for a whim of the rider's name" (14.1126-29). The rider was O. Madden. After the Lynch interpolation, Lenehan reaches for a bottle of Bass ale, declaring, "The gods too are ever kind . . . If I had poor luck with Bass's mare perhaps this draught of his may serve me more propensely" (14.1161-62). Although he confuses the brewer Michael Arthur Bass with his nephew William Arthur Hamar Bass (Sceptre's owner), the confusion toys with the fact that all day long, his pick had everyone believing Sceptre would win the race (Gifford and Seidman

²⁵ For example, Father Conmee "turned a thin page of his breviary" as Corny Kelleher "closed his long daybook" (10.203-06).

435). Lenehan laments Throwaway's victory, declaring "Poor Sceptre! . . . She is not the filly that she was . . . By gad, sire, a queen of them" (14.1140-42). Lynch's reply turns the phrase: "I wish you could have seen my queen today" (14.1143). He continues, dropping the crumb of bread: "The chestnuts that shaded us were in bloom: the air drooped with their persuasive odour and with pollen floating by us. In the sunny patches one might easily have cooked on a stone a batch of those buns with Corinth fruit in them that Periplipomenes sells in his booth near the bridge" (14.1145-49). Corinth fruit recalls the Malaga raisins and the goat on Ben Howth, when Molly and Poldy's love was "in bloom" (8.24; 8.912). Gifford and Seidman suggest "itinerant fruit merchant" for "Periplipomenes," who echoes the woman selling Banbury cakes at O'Connell bridge (435; *U* 8.74). With these internal allusions, the "buns with Corinth fruit" evoke the full litany of crumbs, from crossbuns to manna to *panem*.²⁶

Lynch does not stop there. He tells Stephen of being caught by Conmee—murmuring "*panem nostrum* . . ." from his breviary—and goes on to explain how Kitty feigned "to reprove a slight disorder in her dress: a slip of underwood clung there for the very trees adore her" (14.1153-59). The timing has already associated the couple with the throwaway, Lizzie Twigg, Conmee's *Paternoster*, John Howard Parnell, and the D.B.C. Lynch's story ends when his line, "he [Conmee] had been kind," reintroduces Lenehan's race recap with, "The gods too are ever kind" (14.1160-61). With the congruence of these elements across different episodes, Joyce puts the throwaway right back into the race.

By following Joyce's trail of breadcrumbs back-and-forth through the novel, readers share a power of foresight, linking the flyer-advertised evangelist Alexander J. Dowie with the

²⁶ John Gordon argues that the "Landor" passage corresponds to the "De Quincy" pastiche that precedes it, in an intra-episodic parallel of the path I am tracing. He writes: "The act of reading which results is a two-stage or multi-stage process of juxtaposition and synthesis, recalling the operation of parallaxic reckoning which is one of the book's main themes" (349).

racehorse long before Bloom does in “Eumaeus.” There, “Boom” reads “the account of the third event at Ascot on page three,” finding that the winner, Throwaway, is owned by “Mr F. Alexander,” finally bringing the two together within the narrative. Bloom notes, “Winner trained by Braime so that Lenehan’s version of the business was all pure buncombe” (16.1274-86). The bun may or may not be bunkum, but Bloom has dropped the breadcrumb. Even as Lynch waxes poetic about his pastoral appointment in coded, Landoresque dialogue, the code contains a warning against getting caught in the dark, under the shade of chestnuts like Lenehan’s superficial punning on “O. Madden” or one-liners that are “in bloom” (14.1145). The recurring pattern of a set number of details used to highlight the crumbs of bread betrays a reassuring design behind the novel’s convolutions and stylistic sheen, even as it offers readers a guide through the labyrinth’s twists and turns.

The opening of “Eumaeus” begins to reinforce connections between details, a process that continues throughout the episode. As Bloom and Stephen walk to the cabman’s shelter, Bloom inhales “with internal satisfaction the smell of James Rourke’s city bakery” (16.55-56). Inspired by the “very palatable odour indeed of our daily bread,” he coins another of his many advertising slogans: “Bread, the staff of life, earn your bread, O tell me where is fancy bread, at Rourke’s the baker’s it is said” (16.56-59).²⁷ Earning our bread is, of course, precisely the point of my reading, here. At the cabman’s shelter, Stephen gets coffee and a “roll of some description,” an “antediluvian specimen of a bun,” just as the sailor Murphy (whose initials are D. B. of C.) identifies himself with the *Rosevean*, sailing past the throwaway earlier (16.333;

²⁷ Since the narration here is closely allied with Bloom’s point of view, it tickles his fancy as much as his appetite, as the slogan puns on a song from *The Merchant of Venice*, beginning “Tell me where is fancy bred” (III.ii.63-64). Tim Conley more precisely contends, “a version of Bloom narrates ‘Eumaeus’—the Beaufoy Bloom, we might say” (32; emphasis in original).

16.366; 16.415-51).²⁸ By the end of the episode, Bloom has read the paper as the cabman theorizes a headline: “*Return of Parnell*” (16.1298). Of gambling and the “halfbaked Lyons,” whose stroke of luck and loose lips unleashed the Citizen’s full vitriol, Bloom concludes: “Guesswork it reduced itself to eventually” (16.1293-94). While guesswork might have left Bloom with unleavened or “halfbaked” transcendence, only possibly altering the emotional course of his day, his realization models Joyce’s ephiphanic strategy at large: the vulgarities of the everyday and memorable phases of the mind suddenly show forth, ripe with meaning and portending larger significance. As Leo Bersani has suggested, *Ulysses* is “a guidebook to how it should be read” (63). And just as the title *Ulysses* initiates and validates readers’ attention to the Homeric structure, there are two turns in the *Labyrinthspiel* that more concretely signal Joyce’s appropriation of transubstantiation and daily bread: one in “Cyclops” and one in “Nausicaa.”

Awaiting Bloom in “Cyclops,” Martin Cunningham raises a toast when the parody of a church news column interrupts the narrative. It begins with “the sound of the sacring bell,” the ringing of which liturgically announces the presence of the bread and wine moments before its consecration (12.1676). The parody imagines a procession of saints and sages winding its way to the pub, where their faux celebrant Father O’Flynn blesses “the viands and the beverages and the company of all the blessed,” mocking the host, but fulfilling Cunningham’s toast (12.1737-39; 12.1673). This consecration is a moment of transubstantiation that sets up Bloom’s return. While Bloom was out, Lenahan had disparaged his purported winnings on Throwaway, so Cunningham corrals Bloom into an awaiting jarvey to escape the increasingly hostile atmosphere. While they drive away, the Citizen dashes back into the pub, yelling, “By Jesus, I’ll crucify him so I will. Give us that biscuitbox here,” flinging it at the retreating Bloom for yet another iteration of a

²⁸ To Frances L. Restuccia, Stephen’s snack evokes the theological distinction between substance and accidents of the transubstantiated host, rather than the more playful sense of transubstantiation that I am following here (336).

“throwaway” (12.1812; 12.1853).²⁹ The narrator concludes that Bloom would “remember the gold cup, he would so,” and with the Citizen’s comment, links again the race, the crucifixion at Calvary and its crosstrees, the idea of daily bread, and transubstantiation (12.1898). “Cyclops” ends with a parody of biblical prose, announcing Bloom’s ascension into heaven: “And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoe’s in Little Green street like a shot off a shovel” (12.1915-18). At least in wild parody, Bloom becomes the object of epiphany, transcending everyday existence in his elevation to glory.

The second conspicuous moment of transubstantiation is in “Nausicaa,” with the benediction ceremony at the church Mary, Star of the Sea. As Gerty begins flirting with Bloom, she simultaneously thinks of the congregation within the church, “careworn hearts were there and toilers for their daily bread and many who had erred and wandered”—not unlike we maze-treaders (13.374-76). Moments later, the choir begins to sing the *Tantum ergo*, marking the public displays of both the Eucharistic host within the church and of Gerty’s swaying stockings on the strand (13.489-504). The second verse of the hymn finds Bloom “worshipping at her shrine” (13.564). As the hymn ends, Canon O’Hanlon intones the Anthem to the Holy Sacrament: “*Panem de coelo praestitisti eis*” (“You have given them bread from Heaven”), to which the proper response would be, “*Omne delectamentum in se habentem*” (“Having all sweetness in it”) (13.574; *Office* 237). The benediction displays the consecrated bread as the transubstantiated body of Christ, another breadcrumb. It likewise recalls manna, which is “like

²⁹ The biscuit tin returns in “Circe” when Paddy Dignam and Father Coffey testify to Bloom’s attendance at the funeral. Coffey croaks out “Namine. Jacobs. Vobiscuits. Amen”; that is, *Dominus vobiscum* or “the Lord be with you” (15.1241-42; Gifford and Seidman 469). The tin is from the W. and R. Jacobs company, and the “Cyclops” parody just cited includes the *Dominus vobiscum* blessing (Gifford and Seidman 332; *U* 12.1740). In “Hades,” Father Coffey is a symbol for Cerberus, tempted by “dogbiscuits,” which are the Simnel cakes Blooms sees being hawked just after moving his cake of soap between pockets (6.494-501; 6.595).

coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Exodus 16:31).³⁰

Following Robert Alter in reading Bloom as a Moses figure, John 6:32 nicely reinforces Joyce’s godlike role in dispersing bread throughout the novel: “Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven” (Alter 152). From the twin descriptions of transubstantiation in “Cyclops” and “Nausicaa,” to this extended Biblical and liturgical allusion, Joyce highlights the bread he has given to lead us through his *Labyrinthspiel*.

That Joyce transmutes the staff of life into art through an epiphanic logic of ostensible trivialities makes the pattern of his breadcrumbs that much harder to discern—but then, such is the dilemma of the maze-treader turned around by the prerational *methexis* of the game. Once we can appreciate the *Labyrinthspiel* pattern from the vantage of a maze-viewer, however, our holding in congruity disparate elements across the time and space of the novel leaves us with a strategy for navigating its complexity. So again, Bloom’s assumption about John Howard Parnell’s destination in “Lestrygonians” helps us identify the anonymous, bearded chess player in “Wandering Rocks,” while Lynch and Lenehan’s braggadocio links Throwaway and the throwaway beyond their homonymy.³¹ “Ithaca” reinforces what we have found on the trail when Bloom spies Boylan’s shredded betting tickets (17.320-321). His subsequent “Reminiscences of coincidences, truth stranger than fiction” recount some of the passages that I have examined: the pubs in “Cyclops” and “Lestrygonians,” O’Connell bridge, and Sweny’s chemist shop, from which we are now told Bloom had proceeded to his bath like Moses, “graven in the language of

³⁰ “Honey,” in the King James Version is a translation of “melle,” “mel,” whence the “sweetness” that Gifford translates (392). Several Biblical passages allude to the sweetness of manna (again, Exodus 16:31, Revelation 2:17), but Numbers 11:6 has special resonance with the “undisguised admiration” in Bloom’s “passionate gaze” (13.565). It reads: “But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.”

³¹ The accretion of local details around turns foreshadows the logic of proximity that Joyce would later use with HCE and ALP in *Finnegans Wake*. Not only does Haveth Childers Everywhere likewise become more noticeable as his initials are repeated, but HCE alludes to the Latin words of consecration that both Buck and Bloom invoke: *hoc est corpus [meum]*; the “this is my body” liturgically required for transubstantiation.

prediction” (17.323; 17.340-41). He only associates these scenes with the ostracism over his rumored Gold Cup winnings, but they point to the presence of the larger pattern, adduced “in a kind of retrospective arrangement,” as both Bloom and Tom Kernan would put it (16.1400; 10.783). Here, too, Joyce uses transubstantiation metaphorically, as Stephen and Bloom are about to enjoy a collation of “Epps’s massproduct, the creature cocoa” (17.369-70). The neologism puns on his method of making the mass of ordinary experience as transcendent and divine as the product of the mass, the consecrated staff of life.

“Ithaca” is written in the style of a catechism. As a rote form of testing knowledge, it exemplifies an epistemological system that leaves little room for the play of chance and error: rational play par excellence. So perhaps it is with an eye toward his erstwhile Jesuit masters that it is here that Joyce signals the eminently prerational play of his *Labyrinthspiel*. The reflection on Boylan’s bets continues:

His mood?

He had not risked, he did not expect, he had not been disappointed, he was satisfied.

What satisfied him?

To have sustained no positive loss. To have brought a positive gain to others. Light to the gentiles. (17.348-53)

Things cohere retrospectively, despite “difficulties of interpretation” in the moment (17.343).

Bloom finds it perfectly acceptable not to bet on horses, avoiding altogether the matrix of anticipation and outcome. Dropping breadcrumbs throughout the labyrinth of *Ulysses* is similarly a gamble. Not only might it fail to pay off, it might fail to draw bets at the bookie’s in the first place. Joyce answers Pascal’s wager with one of his own, reasserting godlike control over his material, only without a dogmatic insistence that we recognize the truth of his authority as such. His gamble on whether or not readers will notice his trail recalls George Steiner’s dictum that

art's capacity to communicate is "underwritten by the assumption of God's presence" (*Real* 3). The hand of *Ulysses'* artist-god is everywhere evident, even if he allows the race to go on regardless of our attention to it.³²

Joyce's gamble on readers following his trail is the opposite of a catechism, which leaves nothing to chance. The performative and *methetic* qualities of the *Labyrinthspiel's* play inhere in the reader's action of following the trail of crumbs. These are not the only prerational aspects of game, however. Earlier, I noted that the elements marking each turn consist of characters' private thought processes, their conversations, and various Dublin street furniture. Some are buried in allusions or take place offstage. Bloom's reflection on a Banbury bun as manna in the desert, for example, follows naturally enough from his tossing a few crumbs down to the gulls (8.74-79). When Gerty hears the *Tantum ergo*, Joyce assumes his audience will recognize that the host is being displayed, as the priest intones "*Panem de caelo praestitisti eis*" (13.489; 13.574). The elements are part of the novel's underlying realism even when they are buried under the sheen of style, as Lynch and Lenehan are simply going about a drunken evening's search for adulation and commiseration. That they do so in the code of Walter Savage Landor is, of course, one of the games that Joyce is already playing with his readers. Literary form goes far to demand that readers play along. It has been well noted that the parodies in "Oxen of the Sun" prove that literary style is not an individual writer's immutable ideal, but is itself a language game.³³ To

³² Joyce thus revises Stephen's hierarchy of aesthetic forms from *Portrait*, where it is the dramatic form in which "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (215). The trail of breadcrumbs through *Ulysses* more fittingly follows Stephen's formulation of the "epical form," in which "the personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea" (214-15).

³³ As Paul Armstrong puts it, "The various styles of 'Oxen of the Sun' suggest that the history of a language is not a hierarchical sequence of stages in a teleological development but a series of equal but different language games." He goes on, "By dramatizing the relativity of language games, Joyce doubly challenges the power that any set of codes exercises over its users" (164).

play the *Labyrinthspiel* along with the many other language games Joyce is already playing throughout *Ulysses* is to adopt what Jean-François Lyotard calls a “pagan” stance. This is “not a matter of privileging a language game above others,” he writes, which itself would

be something like saying: The only important game, the only true one, is chess. That is absurd. What is pagan is the acceptance of the fact that one can play several games, and that each of these games is interesting in itself insofar as the interesting thing is to play moves. And to play moves means precisely to develop ruses, to set the imagination to work. (*Just Gaming* 60-61)

The *Labyrinthspiel* method sees Joyce playing multiple games at once. The board game he played with Lucia inspired and modeled yet new rules within the novel. That he centered these new rules on the element of “bread,” given to us by epiphanic means, indicates that Joyce toys with these religious concepts, as they, too, are as contingent as literary style. Such multiplicity likewise necessitates and sanctions the blending of Hansel and Gretel’s trail of breadcrumbs with the labyrinth’s thread of Ariadne.

By deflating the metaphysics of transubstantiation and epiphany with a contingent and performative aesthetics, Joyce aligns himself not only with Lyotard’s paganism, but also with Spinoza’s prerational mentality. To borrow a phrase from the new aestheticism, the form of the *Labyrinthspiel* goes just as far as Stein’s toys in its “unraveling of metaphysical ‘givens’”—doing so, moreover, like Ariadne unraveling a spool of thread (Joughin and Malpas 2). In Nietzsche’s terms, the effect is to remove the “moral additive” from their respective powers of transformation, but I would suggest that this removal is equivocal (*Philosophy* 62). Leaving off my account here would be to argue for *Ulysses* as a “postmodern” artifact, a work of openly contingent play and poststructural deferral—a gamble without a guide.³⁴ And yet, even the pub-

³⁴ And as such would be akin to the majority of engagements with play theory and twentieth-century literature. Despite being a highly sensitive critic of modernist form, Paul Armstrong has a tendency to read a “postmodern” *Ulysses*—understandably so, considering his strong identification with Richard Rorty’s antifoundational philosophy.

crawling gamblers of Dublin take their odds from Lenehan, questionable as his guidance proves to be. My account of the novel as a work of specifically ludic modernism turns on its invocation of bifurcated play, which is, not coincidentally, encoded in the double nature of the labyrinth figure. As such, I now turn to the labyrinth's historical lineage, and the more controlled, unicursal, rational-play components of Joyce's *Labyrinthspiel*.

Unicursal Labyrinths: Chartres and Crete

With the *Labyrinthspiel*, Joyce gambles on an aleatory method that offers to put the reader into a "commodious vicus of recirculation" across *Ulysses* (FW 3). Access to the game remains contingent upon the epiphanic details arresting the reader's eye, as does the possibility of reading the turns through the metaphor of transubstantiation. Likewise, within the conceit, the multicursal layout of the board gives readers performative choices along the path. Here I return to the idea of the labyrinth in the classical and medieval periods, well before it was appropriated by the makers of board games, adding to Doob's vocabulary the perspective of Hermann Kern.

Kern separates metaphorical and literary labyrinths from their visual depictions:

As a graphic, linear figure, a labyrinth is best defined first in terms of form. Its round or rectangular shape make sense only when viewed from above, like the ground plan of a building. Seen as such, the lines appear as delineating walls and the space between them as a path, the legendary "thread of Ariadne." The walls themselves are unimportant. Their sole function is to mark a path, to define choreographically, as it were, the fixed pattern of movement. . . . As opposed to a maze, the labyrinth's path is not intersected by other paths. There are no choices to be made, and the path inevitably leads to, and ends at, the center. Accordingly, the only dead end in a labyrinth is at its center. Once there, the walker must turn around and retrace the same path to return to the outside. (23; see Figure 3)³⁵

³⁵ Kern catalogues labyrinths from Bronze Age petroglyphs to contemporary reconstructions. My Figure 3 is his schematic reference, including a labyrinth and its "thread of Ariadne."

Defining a fixed and inevitable path in which there are no choices to be made recalls rational play mentality concepts like the immutability of truth, the metaphysically given ground of Being, the ideal of mimesis-imitation purporting to a perfect copy, and what Spariosu calls rational “chance-necessity,” which is akin to theological conceptions of divine providence (*DR* 16). To be sure, there is a certain amount of abstraction involved in my description of the *Labyrinthspiel*. By turning to its unicursal instantiations, I will not presume to perfectly align the turns in the novel with, for instance, a seven- or eleven-circuit labyrinth.³⁶ The most important part of Kern’s formulation is the sense of a singular path and its choreography, of the guided nature of a labyrinth that betrays the sure hand of an artificer, particularly when seen from above.

What happens when we read the trail of breadcrumbs not as marking those hexagonal spaces on the *Labyrinthspiel* board, at which a player might gain or lose a turn, but rather, as the turns in a unicursal labyrinth that guide us along from one circuit to the next? What happens when we read less of a gamble into the placement of the turns and more of an artificer’s guiding logic and reasoned choreography? Switching the figure from a multicursal to a unicursal labyrinth suggest quite a different “way of being in the path,” as W. J. T. Mitchell has it in the epigraph to this chapter. The first consequence arises from the simplest method of constructing a unicursal labyrinth, which is shown in Figure 4. We can see from Kern’s diagram that to make a labyrinth is to turn a square into a circle. Circling a square is an idea deeply resonant with both *Ulysses* and my reading here. Joyce once sketched a quick portrait of Bloom—whom Lenehan labels “a cultured allroundman” (*U* 10.581)—to which he appended, in Greek, the first line of the

³⁶ This is to heed Kevin J. H. Dettmar’s warning that we “presuppose certain kinds of answers when we ask certain kinds of questions” (5). One can get caught in schematic mazes of one’s own making when following metaphorical figures like the *Labyrinthspiel* too blindly.

Odyssey, in which Homer calls Odysseus “*polytropos*”: a “man of many turns” (*U* 10.581).³⁷

Amid the confusion and hallucinations of “Circe,” the shade of Bloom’s grandfather, Virag Lipoti, says that Bloom had devoted “the summer months of 1886 to square the circle and win that million” (*U* 15.2400-01). “Ithaca” reveals that Bloom was “occupied with the problem of the quadrature of the circle,” which is subsequently presented as a “secular problem” (*U* 17.1071-72; 17.1696-97). As Gifford and Seidman note, squaring the circle is an impossible task that would have little practical value even if were it possible (494). For Hugh Kenner, “the challenge was as purely intellectual as anything on a chessboard”; or, for that matter, as “purely intellectual” as making labyrinths out of novels (166). Kern, in turn, emphasizes its mystical significance:

It is impossible to overlook the phenomenon of squaring a circle (i.e., accomplishing the impossible)—not as a mathematical problem, but as an ancient cosmological point of view. . . . based on the interpretation of the circle as symbol of the heavens (and of the sun’s path) and the square as a symbol of the earth, it may be inferred that the squaring of the circle, or the “dome over the square,” represents a sort of reconciliation, a union of both. (24)

The “dome over the square” is borrowed from Josef Fink, and the phrase helps to evoke and visualize the tension between the perspectives of maze-treaders and maze-viewers.³⁸

The reconciliation and union of competing views of the world, what Doob calls “*concordia discors*,” is precisely how I see the rational and prerational play concepts at work in *Ulysses* and within ludic modernism generally (*Idea* 2). For Joyce, circling squares and squaring circles are not only a matter of mystical mathematics. The productive reconciliation of opposites

³⁷ See the frontispiece to Ellmann, *Ulysses*. R. J. Schork discusses a further epithet for Odysseus, “*kosmogyrismenos*,” (he had “circled the world”), applied by Joyce himself as an exercise in Modern Greek (*Greek* 82). Schork also highlights Molly’s claim about Bloom: “I know every turn in him” (*Greek* 90; *U* 18.1530). Joyce used the phrase to describe both Bloom and Odysseus in conversation with Budgen (Budgen 15-17).

³⁸ Helen Georgi astutely points out that the quadrature of the circle is “secular” in Ithaca, but is described as “religious” by Virag in “Circe” (336). She reads the problem as a “covert riddle” of the sort that was so famously meant to keep the professors busy, although Herring, for one, finds it no problem at all, just Joyce’s joke on Bloom (108). Georgi’s method of reading is similar to mine insofar as it traces “clues” across the novel based on three schematic sketches of circles inside squares, rather than the labyrinthine shapes I am utilizing here.

is one of the central goals of the novel, concerned as it is with bringing Dublin and the Irish into the light of modernity from the twin shadows of the Catholic Church and British Imperialism. Buck offers his solution to the problem early in the novel: “God, Kinch, if you and I could only work together we might do something for the island. Hellenise it,” by which he means bringing cosmopolitan aesthetics to a supposed backwater (*U* 1.159).³⁹ The closing lines of “Proteus” offer a more compact symbol for Ireland’s labyrinth, one that, crucially, is an epiphanic element in the turns I noted within “Wandering Rocks” and “Eumaeus.” As Stephen is leaving the strand, the narration closes: “Moving through the air high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship” (*U* 3.503-505). This is the *Rosevean*, as we learn in the cabman’s shelter when D. B. Murphy explains, “we come up this morning eleven o’clock. The threemaster *Rosevean* from Bridgwater with bricks” (*U* 16.450). Murphy echoes the turn in “Wandering Rocks” where “Elijah, skiff, light crumpled throwaway sailed eastward . . . by the threemasted schooner *Rosevean* from Bridgwater with bricks (*U* 10.1096-99). The three “crosstrees” on the hill of Calvary are wedded to the bark of a “wily old customer,” a loquacious, dissembling Odysseus (*U* 16.625). Again, the ship’s appearance in each crumb turns the reader back across the novel, just as a unicursal labyrinth transfers a polytropic wanderer from circuit to circuit.

The form of “Wandering Rocks” instantiates the need to “Hellenise” Ireland: our maze-viewer’s vantage of Dublin (as if from the crown of the dome over the square) is bounded by the Scylla of Father Conmee and the Charybdis of the Viceregal Cavalcade, the twin oppressors of Church and Empire out on patrol, policing the walls of Dublin’s labyrinth. As the Linati schema

³⁹ Richard Begam has shown how Joyce rejects both Buck’s impulse toward Wildean aestheticism and Haines’ infatuation with the Irish Revival as means of moving Ireland toward the “*annus mirabilis*” of 1922 (188).

has it, Dublin is caught between “*Cristo e Cesare*” (Christ and Caesar).⁴⁰ I opened this chapter by describing the multicursal *Labyrinthspiel*, but that game is not exclusive. In what follows, I retrace Joyce’s path of breadcrumbs as a logically-arrayed, unicursal thread of Ariadne woven into the novel’s fabric. Although our access to the unicursal labyrinth metaphor remains just as contingent as our access to that of a multicursal one, there is much to be gained by acknowledging both. Doob’s inclusive understanding of the labyrinth concept strengthens our engagement with parallax and paradox, and as Kern shows, the image of a unicursal labyrinth also reconciles opposites through a mystical worldview. While it might seem counterintuitive to align the “mystical” reconciliation of the dome and the square with the rational play of a unicursal labyrinth, this is simply to discover yet another logical absurdity masquerading as “rational.” I now turn from this generic overview to the manifestations unicursal labyrinths in *Ulysses*, one beholden to *Cristo* and several to *Cesare*.

The Chartres-type Labyrinth

Among its thirteenth-century counterparts, Notre-Dame de Chartres is unique in that its three western doors open directly to its nave. As such, there is no way to enter from the main façade without encountering, between the third and fourth bays, the eleven-circuit labyrinth inlaid in the floor (see Figure 5). Medieval pilgrims were drawn to Chartres by its relic, the

⁴⁰ Ellmann, *Ulysses* 194. Within Joyce criticism, Leo Knuth has come closest to Kern’s sense of a unicursal labyrinth, specifically with regard to “Wandering Rocks.” He writes, “only after we have come to recognize the labyrinth as a symbol of man’s quest for the hidden center do we see the significance of the configuration of sections 1, 10, and 19 . . . [Dublin] is virtually a circular labyrinth of streets.” He notes how the central section of the episode features Bloom, at the intersection of an “X” marked by Conmee and the cavalcade’s paths (407). Hart has built upon Knuth’s symmetry, arguing that it is organized by chiasmic structures with Bloom’s section as their anchor and intersection (Knuth had noted the congruence of chiasmus, the “X,” and the Greek letter *chi*). Hart examines “one of the dominant patterns in Joyce’s artistic structures: the out-and-return journey, a ternary, chiasmic arrangement of materials in which the end recalls the beginning . . . at the most distant point of the journey, we find the *peripeteia*, the crucial event or focus of attention which makes it possible to return with fresh insight” (“Chiasmic” 19).

Sancta Camisia, the garment worn by Mary at the Nativity. With the rising Marian cult of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Chartres became known as the “earthly palace of the heavenly queen” (Miller 9). Henry Adams described the cathedral’s atmosphere as suffused with the “light and colour that actually blind the true servant of Mary” (235). Joyce himself claimed that the windows filtering and focusing that light embody the “drama of the world” (Power 92).

According to a nineteenth-century tradition, pilgrims and penitents would have shuffled on their knees along the labyrinth’s path—called both *la lieue* (the league) after its purported length, and the *chemin de Jérusalem* (path to Jerusalem), for its symbolic significance.⁴¹ At the center of the labyrinth, the path opens to a clearing marked by rose-petals of stone, known as both *le ciel* (heaven) and Jerusalem. Upon turning to retrace the path back to Chartres from Jerusalem, to return to earth from the sky, the pilgrim would be overcome with the depiction of the Last Judgment in the western rose window. After what Hart identifies as the *peripeteia*, egress would be accompanied by the contemplation of its stark prophecy and the necessity of penitence for personal salvation (“Chiastic” 19).

Installed sometime between 1220 and 1230, Chartres’ labyrinth has survived intact where others have not. At Reims, an eighteenth-century Canon had the labyrinth removed because it had become a veritable playground (Kern 160; Branner 18). Unlike at Chartres, Reims’ labyrinth was laid out in a square, resquaring the circle. It incorporated depictions of its architects at each of the four corners, just as legend had it that the architect of Chartres was buried at the center, under “*le ciel*.”⁴² The choreographed path and surrogate pilgrimage of the *chemin de Jérusalem* reflects the church’s status as the sole means to salvation: the “logical and coherent” system that

⁴¹ The labyrinth is slightly elliptical, 41.34 feet west-east (the entrance axis) by 40.35 feet north-south. The “league” is in fact a much shorter 964.56 feet (Kern 153).

⁴² An 1849 excavation confirmed that no one had been buried there (Kern 153; 160-61).

Stephen so memorably rejects in conversation with Cranly, of which the reception of one's daily bread is an integral component (*P* 215).⁴³ The diameter of Chartres' labyrinth is roughly equal to that of the great rose window on the western façade. Were that wall folded down to the floor, the window and labyrinth would nearly coincide, strengthening the association between the Last Judgment and the *chemin de Jérusalem*. The right angle between the two suggests a *concordia discors*, resolving the existential turmoil of the penitent with the overarching and beneficent logic of Catholic dogma.⁴⁴

For much of medieval France and southern England, founding a cathedral also meant building an accompanying labyrinth. I already noted the metaphor of transubstantiation present in the node within "Cyclops," but will augment that account here to suggest that the parodic blessing of a pub as a cathedral invokes the idea of a church-labyrinth. Martin Cunningham's toast, "God bless all here is my prayer," introduces a parody of a church news column (12.1673). In the procession that is reported over the next eighty-odd lines, "the children of Elijah" make their way through central Dublin from Nelson's Pillar to Barney Kiernan's pub, chanting the lesson from the feast of the Epiphany (12.1676-1751). Diegetically, the procession occurs during the brief moment of Cunningham's toast, bookended by the "sacring bell" and mock blessing of all present (12.1676). Dogmatically, the body and blood of Jesus would be present in this instance of transubstantiation. Joyce renders the moment highly ironic by equating an

⁴³ The actual usage of church labyrinths was more varied. Doob finds no medieval evidence to support the idea that they were used for surrogate pilgrimages. Even the moniker "*chemin de Jérusalem*" was applied after the Renaissance. Regardless, the strength of the tradition in Joyce's time is too intriguing to go unremarked. Doob lists three primary functions of medieval church labyrinths. First, they were yet another sign of the magnificence of Christian architecture (*Idea* 121). Second, they carried various liturgical uses to assert "moral-doctrinal truths" (*Idea* 123). Finally, they fused aesthetics and theology to remind worshippers of the artistry of God in creating the cosmic labyrinth (*Idea* 128). My reading here conflates the three.

⁴⁴ The alignment of the rose window and the labyrinth is also more important for its symbolic, rather than literal significance. The window is slightly larger, with a 43.8-foot diameter (Demaray 22). Philip Ball concludes "the match is generally overstated" (139).

afternoon's quaff of Jameson with the Blessed Sacrament. A subtler pun on the body and blood of Jesus, however, is evident when the pub itself is refigured as a cathedral: "the celebrant blessed the house and censed the mullioned windows and the groynes and the vaults and the arrises and the capitals and the pediments and the cornices and the engrailed arches and the spires and the cupolas and sprinkled the lintels thereof with blessed water" (12.1731-35). But for the inclusion of cupola, the passage is a textbook description of a Gothic cathedral. Their cruciform shape recalls not only the crosses of Calvary, but also the body of Jesus itself. In the layout of Chartres, as elsewhere, the labyrinth occupied the place of the viscera.⁴⁵ "Cyclops" sees Bloom utterly confounded by his ostracism. From his vantage, it is comparatively simple Dublin anti-Semitism. From these Dubliners' perspective, it is more a matter of his presumed winnings on Throwaway's victory (exacerbated by comparatively simple Dublin anti-Semitism). When the narrative sees him ascending into heaven, "to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees," he symbolically leaves his "maze of distress," like a penitent at Chartres might have wished to ascend directly to the light of Jesus seated in Judgment in the western rose window (*U* 12.1917; *D* 33). Of course, the center of that labyrinth was also *le ciel*.

The parodic procession that interrupts Cunningham's toast passes Nelson's Pillar, site of Stephen's "*A Pisgah Sight of Palestine* or *The Parable of the Plums*" (7.1057-58). For Stephen's interlocutors, the parable recalls "Moses and the promised land," the same promised land which Bloom has been contemplating since finding the Zionist pamphlet for Agendath Netaim (4.191; 7.1061). Just as I earlier suggested that that the moment of transubstantiation within the turn in "Cyclops" is a clue to read the breadcrumbs as "daily bread," here I want to take the founding and blessing of a cathedral as a clue to read the trail of crumbs as Joyce's version of a *chemin de*

⁴⁵ Michael Ayrton writes of the significance of the labyrinth-as-body and mirror of micro- and macrocosm. The ancient Akkadians used the same word for "underworld" and "viscera" (8).

Jérusalem—or, rather, a *chemin de New Bloomusalem*—a choreographed path we might follow to the promised land of the novel. Again, we need to keep in mind the same pattern that I have already laid out, now as turns in a unicursal labyrinth. There are, however, two more turns in “Circe,” which trace Bloom’s pilgrimage through his private labyrinth, and which are contained by the repetition of a line that itself reinforces our recursive wanderings across the novel. The first turn begins as Bloom is searching for Stephen. Zoe notices their matching black attire and beckons him into the brothel (15.1395). As she flirts with Bloom, she finds his potato talisman, pocketing it coyly, saying “You’ll know me the next time” (15.1321). The theft of his charm induces yet another hallucination, as Zoe becomes the Calypso of the “womancity” Jerusalem (15.1327). She cites the Song of Solomon in Hebrew, verse five, “I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem” (15.1340-41). To Bloom’s comment that he rarely smokes, Zoe impels him to “Go on. Make a stump speech out of it” (15.1353).

In the irrational logic of “Circe,” the twin references to Jerusalem are enough to set up an associative chain in the scene that follows. As Bloom is stumping, performing first as a labor organizer before shifting to the beneficent King Leopold, familiar details creep in: John Howard Parnell with his chessboard tabard and Dr. William Alexander—the actual primate of Ireland recalls Alexander Dowie, the false Elijah—appear in a procession following “the pillar of cloud” (15.1407-23). Bloom, now crowned, promises and prophecies to his subjects, “ye shall ere long enter into the golden city which is to be, the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future” (15.1543-45). The breadcrumbs themselves appear when Bloom’s followers hand out “*loaves* and fishes” and the “Babes and Sucklings” sing their nursery rhyme, “Clap clap hands till Poldy comes home, / *Cakes* in his pocket for Leo alone,” and Bloom repeats the formula of

the throwaway's falling speed, "32 feet per second" (15.1569-1605; my emphasis).⁴⁶ King Leo's promises keep coming, only to be challenged by Alexander J Dowie, who proclaims himself leader of the "antiBloomites" (15.1753). Where Throwaway had earlier caused Bloom's ostracism, here it is the throwaway that portends his downfall. Mulligan is swiftly called in to diagnose Bloom as a "new womanly man," yet another figure for the paradoxical reconciliation of opposites.⁴⁷ Bloom endorses a rumor that he is either the "Messiah ben Joseph or ben David"; that is, either a messiah who will establish Jewish rule over Jerusalem or one who will bring about a new world (15.1834; Gifford and Seidman 481). In keeping with his sudden reversals of fortune, however, his neighbors Mastiansky and Citron soon cast him as a false messiah.⁴⁸

Within this hallucination brought on by Zoe's "You'll know me the next time," we come upon the first turn within "Circe," casting Bloom as both a pilgrim and a leader to a promised land. The second passing of that line later in the episode reinforces the journey toward some sort of salvation.⁴⁹ The second turn in "Circe" occurs just after Bloom is "broken" by Bello and begins to commiserate with The Nymph (15.3219). The familiar details accrete steadily. Bloom echoes Lenehan's assessment of the racehorse *Sceptre*, only now in relation to Molly: "Frailty, thy name is marriage" (15.3277; 12.1227-28). He drops a breadcrumb by recalling a snack of "tipsycake" as a schoolboy on a trip to Poulaphouca waterfall. The tender memory of his proposal, already recounted in a turn in "Lestrygonians," suddenly erupts: "High on Ben Howth

⁴⁶ Joyce changed the nursery rhyme's "pockets full of plums" to cakes, suggesting the clear intention of dropping a breadcrumb.

⁴⁷ Suggesting that Joyce knew Weininger as well as Stein did, see Chapter 1.

⁴⁸ These latter two reappear here because they were associated with the Agendath Netaim pamphlet in "Calypso." Bloom associates the lemons the colony promises to grow with his friend's name (4.204). By similar association, "citron" should recall the turns that close "Lotus-Eaters," open "Lestrygonians," and anchor "Oxen of the Sun."

⁴⁹ The interval sees Bella morph into Bello and Bloom at his most abject. It also contains a few other moments where the elements I have been tracing crop up with conspicuous proximity, such as when Bello reads the account of the Gold Cup and cries "a cockhorse to Banbury cross," again linking crossbuns and a throwaway (15.2944).

through rhododendrons a nanny goat passes, plumpuddered, buttytailed, dropping currants” (15.3324; 15.3367-68). The image of looking down on water brings in the throwaway: “Thirtytwo head over heels per second. Press nightmare. Giddy Elijah. Fall from cliff. Sad end of government printer’s clerk” (15.3374-76). The last sentence contains a subtler element, as the government printer for whom Bloom worked was *Alexander Thom* (Gifford and Seidman 508). Soon, The Nymph presents herself as a nun, remarking, “Tranquilla convent. Siser Agatha. Mount Carmel . . . No more desire . . . Only the ethereal. Where dreamy creamy gull waves o’er the waters dull” (15.3435-38). Gifford and Seidman note that Mount Carmel in Palestine was “associated with Elijah” (508). More importantly, these details lead up to The Nymph’s variation of the ditty Bloom invented as he first threw the throwaway down on the Liffey, “*The hungry famished gull / Flaps o’er the waters dull*” (which he himself had varied when coming upon A. E. moments later) (8.67-68; 8.549-50). As The Nymph repeats the line, the stage directions record, “*Bloom half rises. His back trouserbutton snaps*” (15.3439). Her repetition of the little rhyme on the gulls reminds Bloom of Molly. When Bloom “half rises”—like a halfbaked bun—the Button goes “Bip!” and The Nymph’s spell over Bloom is “broken” (15.3439-49). As Bella Cohen reappears, she says “You’ll know me the next time” (15.3477-80). Bella thus closes the second turn in “Circe” with a metafictional commentary on Joyce’s labyrinthine method. If we are to find the turns in the labyrinth, we must know these various details to know them the next time they appear around a crumb of bread.⁵⁰ It is crucial that here the throwaway empowers Bloom to break free of both The Nymph and Bella, whereas in the first node I traced in “Circe,” Alexander J Dowie dispelled the illusion of King Leopold’s power (like the myriad other ways that Throwaway/the throwaway “break” Bloom). Tracing that recursive path back to the earlier

⁵⁰ In their way, the details thus function like the potato talisman Zoe takes from Bloom.

turns has brought Bloom to the center of his labyrinth. Having reached his own moment of clarity and mental equanimity, his own empowering *peripeteia*, he may now begin to retrace the *chemin de New Bloomusalem* back out of his existential labyrinth to begin his *nostos* toward the promised land at 7 Eccles Street.

Bloom's mental equanimity is reinforced in "Ithaca," where he and Stephen engage in a mutual "exodus from the house of bondage to the wilderness of inhabitation" (17.1021-22). Joyce figures their movement from kitchen to garden as an Easter procession, tinged with the memory of the Exodus with the low intonation of Psalm 113:1 (114:1 KJV): "*In exitu Israël de Aegypto, domus Jacob de populo barbaro facta est Judaea sanctificatio eius, Israël potestas eius*" ("When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion"). Critics have long noted allusions to Dante in the passage, and the psalm is the same sung by souls entering purgatory in the *Purgatorio* (2.46).⁵¹ Joyce rewrites the closing lines of the *Inferno* with his vision of the night sky greeting Bloom and Stephen, as it had greeted Virgil and Dante ascending from Hell (*Inferno* 34.136-39):

What spectacle confronted them when they, first the host, then the guest, emerged silently, doubly dark, from obscurity by a passage from the rere of the house into the penumbra of the garden?

The heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit. (*U* 17.1036-39)⁵²

This sight of the stars prompts Bloom's reflections on "the quadrature of the circle" that I noted above, invoking unicursal labyrinths' dome over the square (17.1072). Finally, at "Stephen's suggestion, at Bloom's instigation," the two water the waste land of the garden, in what A.

⁵¹ See Reynolds 456-58, Litz 399-400, and Gifford and Seidman 581. My analysis in what follows is indebted to all three. On Dante's relationship to Chartres, see Demaray, 22-24.

⁵² Mandelbaum translates the original: "My guide and I came on that hidden road / to make our way back into the bright world; / and with no care for any rest, we climbed— / he first, I following—until I saw, / through a round opening, some of those things / of beauty Heaven bears. It was from there / that we emerged, to see—once more—the stars" (*Inferno* 34.133-39).

Walton Litz calls their “moment of symbolic union” (17.1186; Litz 401). Litz follows Clive Hart to point out that the theme of “micturition as creation and transubstantiation” had already been established in Buck Mulligan’s “Ballad of Joking Jesus.”⁵³

The founding of the Cathedral of Barney Kiernan in “Cyclops” suggests that we might read the breadcrumbs as turns in a unicursal church labyrinth. When Bloom and Stephen embark on their exodus in “Ithaca,” their search for that promised land where they will find spiritual union and renewal, they play the roles of pilgrims walking the *chemin de New Bloomusalem*, emerging silently from “obscurity.” They do so from the house at 7 Eccles Street, but the labyrinth at Chartres was also a “house of Dedalus” or *domus daedali*, as indicated even today by the French “*dédale*” (maze). Even more conspicuous is Joyce’s choice to rewrite the ending of the *Inferno* rather than simply quote it, as both he and Dante quote Vulgate Psalm 113. What Gifford and Seidman call his “‘improved’ version” of Dante’s glimpse of the stars (again: “The heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit”) might also describe a pilgrim’s view upon leaving Chartres’ labyrinth, gazing up at the rose window backlit by the setting sun and set against the cathedral’s stone darkness, its rosettes, studded circles, and ellipses dominated by sapphire *bleu de Chartres*.⁵⁴ The subsequent acknowledgement of Molly’s lamp sees the scene playing further with the salvation that would weigh so heavily on the mind of a pilgrim gazing at

⁵³ Litz 401. The lines of the “Ballad” in question run, “If anyone thinks that I amn’t divine / He’ll get no free drinks when I’m making the wine / But have to drink water and wish it were plain / That I make when the wine becomes water again” (1.596-99).

⁵⁴ “*Bleu de Chartres*” describes the sapphire-tinted soda glass associated with Chartres and Saint-Denis in Paris (Ball 250-51). We know that Joyce had visited Chartres at least once, although Arthur Power’s account of it is from June 1925 (Power 101; for the date, cf. Ellmann, *JJ* 571). Among the three lancets on the west façade, below the rose window, is one of the earliest examples of the “Tree of Jesse” theme in medieval stained glass. Dating circa 1145, the window depicts Jesus’s ancestry as a tree sprouting from Jesse’s groin, with David, Solomon, et al. depicted in its boughs. It may not be a stretch to read this “heaventree” as a part of Joyce’s reworking of Dante (Miller 30). The basic image of blue-tinted windows against a stone backdrop is, I think, more convincing. A final aspect of Bloom’s escape from “Circe” is Joyce’s revision of Dante’s ascent from Hell in the opening lines of the *Purgatorio*: “The gentle hue of oriental sapphire / in which the sky’s serenity was steeped— / its aspect pure as the far horizon— / brought back my joy in seeing just as soon / as I had left behind the air of death” (1.13-17).

that nightblue fruit. The catechist asks, “What visible sign attracted Bloom’s, who attracted Stephen’s, gaze?”, thus recalling the question that Cato puts to Virgil and Dante in the opening lines of the *Purgatorio*: “What served you both as lantern / when, from the deep night that will always keep / the hellish valley dark, you were set free?” (*U* 17.1171-72; *Purgatorio* 1:43-45). The allusion marks Molly as Bloom’s Beatrice and reminds us that the salvation of the Last Judgment depicted in the rose window coincides with the still-open question of whether Bloom and Molly’s marriage will be saved.

The culmination of the scene with micturition/transubstantiation drops a crumb of bread. Bloom completes his *chemin de New Bloomusalem*, while the Chartres metaphor turns back to the generic idea of the labyrinth with the immediate intercession of the square-the-circle theme. After Bloom selectively recounts his day to Molly, the catechist asks “What moved visibly above the listener’s and the narrator’s invisible thoughts?” (17.2298-99). The answer is simple: the shadow that Molly’s lamp casts on the ceiling. That “upcast reflection of a lamp and shade,” however, evokes a labyrinth: “an inconstant series of concentric circles of varying gradations of light and shadow” (17.2300-01).

The episode ends with Bloom’s *non sequitur* of an answer to the catechist’s “When?”: “Going to dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor roc’s auk’s egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler” (17.2227-30). Helen Georgi cites Rudolph Koch to show that the image of a circle contained by a square was a medieval sign for “urine” (Georgi 333; Koch 71).⁵⁵ The ideogram of the circle contained by a square does fit nicely with the micturition/transubstantiation theme, but I would like to interpret this particular squared

⁵⁵ For Georgi, this pun on “you’re in” suggests that Bloom and Molly will find sexual as well as spiritual union: “the shadow of Bloom’s impotence has lifted, and the sexual union correlates in microcosm to the sense of squaring the circle in macrocosm, namely, unity in the material and spiritual world” (333-34).

circle in two further ways. First, Gifford and Seidman read the “square round Sinbad the Sailor roc’s auk’s egg” as a reference to Dante’s use of a geometer frustrated by squaring the circle as a metaphor for humanity’s ignorance of the divine (Gifford and Seidman 606; *U* 17.2328-29).

Dante can only vaguely convey the vision of a human form imprinted upon the tripartite divine circle. His comprehension is as limited as his ability to express it:

As the geometer intently seeks
to square the circle, but he cannot reach,
through thought on thought, the principle he needs,
so I searched that strange sight:
(*Paradiso* 33.133-136)

Crucially, he goes on to imagine his knowledge and artistry in Daedalian terms:

I wished to see
the way in which our human effigy
suited the circle and found place in it—
and my own wings were far too weak for that.
(*Paradiso* 33.133-39)

Dante imagines himself an Icarus with a mind that is all too human to comprehend the divine image. Joyce had less deference to Dante’s god and was eager to let both his knowledge and expression soar. The labyrinths of *Ulysses* suggest that Joyce thought himself closer to Ovid, who boasts: “Minos could not control the wings of a man; I am planning to hold fast the winged god” (“*Non potuit Minos hominis conpescere pinnas; / Ipse deum volucrem detinuisse paro*”) (Ovid, *Art of Love* II.97-98). Secondly, Karen Lawrence has pointed out how the “fertile medium of dream language” in the final two answers of “Ithaca” “looks back to the ‘moo-cow’ story that begins *A Portrait* and forward to the language of *Finnegans Wake*.” She continues, “in ‘Ithaca,’ we see that the wealth of possible connections can never be catalogued completely” (198). In other words, even the catechism—the exemplar of the rational and logical ordering of knowledge and experience—is shot-through with the illogical and irrational in Bloom’s “dream language.”

The labyrinth of light moving visibly above his invisible thoughts is symbolic of all thought: reason and unreason never fully separate.

The Cretan-type Labyrinth

Where the *Labyrinthspiel* with which I began turned *Ulysses* into a game that offered up Joyce's artistry as daily bread for our intellectual sustenance and aesthetic salvation, the metaphor of the unicursal labyrinth reinforces Joyce's bifurcated play. The Chartres-type labyrinth is rational play. Its choreographed path to the promised land of Joyce's creation reflects one pole of the structural dichotomy in which Ireland is trapped: *Cristo*. In what follows, I want to turn to the second pole, albeit less to the British Empire represented by the Viceregal Cavalcade than to the classical history from which unicursal labyrinths come to us, and in which *Cesare* played no small role. The Chartres-type labyrinth is emblematic of Bloom's existential journey, but here I will read the turns as a unicursal labyrinth not with the Christian pilgrimage in mind, but its mythic origins in ancient Crete. Like Bloom, Daedalus's namesake Stephen has his own labyrinth to escape. The way into this reading is again the turn within "Cyclops."

After the cathedral-founding procession ends and Martin Cunningham's toast is offered as a secularized "Eucharist," Bloom returns from the courthouse in a flush. He draws the Citizen's ire, who ambiguously threatens, "Don't tell anyone" (12.1762). Again, the Citizen believes that Bloom is being stingy with his purported winnings on the Gold Cup. Bloom remains unaware of Lenehan's rumor-mongering and is more concerned with getting the Dignams their relief fund than with keeping his supposed secret:

—Beg pardon, says he.

—Come on boys, says Martin, seeing it was looking blue. Come along now.

—Don't tell anyone, says the citizen, letting a bawl out of him. It's a secret. (*U* 12.1762-65)

Just as this turn suggests the transubstantiation metaphor and—because of the founding of a cathedral—the Chartres-type labyrinth, here I argue that the conspicuous emphasis on a “secret” introduces the Cretan labyrinth, which was itself founded on a secret.⁵⁶ Minos had it built to hide the family shame, the Minotaur, who had already “grown / past all concealment” (Ovid, Martin 8.213-13). He had Daedalus, “a man famous for his skill in the builder’s art” devise the labyrinth, a “*domo caescisque includere tectis*,” literally a roofed-house with blinds or dead-ends (*Metamorphoses* VIII.158-59). Daedalus “framed confusion and seduced the eye / into a maze of wandering passages” (“*ponit opus turbatque notas et lumina flexum / ducit in errorem variarum ambage viarum*”) (Ovid, Martin 8.221-22).⁵⁷ The labyrinth, here, is described as a sort of *trompe l’oeil* architecture, a description that might serve just as well for Joyce’s formal experimentation in *Ulysses*.⁵⁸ Ovid uses the simile of the Maeander river, which “plays” (*ludit*) in the Phrygian fields, to describe the path through the labyrinth. He tells us that Daedalus himself was “scarce able to find his way back to the place of entry, so deceptive was the enclosure he had built”

⁵⁶ I want to avoid getting lost in the manuscript history of the novel, but it is worth noting that, beyond the transubstantiation of Martin Cunningham’s toast, the two ancillary emphases I have read in this scene (the description of a Gothic cathedral and the phrase “It’s a secret”), were relatively late—and, crucially, coterminous—additions. The initial typescript based on the *Little Review* printing does not describe a Gothic cathedral at all. Instead, it reads, “the celebrant blessed the house and censed and sprinkled the lintels thereof with blessed water and prayed that God would bless that house as he had blessed the house of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and make the angels of His light to inhabit therein” (*JJA* 13.165). Joyce does not imply a Gothic cathedral until he made additions to three of four versions of placard 37 sent to him by his printer Maurice Darantière. He first added “the mullioned windows and groynes” (19.206), then “the vaults and the arrises and the capitals and the pediments” (19.222), then finally “the cornices and the engrailed arches and the spires and the cupolas” (19.230). These were added in versions one, three, and four, respectively. In version two of placard 37, he added the Citizen’s “It’s a secret” (19.215). The proximity and specificity of these additions suggest a comprehensive effort to include both a Christian and a Cretan labyrinth as the novel neared publication.

⁵⁷ Miller gives: “He confused the usual passages and deceived the eye by a conflicting maze of divers winding paths” (*Metamorphoses* VIII.160-61). In the following discussion, I will selectively cite translations by Charles Martin and Frank Justus Miller, depending on their respective emphases. The Martin translation will be indicated parenthetically. All Latin quotations are from the Loeb edition with Miller’s facing translation. I will use the same method with the references to Robert Fagles’ translation of the *Aeneid*, below.

⁵⁸ This literary depiction of the Cretan labyrinth is multicursal, whereas surviving visual depictions are unicursal. My primary emphasis will be on the unicursal idea, especially when I reference the *lusus Troiae* below.

(*Metamorphoses* VIII.160-68). After Theseus kills the Minotaur and sails off with Ariadne, Crete becomes a prison for Daedalus and his son. As Minos rules everything but the air, Daedalus “set his mind at work upon unknown arts and changes the laws of nature” (“*et ignotas animum dimittit in artes / naturamque novat*”) to build wings for their escape (*Metamorphoses* VIII.188-89). As he works with beeswax and feathers, the young Icarus “playfully got in his father’s way” (Ovid, Martin 8.275). Icarus’s sport is a form of *lusus*. His youth and exuberance are the ultimate cause of his fall, as he “audaciously began to play,” acceding to the desire for greater heights (Ovid, Martin 8.312).⁵⁹ Icarus falls, then, because of his failure to recognize the gravity of the situation (so to speak), refusing to “fly in a middle course” and instead engaging in play that is so dangerous as to be irrational (*Metamorphoses* VIII.203).

“*Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes*” is, of course, the epigraph to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and is often taken as indicative of Stephen’s sense of himself as a descendent of Daedalus. Although he prays to his namesake at the close of *Portrait*, “Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead,” as a character, Stephen is less attuned to the possibilities of failure than was his creator (*P* 224).⁶⁰ The first inklings of his aesthetic calling are couched in his rejection of the Jesuit priesthood: “The snares of the world were its ways of sin. He would fall. He had not yet fallen but he would fall silently, in an instant” (*P* 142). The only type of fall Stephen seems to countenance—let alone anticipate—is Luciferian, not Icarian. As I noted

⁵⁹ Martin is freer in his translation of “*audaci coepit gaudere volatu*” than Miller, who renders the phrase: “[the boy] began to rejoice in his bold flight” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII.223). Schork shows how Joyce was also indebted to Ovid’s treatment of Daedalus in the *Ars Amatoria*. In that earlier work, Ovid emphasizes Icarus’ innocence, over his play: “With beaming face the boy handled the feathers and the wax, not knowing that the harness was prepared for his own shoulders” (Ovid, *Art of Love* II.49-50). He tells the story to establish an elaborate conceit on the difficulty of controlling winged things (such as Cupid). Schork finds this version the source for Stephen’s “*Pater, air*” in “*Scylla and Charybdis*” (*U* 9.954; *Latin* 157).

⁶⁰ Schork notes how Joyce changes the description of Daedalus as “*opifex*” to “artificer.” He cites Lewis and Short to argue for the precision with which Joyce turns a craftsman or “master of the *artes sordidae*” into an *artifex*, or “master of the liberal arts” (*Latin* 154-55).

earlier, he famously describes those dangers of which he is aware as “nets.” Speaking to his revivalist compatriot Davin, he boasts “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets” (*P* 179). By the time of his return to Ireland, however, he has come to realize that although he can channel Daedalus, neither Icarus nor Daedalus’s too-promising nephew Perdix (the lapwing) can be wholly absent from his mythical ancestry.⁶¹ As he silently laments in “Scylla and Charybdis”: “Fabulous artificer. The hawklike man. You flew. Whereto? Newhaven-Dieppe, steerage passenger. Paris and back. Lapwing. Icarus. *Pater ait*. Sebedabbled, fallen, weltering. Lapwing you are. Lapwing be” (9.952-54). As Joseph Heininger has put it, “Stephen has not found in Paris any of the successes he had hoped for but rather a series of political, artistic, religious, and sexual disillusionments. The ‘nets’ he had tried to escape by leaving Ireland have demonstrated their universal reach and unexpected strength” (443).⁶²

In *Ulysses*, then, Stephen recognizes that he is in danger of an Icarian fall, wondering at the extent to which he is caught, like Daedalus, in a trap of his own making. As Stephen gets deeper into his reading of *Hamlet* at the National Library, he provocatively claims “Paternity may be a legal fiction,” citing Pasiphae and the labyrinth’s Minotaur in support of his assertion (9.854). He promptly reflects, “What the hell are you driving at? . . . Are you condemned to do this?” (9.844-49). The conversation turns when Magee exclaims “Names! What’s in a name?”

⁶¹ Daedalus was so threatened by Perdix—at twelve he had already invented the iron saw—that he threw his nephew-apprentice off of the Acropolis. Athena saved the boy at the last moment, changing him into a partridge (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII.236ff.). Alberto Moreiras highlights problems with both Ovid’s text and its translations, choosing to interpret the boy as being named “Talós,” and concluding that “Perdix” was the boy’s mother’s name (71-75). His emphasis on Talos’s maternity is crucial to his psychoanalytic reading, but will not affect my own.

⁶² Beyond the critics of Stephen’s “fall” whom I cited in note 3, above, Sean Latham sees Stephen’s snobbery as inhibiting his “proper imaginative development, for it exiles him to a dreary world of empty performance” (790). Begam argues that when Stephen attempts to establish a transcendental metaphysics, he finds “the world of immediate experience is ‘ineluctable,’ holding him fast within the matrices of time and space” (194).

(9.901). Stephen's answer recalls how he once thought of his name as a prophecy, only now in terms that highlight its prerational contingency, rather than its rational inevitability: "What's in a name? That is what we ask ourselves in childhood when we write the name that we are told is ours" (9.926-27).⁶³ Stephen doubts his capacity for flight as he compares his current interlocutors (some of Dublin's leading literati) to others who had served as the whetstones of his intellect: Cranly, Mulligan, his brother Maurice. He reminds himself to forge ahead: "Speech, speech. But act. Act speech. They mock to try you. Act. Be acted on" (9.977-79). The need to "act speech" is a tacit admission that Stephen is working performatively, with the prerational play of being-as-becoming. This is the more fundamental sense in which Stephen is a flailing Icarus, caught audaciously playing too close to the sun. His only recourse is to more play: "He laughed to free his mind from his mind's bondage" (9.1016). Acting speech suggests that his theory might do things in the world, such as earn a commission, and yet his admission that he does not believe his own theory reinforces its relative contingency. Eglington, who has to keep his journal *Dana* financially afloat, quite reasonably writes Stephen's playing off, calling him "a delusion"—accusing him, etymologically, of "false play" (9.1064). "Well in that case . . . I don't see why you should expect payment for it since you don't believe it yourself," he responds (9.1071-72). If Stephen wants to fly by the nets of nationality, language, and religion (and now, it seems, alcoholism, poverty, debt, and debased sexuality), to become the type of artist that produces a *Ulysses* and not just "deeply deep" epiphanies, he will need to more skillfully balance his

⁶³ The corresponding passage in *Portrait* reads, "Now, as never before, his strange name seemed to him a prophecy. . . . Now, at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air" (148). The reflection is prompted by his classmates Hellenizing his name, shouting "Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!" (P 147). John Paul Riquelme's note reads the Greek as "Ox as wreath-bearer for sacrifice," and so the Minotaur—the ox—is inextricably linked to the poet's crown of laurel. Within "Scylla and Charybdis," he immediately remembers both the moniker "*Bous Stephanoumenos*" and his acquisition, immediately thereafter, of "a pointed salteaten stick," the precursor to his current ashplant (U 9.939; P 149).

delusional Icarian play with reasoned Daedalian craft (3.141). He will, in other words, need to temper his lopsidedly prerational relativism with the bifurcated play of a ludic modernist.

Although Daedalus was nearly lost in the completed labyrinth, it is the metaphorical labyrinth of exile on Minos's Crete that he escapes by flight. Just as the conceit of following Chartres's labyrinth to its center, *le ciel*, gives us a metaphorical vantage, by flying the middle course Daedalus skims the dome over the square, and reconciles the labyrinth's inherent *concordia discors*. His example of moving from the aleatory confusion of a maze-treader to appreciating rational artifice like a maze-viewer is essentially a ludic modernist gesture. Ovid's phrasing of "Changing the laws of nature" ("*naturam novat*") reinforces Daedalus' latent modernism, as "*novat*" carries the sense of refreshing and making new (*Metamorphoses* VIII.189). Daedalus knew the rules of the game well enough as its creator, but also knew how to break them productively, to create a new language games. If Minos controls all but the air, in other words, one must learn to fly by *ignotas artes*.

In "Scylla and Charybdis," Stephen is not yet able (or willing) to fly a middle course. In "Circe," however, when we next see him engage his mythical ancestry, Joyce offers hope that he might soon be able to temper his play. I just argued that Bloom begins to escape own labyrinth after the moment of *peripeteia* when his button goes "Bip!" and he reclaims his talisman from Zoe. The same moment sees him begin to assert his own symbolic fatherhood to Stephen by paying Bella fairly and subsequently taking care of Stephen's money (15.3441; 15.3584ff.). His progress out of the labyrinth stalls when he turns Zoe away from reading Stephen's palm, proffering his own instead. She seems to find evidence of his cuckoldry and whispers as much to Florry (15.3722-23). In a near-direct quotation from "Sirens," the stage directions flash to Blazes Boylan in his hackney car, only now bragging to Lenehan of his conquest (15.3726-3753). Zoe's

whispers to Florry are doubled by the Ormond barmaids, Lydia Douce and Mina Kennedy: “*Bronze by gold they whisper*” (15.3735). As the fantasy of Boylan and Molly’s tryst plays out, Bella and Kitty join in the secret, laughing at Bloom’s plight (15.3754-3818). Where I earlier read the supposed secret of Throwaway as evocative of the labyrinth, here the secret of Bloom’s cuckoldry is given its own prize bull in the form of Boylan. Stephen makes the association concrete when he utters, “*Et exaltabuntur cornua iusti* [And the horns of the righteous shall be exalted]. Queens lay with prize bulls. Remember Pasiphae for whose lust my grandoldgrossfather made the first confessionbox” (15.3865-67). Stephen recalls Pasiphae and Minos because the apparition of Shakespeare in the mirror moments before casts his mind back to his failed flight in “Scylla and Charybdis” (15.3821-24).

Stephen proceeds to give the girls some “parleyvoo” before Bloom attempts to calm him down, clearly recognizing that Lynch’s reference to the abortive Paris sojourn is fraying Stephen’s tattered and Bass-besotted nerves (15.3876). “Look . . .” Bloom says, approaching Stephen (15.3933). His concern is met with contempt: “No, I flew. My foes beneath me. And ever shall be. World without end. (*he cries*) *Pater! Free!*” (15.3935-36). Although meant to evoke his mythical father and God the father, his cries are answered by his paternity-is-a-legal-fiction-father, as Simon Dedalus “*swoops uncertainly through the air, wheeling, uttering cries of heartening, on strong ponderous buzzard wings*” (15.3946-47). Stephen’s confrontation with Simon will shift from a foxhunt into the Gold Cup. Where thus far Throwaway has been associated with Bloom, here the presence of Garrett Deasy links the race to Stephen (15.3981). The scene closes with an allusion to their earlier conversation. Hearing Privates Carr and Compton pass by outside with Cissy Caffery, singing “My Girl’s a Yorkshire Girl” in “discord,” Stephen responds, “Hark! Our friend noise in the street” (15.3996-98).

From the secret of a husband and spiritual father's misfortune to the recollection of Icarus's fall, this passage in "Circe" consistently evokes the Cretan labyrinth. Its prominence subtly prepares us for an initiation rite that Stephen must perform and pass in order to fulfill his artistic destiny, and which itself derives from the Daedalus myth. Upon hearing the song in the street, Zoe compels the party to "Dance! Dance!" (15.4005). Stephen begins "*beating his foot in tripudium*" (15.4013). After a moment, "*Arabesquing wearily, they weave a pattern on the floor, weaving, unweaving, curtseying, twirling, simply swirling*" (15.4091-92). The wheeling waltz soon has Stephen and his ashplant in a brief "*Pas seul*," until Simon cries, "Think of your mother's people!" (15.4120; 15.4137). Stephen's only answer is to proclaim "Dance of death," as the scene begins its climax with the appearance of his mother (15.4139). Mulligan appears with "*a smoking buttered split scone in his hand*," dropping a breadcrumb (15.4168). Finally facing down his mother's apparition and her memory, Stephen cries "*Nothing!*" and strikes out, brandishing his ashplant as if it were Siegfried's sword (15.4242). Upon smashing the chandelier, he comes back to his still-inebriated senses, and with a typically comic touch in a moment of high drama, Joyce has him run out of the brothel with "*his head and arms thrown back stark*," just as he had been taught in his childhood by Mike Flynn (U 15.4255; P 53).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ A final allusion to the Chartres-type labyrinth deserves mention here. Doob argues that medieval church labyrinths were used liturgically to assert "moral-doctrinal truths" (*Idea* 123). One such assertion is evident in a well-documented Easter dance performed on the labyrinth (no longer extant) at the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Auxerre. Although little documentation exists for Chartres, it is likely that it had a similar liturgical tradition, as the bishops of both cathedrals were subject to the archbishop of Sens ("Auxerre" 134). The dance represented Jesus' Harrowing of Hell—his descent and freeing of just souls to Heaven—modeled on the pagan precedent of Theseus slaying the Minotaur. The Auxerre dance was performed at vespers over the Easter holiday and accompanied by Wipo's *Victimae Paschale laudes*, which treats of the same theme (*Idea* 123; "Auxerre" 134-35). It involved the Dean of the cathedral performing a *tripudium* (dance), while singing and simultaneously tossing a *pelota* (ball) to the canons encircling him, *circa daedalum* (around the labyrinth) ("Auxerre" 134). The *pelota* represented both the ball of pitch Ariadne gave Theseus with which to choke the Minotaur and the ball of thread he used to retrace his route. The dance thus recalls Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, symbolizes the church's path to salvation, and participates in the cosmic symbolism of the labyrinth ("Auxerre" 137). The Easter procession in "Ithaca" is likewise modeled on a vespers ceremony and, again, symbolizes Bloom and Stephen's final ascent from the hell of "Circe" (17.1023-25). Stephen's weaving dance thus participates in this medieval tradition of labyrinth-dancing—down to

The concatenation of the weaving and unweaving dance, its qualified celebration, the encounter with the shade of May Goulding Dedalus, and her symbolic burial combine to suggest much deeper correspondences with the Daedalus myth than Stephen's cry of "*Pater! Free!*" alone suggests (15.3936). Joyce is in fact alluding to three other aspects of the Cretan labyrinth. The first is to the *Iliad* and the ekphrastic depiction of Achilles's shield. Among the vignettes wrought there by Hephaestus, we hear of the labyrinth not as a prison, but as a dancing floor that Daedalus made for Ariadne's "magical dancing."⁶⁵ The second allusion is to Plutarch, who writes that Theseus performed a dance called "The Crane" after escaping Crete and landing safely at Delos. He performed "an imitation of the circling passages in the Labyrinth, and consisting of certain rhythmic involutions and evolutions."⁶⁶ Theseus's crane dance and Ariadne's dancing floor merge in the third allusion, which is to the equestrian ballet that closes the funeral games Aeneas holds for Anchises in Book 5 of the *Aeneid*. Aeneas's son Ascanius leads three groups of young riders in a mock battle, a war game that proves the boys' maturity

"*beating his foot in tripudium*" (15.4013). God's presence is signaled by "Our friend noise in the street," again, formulated in reference to children playing (15.3998; 2.386). It is unclear whether Joyce could have known of the dance at Auxerre, but he certainly knew J. K. Huysmans's novel of Chartres, *La Cathédrale*. In the final chapter, Luc Durtal reflects on the variety of Christian dancing, including one at Limoges where "the Curé of St. Leonard and his parishioners pirouetted in the choir of the church" (329). For Joyce's relationship to Huysmans, see Mercier.

⁶⁵ "A dancing floor as well
he fashioned, like that one in royal Knossos
Daedalos made for the Princess Ariadnê.
Here young men and the most desired young girls
were dancing, linked, touching each other's wrists, . . .
Trained and adept, they circled there with ease
the way a potter sitting at his wheel
will give it a practice twirl between his palms
to see it run; or else, again, in lines
as though in ranks, they moved on one another:
magical dancing!"
(*Iliad* 18.678-92)

⁶⁶ Plutarch continues, "Theseus danced it round the altar called Keraton, which is constructed of horns ["kerata"] taken entirely from the left side of the head" (45). Not to put too fine a point on it, but the scene in "Circe" I have been following begins with the image of Shakespeare "*crowned by the reflection of the reindeer antlered hatrack in the hall*," which itself echoes "*Bloom's antlered head*"—his cuckold's horns (15.3823-24; 15.3764).

and ability to handle their horses and weapons as men. At Epytides's commands, we see them "wheeling charge into countercharge, return and turn / through the whole arena, enemies circling, swerving back / in their armor, acting out a mock display of war" (Virgil, Fagles 5.642-44). The Trojan boys weave their paths in play ("*texunt . . . ludo*"), and Virgil explicitly links their pattern to the labyrinth in "hilly Crete" ("*Creta . . . Labyrinthus in alta*") (Virgil, Fagles 5.646; *Aeneid* V.588-93). Robert Fagles translates their movements as "dancing," where Virgil has "*discurrere*," or wandering in different directions (Virgil, Fagles 5.639; *Aeneid* V.580). The translation combines the essence of the crane dance with a fundamental trait of the labyrinth: *error* or wandering.⁶⁷

In both choreography and in symbolism, Joyce folds these three classical precedents into Stephen's twirling and swirling, weaving and unweaving dance of death. He takes up his ashplant, which he has already been calling his "sword" throughout the day, to prove his manhood.⁶⁸ He confronts Simon, so sadly representative of a man caught in Ireland's nets, just as Aeneas will shortly descend to Hades to meet his own father, albeit on much warmer terms.⁶⁹ The dance helps to bury the ghost of his mother, nearly a year after her funeral. Insofar as I am reading the dance of death as an ancient initiation rite, it is crucial to remember that Stephen's

⁶⁷ Kern calls the dance "a sort of debutante ball for boys on horseback at which these youths, who were now capable of bearing arms, could demonstrate what they had learned" (77). Doob astutely notes, "Virgil gives us a simile, not a metaphorical equation; readers are free to limit or expand the resemblances between game and building" (*Idea* 29). As for its performance during a funeral, Kern reads three possible purposes: "protecting the deceased from being disturbed, protecting the living from the dead (sealing the grave), and symbolically guiding forth the souls of the deceased" (80). From the available evidence, Doob does not follow Kern on every point, but for my purposes, the thematic parallels with Stephen's situation are clear (Doob, *Idea* 27).

⁶⁸ For the ashplant as a sword, *U* 3.16; 9.296; and 9.957, this last during the lapwing passage.

⁶⁹ Aeneas's journey to the underworld begins at the gates of the temple to Apollo at Cumae, where Daedalus himself engraved his history after safely landing (the only other treatment of the Daedalus myth in the *Aeneid*). Aeneas prays to the Sibyl: "I ask no more than the realm / my fate decrees" (Virgil, Fagles 6.80-81). In limiting his ambition to his destiny and fate, he mirrors the young Stephen's idealistic desire to inherit Daedalus's realm of art. When he finally does reach his father in Hades, Anchises gives him a vision of Rome to come: all that he will "create" (see Virgil, Fagles, lines 870ff.)

guilt is not simply caused by his refusal to kneel and pray at her deathbed. In *Portrait*, moments before hearing his classmates call *Bous Stephenoumenos!*, he regards his matriculation at University College as evidence that “he had passed beyond the challenge of the sentries who had stood as guardians of his boyhood” (144). One of those sentries keeping him from the University—and thus his true vocation—was his mother, who was “hostile to the idea as he had read from her listless silence. Yet her mistrust pricked him more keenly than his father’s pride” (*P* 144). Where Stephen assumed that his university career would mark the end of his boyhood, Joyce holds out this moment in “Circe” as a later and necessary supplement that will finally allow him to escape those sentries and fly by the nets flung at his soul. Throughout *Ulysses*, then, Stephen fulfills the arc of *Hamlet*: “The boy of act one is the mature man of act five” (9.1020).

To Virgil, the funeral games for Anchises establish an important Roman rite called the *lusus Troiae* [game of Troy]. His treatment of Ascanius’s choreographed ride concludes with a reference to both its lineage and continued practice in Rome:

This tradition of drill and these mock battles:
 Ascanius was the first to revive the Ride
 when he girded Alba Longa round with ramparts,
 teaching the early Latins to keep these rites,
 just as he and his fellow Trojan boys had done,
 and the Albans taught their sons, and in her turn
 great Rome received the rites and preserved our fathers’ fame.
 The boys are now called *Troy*, their troupe the *Trojan Corps*.
 (Virgil, Fagles 5.655-62)

Virgil was far from disinterested in highlighting this history, as his patron Caesar Augustus is credited with popularizing the ride in Imperial Rome in order to strengthen ties to Troy (Suetonius 79). Even so, the *lusus Troiae* and the Cretan labyrinth were connected as early as 600 years before Virgil’s lightly propagandistic treatment, as shown by the depiction of horses

leaving a labyrinth on an Etruscan wine pitcher found at Tragliatella (see Figures 6a and 6b).⁷⁰ The inscription inside the labyrinth reads “Truia,” backwards, which is generally interpreted as “Troy.” According to Kern, this is “the earliest evidence of a name being given to a labyrinth” (79). The ancient image links Daedalus with Odysseus, artificer of the most famous horse in Trojan history. *Ulysses* turns what Virgil calls this “horse of mountainous bulk” into Throwaway (*Aeneid* II.15).

Equally compelling for my account is Ascanius’s later performance of the game of Troy at the founding of Alba Longa, celebrating the construction of its walls. From its roots as an initiation rite performed during funeral games, the *lusus Troiae* was associated with the founding of a city. Recall that the turn I traced in the “Oxen of the Sun” episode is written in stylistic imitation of Walter Savage Landor, whose *Imaginary Conversations* “do not attempt to re-create the historical past but rather to use that past to develop perspectives on the social, moral, and literary problems of Landor’s own time” (Gifford and Seidman 434). The end of Landor’s conversation between Horace and Virgil reads as if it were written specifically to describe Joyce’s project in *Ulysses*. Horace compliments Virgil: “Your first and second books are prodigies of genius. Continue, and you will have recorded the most memorable events of the most memorable nations, and have turned the eyes of future ages back toward them. Apollo and Neptune by their united power raised the walls of Troy; Virgilius, single-handed, will have raised an imperishable Rome” (442). And so we are back where we started: Joyce takes the staff of life, transubstantiates it into art, and by doing so through labyrinthine methods, single-handedly raises the walls of an imperishable Dublin, consecrated with his own *lusus Troiae*.

⁷⁰ The Tragliatella *oenochoe* dates from c. 620 BCE. The middle band of engravings is given in detail in Figure 6b. Kern argues that the conspicuous absence of the Minotaur and the presence of the riders indicates the local Etruscan tradition of the *lusus Troiae* (77-83).

Keeping ancient rites is one of the foundational manifestations of rational play.⁷¹ Again, one of the earliest definitions of ritual as play appears in Plato's *Laws*, where the Athenian character contends that because "man . . . has been created as a toy for God," he must "spend his whole life at 'play'—sacrificing, singing, dancing—so that he can win the favor of the gods" (VII.803c-e). This invocation of rational play presages the penitential logic of the Chartrean labyrinth and the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation. Plato's Athenian goes on, however, to cite the advice that the sagely disguised Athena gives to Telemachus as he is about to meet Nestor early in Book III of the *Odyssey*. The whole passage in Plato reads:

A man should spend his whole life at "play"—sacrificing, singing, dancing—so that he can win the favor of the gods and protect himself from his enemies and conquer them in battle. He'll achieve both these aims if he sings and dances in the way we've outlined; his path, so to speak, has been marked out for him and he must go on his way confident that the poet's words are true.

*Some things, Telemachus, your native wit will tell you,
And Heaven will prompt the rest. The very gods, I'm sure,
Have smiled upon your birth and helped to bring you up.* (*Laws* VII.803e-804)

Joyce's own Telemachus began with the headstrong assurance that the gods had smiled on his birth. With my reading of the various unicursal labyrinths in *Ulysses*, I have tried to show how Stephen's path toward the ludic modernism that is his ostensible birthright is marked out for him. With a hand as assured as that of Mentor—a god in disguise—Joyce lays out the proper rituals to guide the way: his own song and dance.

Conclusion

⁷¹ For C. J. Putnam "the seriousness of the future looms large in the happy present" of the *lusus Troiae* (87). The perfection of its choreography reminds us that whereas death is avoided in ritual, it cannot be in life: "the meaning of the *lusus Troiae* hovers between the two poles of complete escape and complete involvement with real life" (88). He explicitly cites Johan Huizinga's separation of play from "real" life (which I will not challenge for his reading of Virgil), but again, my sense of ludic modernism's bifurcated nature avoids such distinctions.

Joyce raises the walls of Dublin with a ludic modernist *lusus Troiae*, leaving its gates open wide by weaving two genera and at least three species of labyrinth into the novel. The reading I have offered takes Stephen Dedalus's name as Ariadne's ball of thread—a tantalizing leader that has been taken up before—which I have tried to unwind in order to follow its course deeper into *Ulysses* and into more of its labyrinths than have been explored. The idea of the labyrinth encapsulates *concordia discors*, reconciles competing perspectives and parallax, and circles the square. As such, it is also a figure for ludic modernism, whose defining feature is its simultaneous engagement of rational and prerational play. The bifurcated play concepts appear in *Ulysses* as the multicursal *Labyrinthspiel* and the unicursal labyrinths of Chartres and Crete, *Cristo e Cesare*, respectively. All of these labyrinthine metaphors depend upon the epiphanic logic of the minutiae of daily life arresting the eye long enough that readers notice the crumbs of bread that Joyce has scattered throughout the novel. I have argued that we can read that trail of crumbs as corresponding to the marks on a child's board game and the recursive turns of a labyrinth. Yet while the Christian and Cretan examples offer choreographed paths to salvation, a promised land, artistic maturity, and even the promise of divine protection over a city's future, our access to those singular paths remains contingent upon our playing along with Joyce's *Labyrinthspiel*. Joyce, in other words, uses performative means to metaphysical ends.

Penelope Reed Doob offers consolation to “maze-treaders” who might tire of their wandering in terms highly applicable to *Ulysses*, writing, “Once you learn the maze or see the labyrinth whole, then, elaborate chaos is transformed into pattern” (*Idea* 24). At least with regard to the labyrinths I have outlined, Joyce gambles on an aleatory method that can indeed reveal an elaborate—and reassuring—pattern, dimly appearing out of chaos like a winged form slowly climbing on the air. His wager answers Pascal's in its own way: again, the hand of this artist-god

is everywhere evident in his creation, quite unlike the artist-god that the young Stephen Dedalus thought “remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (*P* 189). Like the medieval architects at Reims, Joyce weaves his image into his labyrinth.⁷²

Finally, the exuberance of Joyce’s play with labyrinths and their history should in no way belie its seriousness. In reading *Ulysses* as a game, a *Labyrinthspiel*, my task has been to demonstrate that prerational play is never far from its rational counterpart. By weaving *Ulysses* into the long lineage of the labyrinth, Joyce likewise implies that from a ludic modernist’s inherently dual perspective, traditions of even the greatest gravity are implicated in play. From a ludic modernist’s perspective, the whole grand Achaean expedition was itself a *lusus Troiae* whose prelude was a compromised vanity contest and to which Odysseus’s travels and travails were but a lingering endgame. That *Ulysses* does not end in a vengeful bloodbath, like the *Odyssey*, marks a limitation of Homer’s imagination, not Joyce’s. Bloom lets his Minotaur live and will negotiate the shame to his marriage just as he has negotiated the labyrinth of Bloomsday: if not quite deftly, then deftly enough without descending to barbarism. From a ludic modernist’s perspective, flying by the nets of nation, language, and religion depends upon the knowledge and navigation of their contingency despite their practical ineluctability. The *Labyrinthspiel* lets us whet our intellects by playing against Joyce’s own. We must learn to not just play along, but to actively hone our strategies. Without a ludic modernist’s perspective, we risk getting caught in the nightmarish recurrence of history’s labyrinths: more Citizens will appear as Cyclopes, our leaders and heroes will be Boylans—yet more aggressive toffs in turn-

⁷² Maude Ellmann has argued for a further sense of “weaving” in the novel: Molly as a spider, with her eight sentences her arachnid legs, her monologue a Penelopean tale “woven” in tribute to Joyce’s patron Harriet Weaver (68). See also Schork’s discussion, in which he suggests an etymology of “Penelope” (*pēnē* + *elopeia*; the thread on a shuttle and a derivation of the verb to “pluck out”) as “Weaver-Unraveller” (*Greek* 92).

ups living off the ill-gotten gains of their fathers. Without a ludic modernist's perspective, our labyrinths might see us like those unlucky Athenian youths—doomed by accident of destiny to die for a king's vanity—or again like scab-kneed pilgrims: beguiled by a beautiful and transcendent logic founded on hollow foundations. *Ulysses* holds out hope that with a ludic modernist's perspective, our error and wandering in labyrinths might come to resemble a quiet evening at play: free, childlike, and navigable according to a will more our own than any weaver's.

Chapter Three

Playing with Masks: T. S. Eliot Beyond the Primitive

For a poet is an airy thing, winged, and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. As long as a human being has his intellect in his possession he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy.

-Socrates (Plato, *Ion* 534b)

Introduction

One wonders what modernists had to hide behind all of those masks. Gertrude Stein sat for Picasso some “eighty or ninety” times before he could finish—without, in the end, her presence—the flattened mask of her face (Stein, *ABT* 47). Wyndham Lewis prepared a face for T. S. Eliot, hanging a mask between a crown of brilliantined hair and the lavish expanse of the poet’s padded shoulders. For Rose Sélavy, all it took was some rouge, kohl, and a fur collar to soften the shadows in Man Ray’s studio. In sculpting his self-portrait as a young man, James Joyce donned a mask that might evoke an Athenian craftsman. Alfred Jarry masked his actors in modernism’s first *succès de scandale*: *Ubu Roi*. Eliot would later have the chorus in *The Rock* appear masked, “unindividuated,” he explained, “speaking *for me*,” for the poet who began his career behind a studious mask of Laforgian irony (“Three Voices” 91).

Not the least of things that modernists had to hide was the suspicion that their masks were stolen. Picasso’s portrait of Stein predated by mere months his more famous invocation of African and Iberian forms in *Les Femmes d’Alger*. Michael North has suggested that modernism developed out of the “contradictions of European colonialism,” which brought revelatory cultural artifacts from frontiers to metropolises (76). Artists considered whether the mask was a “psychological revelation exposing what usually lies *behind* the face” or whether it

was “convention embodied,” exposing “a void where the face should be” and thus the “conventional nature of all art” (63, emphasis in original). Much of the criticism on Picasso’s philosophical brothel follows what Susan Stanford Friedman summarizes as an “appropriation model” of modernist studies, which she criticizes for recapitulating “the logic of imperialism” (*Planetary* 65). In this, Western primitivism is read as theft on par with the exploitation of colonial resources.¹ Eliot himself outlined some of the social conditions that were necessary for the sort of modern art that could be considered appropriative: “Psychology . . . ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago” (“*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” 178). The ostensibly scientific study of myth, mind, and the “Other” may have been a step toward making modern art possible, but it may have done so by taking in stride what Jacques Derrida has called anthropology’s “white mythology.”²

There are limits to the appropriation model, and with a nuanced approach to ideology critique consistent with the new aestheticism, Jahan Ramazani cautions that in the heat of the chase, modernism’s police ought not pursue its thieves too blindly, no matter what different voices we “do.” He warns that adhering too closely to the appropriation script risks “circumscribing instead of opening up possibilities for global and transnational analysis,” thereby denying that cross-cultural exchanges can be aesthetically-generative (11). Friedman, in

¹ The debate over cultural appropriation in *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* is vitriolic. Opinions range from the suggestion, based on notebook sketches and chronological research, that Picasso had made his “breakthroughs” well before the Trocadéro exhibition of African masks (Warncke); to psycho-dramatic reasons why he may have denied such influence (Rubin); to accusations that modern art is permeated by imperialism (Gikandi). I address the latter in a later note and will address Eliot’s own relationship to the appropriation model momentarily. For *Les Demoiselles*’ effects on Stein, see North 59-76.

² In what Spariosu would call a prerational response to rational play, “white mythology” is Derrida’s term for the tautological truths that Western metaphysics takes to be foundational and universal: “Metaphysics—the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason” (213). Eliot, as this chapter will make clear, understood the contingency of “Reason” as defined in Western philosophy and anthropology, and moreover, incorporated that understanding in his poetry.

turn, advocates “a planetary approach to cultural circulation” that would acknowledge “a colonial modernism that Picasso and the cubists indigenized, that is, made native to Parisian modernism.” For Friedman, the “creative agencies of modernities outside the West circulated into the West as transformative influences” (*Planetary* 66). Where Friedman’s terms are meant to approach the circulation of plural modernities and modernisms, as I noted in the Introduction, my interrogation of the ludic is limited to one archive of modernism. But although the terms are different, my sense of the pressures that prerational play can exert on rational discourses is not dissimilar to Friedman’s invocation of indigenizing processes that are also transformative.

The influences of psychology, ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* upon Eliot are undeniable, and we need not elide ethnocentrism, nor ignore appropriations of the “*mentalité primitive*,” to note that strict ideology critique can circumscribe our understanding of his poetry. This chapter opens up new possibilities by looking to Eliot’s early practice of ludic modernism, which was later informed by primitivism and by his reading in anthropology. In what follows, I begin with the work of the anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, whose description of a “prelogical” mentality separating primitive cultures from a “logical” Western mind intrigued Eliot as early as his graduate work at Harvard.³ Here, I will examine the unacknowledged ways in which his prelogical/logical schema presages Mihai Spărosu’s sense of the prerational and rational play mentalities evident throughout Western thought. I argue that Lévy-Bruhl’s theories

³ Among others, William Harmon, Marc Manganaro, David Spurr, and David Chinitz have studied the influence thoroughly. I will return to their accounts. In his 1913 seminar with Josiah Royce (for which Harry Todd Costello published his transcriptions), Eliot defended Lévy-Bruhl’s thought in a paper titled “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual” (*Complete Prose* I 106-19). His deep reading in contemporary anthropology and comparative religion is reflected in a series of reviews of works by Émile Durkheim, A. J. Balfour, Clement C. J. Webb, W. J. Perry, and Wilhelm Wundt. In consequence, Eliot was skeptical of vogueish primitivism, and Chinitz contends that for Eliot, “the emergence of the primitive as a fad presents not only a nuisance but a positive obstacle to any consideration of primitive cultural constructs as a serious alternative to modern ones” (79). My citations to these reviews and other writings are to the originals where they are available, but since the time of my writing the full range has become available in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, particularly Volumes 1 and 2.

manifest in Eliot's poetry in precisely the sense of bifurcated play that Spariosu identifies. I then read this nuanced conception of play in Eliot's relationship to the materialism and social codes of bourgeois society, in his understanding of the poet's role within an atomized and increasingly diffuse culture, and finally, in the formal elements of his poetry that hearken to the primitivist artifact *par excellence*, the tribal mask. Play and the primitive converge in *The Waste Land*, which I read as the mask of the poet, his ritual dance, and his totem—Eliot's call for a renewed culture and his means of achieving it.

From Play to the Primitive

No doubt due to Eliot's invocations of *The Golden Bough* in both "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" and in the "Notes" to *The Waste Land*, James Frazer remains the anthropologist most readily associated with the poet. Frazer's influence on modernism hardly needs emphasis, except to highlight the fact that Lucien Lévy-Bruhl opened *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* with an explicit rebuke to the "comparative method" that Frazer, and colleagues such as E. B. Tylor, popularized.⁴ A synopsis of *How Natives Think* is necessary here in order to compare it to Mihai Spariosu's theory of play. In his Introduction, Lévy-Bruhl wondered why the comparative method had not developed a "positive science of the higher mental functions." "The English school of anthropology," he wrote, "is perpetually trying to show the relation between 'savage' and 'civilized' mentality, and to *explain* it. And it is just this *explanation* which has prevented their going any further. They had it ready-made. They did not look for it in the facts themselves, but imposed it on them" (*HNT* 7; emphasis in original). Predating Derrida by sixty

⁴ *Les fonctions mentales* (1910) was translated in 1926 as *How Natives Think*, hereafter *HNT*. Lévy-Bruhl's next major anthropological work was *La Mentalité Primitive* in 1922. Eliot himself commissioned an essay on "Primitive Mentality and Gambling" for *The Criterion* in 1924.

years, he argues that one problem with the comparative method is that Frazer's sense of his own cultural superiority, combined with the Enlightenment belief in the essentially unified and rational nature of human thought, let him imagine that "primitive" peoples possessed a mentality entirely like his own, only at a more childlike state of development.

Lévy-Bruhl launches his critique with the aid of Émile Durkheim's conception of "collective representations."⁵ In Lévy-Bruhl's summary, collective representations are a community's beliefs, rituals, and ways of thinking: "They are common to the members of a given social group; they are transmitted from one generation to another; they impress themselves upon its individual members, and awaken in them sentiments of respect, fear, adoration, and so on . . . they present themselves in aspects which cannot be accounted for by considering individuals merely as such" (*HNT* 3). Tylor attempted to explain animistic beliefs and practices as the grasping explanations of insufficiently rational and child-like individuals, writing, "Spirits are simply personified causes" (qtd. in *HNT* 14). To Lévy-Bruhl, the English school's Western sense of the individual belies the commonality of collective representations: "Myths, funeral rites, agrarian practices and the exercise of magic do not appear to originate in the desire for a rational explanation: they are the primitives' response to collective needs and sentiments which are profound and mighty and of compulsive force" (*HNT* 15). From the start, then, Lévy-Bruhl's anthropology questions the primacy and universality of both reason and the rational individual.

Within a primitive society, the idea of "representation" is distinct from the purely "intellectual or cognitive phenomenon" that it is in "civilization"—what we would understand as a Platonic conception of representation as mimesis-imitation. Instead, he argues, "what is really

⁵ Lévy-Bruhl adopts Durkheim's concept wholesale—with only slight attribution—and for my purposes, his summaries will suffice. Eliot referenced Durkheim's original piece, "*Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives*" (1898) in the paper for Royce's seminar. It is reprinted in Durkheim 1-48.

‘representation’ to us is found blended with other elements of an emotional or motor character, coloured and imbued by them, and therefore implying a different attitude with regard to the objects represented” (*HNT* 23). There is something physical and real at work here, as if collective representations might make something happen in the world, rather than in the mind alone. This is emphasized by ritual performance, and although “the ceremonies in which these representations are translated into action [*sont*], so to speak, take place periodically,” they have lasting impact, as a representation will “never appear . . . as a colourless and indifferent image” (*HNT* 24). The added emphasis on the action brought about by collective representations is a crucial distinction that leads Lévy-Bruhl to call primitives’ mental activity “mystical,” and to assert their “belief in forces and influences and actions which, though imperceptible to sense, are nevertheless real” (*HNT* 25). Totemic communities rely on the mystical connections between animals, plants, people, and their environment, and thus the line between the animate and inanimate is deemphasized. For example, “rocks, the form or position of which strike the primitive’s imagination, readily assume a sacred character in virtue of their supposed mystic power” (*HNT* 27). The forms of animals and objects are so tied to their mystical powers that the most mundane objects are faithfully copied from generation to generation, lest a “change in the established order of things” lead to adverse effects (*HNT* 28-29).⁶ As Lévy-Bruhl summarizes the mystical relationship to nature, “there is no phenomenon which is, strictly speaking, a physical one . . . rippling water, the whistling wind, the falling rain . . . [are] immediately enveloped in a state of complex consciousness, dominated by collective representations” (*HNT* 30-31). There is, moreover, an epistemological element at work, as “this mentality never perceives the phenomenon as distinct from the interpretation” (*HNT* 32).

⁶ Lévy-Bruhl is quoting J. J. M. de Groot on Chinese custom, although the phrase appears with a slightly different complexion in the context of modernism.

Lévy-Bruhl goes on to posit a “law of participation” that governs individuals’ relationships to collective representations. The law of participation preempts the rationality of the law of non-contradiction, suggesting instead that “objects, beings, phenomena can be, though in a way incomprehensible to us, both themselves and something other than themselves” (*HNT* 61). Such is the mystical explanation of totemism. As one of Lévy-Bruhl’s sources has it, “The Bororos [of Brazil] give one rigidly to understand that they are araras [parakeets] *at the present time*, just as if a caterpillar declared itself to be a butterfly” (*HNT* 62). An individual’s participation in totemic collective representations might extend even further, such that “the actual individual, the ancestral being living again in him, and the animal or plant species that forms his totem are all mingled” (*HNT* 76). In this way, the past is cohesive with individuals, who are themselves cohesive with their human and totemic communities. The mystical sense of collective representations and the seeming disregard for the law of non-contradiction finally lead Lévy-Bruhl to distinguish a “prelogical” mentality distinct from the “logical” mentality evident in himself, Frazer, Tylor, and other “civilized” commentators. I use his vocabulary because it presages Spariosu’s, but by no means do I mean to reify any of the teleology that is implied by the terminology. Like Spariosu, Lévy-Bruhl himself rejects alternatives like “alogical” and “antilogical,” so I will let his terms stand under the same conventions of contemporary criticism that inhere when we use “primitive” as to carry its scare quotes with it (*HNT* 63). Lévy-Bruhl rejects the comparative method’s sense of “childlike” primitives, stating explicitly that “prelogical” should not be taken to mean antecedent to—or even opposed to—a logical mentality (*HNT* 63). Rather, the prelogical mentality is a different way of thinking, and of relating to one’s world, one more attuned to mystical than to empirical relationships between things and

phenomena. The tribal dancer, it seems, does not seek to know himself from his dance—nor, for that matter, from the gods and ghosts he channels, nor the mask he wears.

I return to more of Lévy-Bruhl's specific examples of the prelogical mentality below, but will conclude this summary by noting that the prelogical mind works through an individual's participation in a holistic system of collective representations. These are profoundly social, propagated by ritual, conscious of past tradition, and have a mystical power that is strikingly “performative” in its capacity to affect lived experience. With the communal nature of its collective representations, the prelogical mentality depends upon a symbiotic and cohesive relationship among individuals, their community, and a shared history. In its ambivalence to the law of non-contradiction and enabling of totemism, it can even question the notion of a singular individual—to say nothing of a rational one.

William Harmon was the first critic to catalogue Eliot's numerous references to Lévy-Bruhl. Eliot knew of *Les fonctions mentales* as early as the 1913 seminar he took with Josiah Royce, for which he presented a paper on interpretation in theories of knowledge. Harmon had unearthed the 1916 review of C. J. Webb's *Group Theories of Religion and the Religion of the Individual*, in which Eliot defends Lévy-Bruhl against Webb's apparent misreading. A passage from the review is worth citing at length, as Eliot summarizes his understanding of the prelogical/logical schema:

In his book on “Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures” [*sic*] this author distinguishes sharply between a pre-logical and a logical mentality. The former is that of the Bororo of Brazil who has a parrot for his totem. Now, according to M. Lévy-Bruhl, this is not merely the *adoption* of parrot as an heraldic emblem, nor a merely mythological kinship or participation in qualities; nor is the savage *deluded* into thinking that he is a parrot. In practical life, the Bororo never confuses himself with a parrot, nor is he so sophisticated as to think that black is white. But he is capable of a state of mind into which we cannot put ourselves, in which he is a parrot, while being at the same time a man. In other words, the mystical mentality, though at a low level, plays a much greater part in the daily life of the savage than in that of the civilized man. M. Lévy-Bruhl goes

on to insist quite rightly upon a side of the primitive mind which has been neglected by older anthropologists, such as Frazer, and produces a theory which has much in common with the analyses of mythology recently made by disciples of Freud. (Eliot, “*Group Theories*” 116)

Well before he became the Possum, Eliot here defends the prelogical basis of totemism. Harmon discerns a number of other moments where Lévy-Bruhl’s thought is evident in Eliot, finally claiming that the anthropologist informed the poet’s early “philosophy of history,” which still saw the primitive as an earlier stage of cultural development. Despite Lévy-Bruhl’s caveats against the prefix “pre-” being taken temporally, the value-laden teleology is more than implied in Harmon’s account. As he reads Eliot’s essential stance: “To civilize is to gain a great deal, particularly in the natural sciences, but the cost of that gain, expressed as a weakening of memory and a loss of mystical perception, seems high indeed” (800). Harmon locates the “civilizing” moment in what Lévy-Bruhl calls the “dissociation” of natural phenomena from their mystical elements.⁷ This is, Harmon rightly points out, precisely the same “dissociation of sensibility” that Eliot so famously identifies in “The Metaphysical Poets.”⁸

Where Harmon reads a philosophy of history in Lévy-Bruhl’s influence, later critics have emphasized the discursive nature of Eliot’s appropriation of the primitive. Marc Manganaro finds that for Eliot, “the poet is meant to appropriate the ‘savage’ . . . for use in the contemporary artistic program. The ethnocentrism of Eliot’s position is undeniable and is reinforced in numerous reviews and essays that emphasize the evolutionary *use* that the modern artist can make of the ‘savage.’” Manganaro continues, “we ought to consider Eliot’s ‘primitive’ as precisely that: as *his*, as a *figure* shaped in his own mind with the assistance of then-current

⁷ Lévy-Bruhl’s “dissociation” is the same in English and French (*HNT* 31; *Les fonctions* 39).

⁸ In the 1921 essay, Eliot basically re-phrases Lévy-Bruhl when he writes, “Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility” (*SP* 64). See also Timothy Materer who reads the “dissociation of sensibility” in Eliot’s understanding of the absorption of mythology and theology into daily life in Dante (54-55).

social-scientific writing” (“Beating a Drum” 394). Here, Eliot uses the primitive mystical mindset to refresh his “decaying world” by introducing prelogical or “deliberately illogical” formal structures into poetry, as “a change in sensibility can mean a change of direction for a culture” (“Dissociation” 105).⁹ David Spurr puts a deconstructive spin on Eliot’s own personal primitive, arguing that in his eagerness to put contemporary anthropology to use, Eliot accepted the discipline’s representation of itself “as the truth alternately of human nature and of the racial or cultural other.” For Spurr, Eliot buys anthropology’s “white mythology” wholesale (267). He goes on to argue that Eliot did not just find notions of poetry’s primitive roots useful for his myths about the difficulty and importance of modernism’s project of recovery—Eliot eventually came to develop a “primitivist ideal” of a society based on “organic unity . . . blood kinship, rootedness in a single place, and a shared sense of taboo” (273). Despite what I consider a misreading of Eliot’s claims for the universal truths of anthropology, Spurr convincingly reads the loss of this ideal as driving Eliot’s anti-Semitism, since “Eliot’s discourse puts the figures of savage and Jew in polar opposition: the one an undifferentiated, original unity, the other wandering dangerously beyond the outer limit, an object of perpetual exclusion because disruptive of that mythic unity” (273). Eliot’s lamentations for an impossible ideal coalesce more concretely in his later writings, such as *After Strange Gods* (1934) and *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1940). Lévy-Bruhl’s continuing influence into Eliot’s post-conversion career suggests how deep a foundation his thought provided.

⁹ Manganaro reads “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” as an example of “an avenue by which the world may be revived,” through a change in poetic sensibility (“Dissociation” 105). My own reading of *The Waste Land* will carry this logic further, which is also evident in my account of how Stein’s toys challenge the linguistic categories through which we understand the world.

Each of these critics recognizes the extent to which Eliot saw the prelogical mentality as something that might be taken from primitive cultures in order to reinvigorate his own.¹⁰ As I mentioned at the outset, however, I want to turn from this appropriation model, moving from the primitive to the playful as a means to open new avenues of inquiry. The appropriation model, which arises out of the need to confront modernism's uneasy relationship with Empire, tends to assume—and reify the assumption—that art, culture, and even cultural “mentalities” are commodities borne across the waves like so much silk and sugar, rubber and rum, extracted at gunpoint and imported to satisfy insatiable Western demand.¹¹ My purpose here is not to deny that may have Eliot “used” the primitive just as he affected a Malacca cane. Nor is this the venue to lament the commodification of culture from which we suffer so much more acutely today than a century ago. Rather, I want to begin by echoing a comment of Eliot's during the discussion of his paper in Royce's seminar: “Lévy-Bruhl draws the line between the crude mentality of primitive [man] and his own [mentality] too sharply” (Costello 74). To what extent was it unnecessary to import the prelogical at all? To what extent was it already “here”?¹² Eliot answered these pressing questions by turning to play.

¹⁰ The body of work on Eliot and Lévy-Bruhl is meager compared to that which looks to Frazer and Jessie Weston (wherein the “appropriation model” of criticism also inheres).

¹¹ Perhaps this is reductive. With more nuance, Ramazani warns, “we should be wary of the naïve presupposition that a poetic text could, as if released from all ethnocentric moorings, engage a text from another hemisphere without assimilative pressure, without using it for its own cultural ends” (110).

¹² In highlighting the continuity that Eliot saw between purportedly “savage” and “civilized” cultures, I follow critics like Chinitz (72ff.), Robert Crawford in *Savage*, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis. Chinitz writes, “Eliot's *Poems* (1920), *The Waste Land*, and *Sweeney Agonistes* all seem to imply that the distance between the primitive and the contemporary mind is mostly illusory” (78). Eliot himself returned to this idea in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, where he cites an article by the French anthropologists Émile Cailliet and Jean-Albert Bédé. They used Lévy-Bruhl's prelogical mentality to argue that symbolist poetry works by disrupting rational modes of thought, teasing out the mystical connections between things. Eliot, citing Lévy-Bruhl himself, concluded, “The prelogical mentality persists in civilised man, but becomes available only to or through the poet” (UPUC 148). The larger implications drawn from the conclusion of the lecture series will bear upon my reading of *The Waste Land*.

As is already apparent from my summary, the distinction that Lévy-Bruhl makes between the prelogical and logical mentalities bears striking resemblance to Spariosu's prerational and rational conceptions of play—a debt that the latter briefly notes (*DR* 6, 9n). Spariosu describes the historical *agon* between his two mentalities in terms that echo the appropriation model's view of how “civilization” in Eliot (and in Frazer, Tylor, et al.) relates to the “primitive”:

On the one hand, rational mentality represses its prerational counterpart, labeling it “savage,” “barbarian,” and “primitive,” precisely because prerational power presents itself in a naked, unashamed, and violent form. On the other hand, rational mentality experiences the transition to mediated forms of power as a loss of presence and a yearning for (absolute) authority. The prerational historical past becomes idealized either in the sentimental notion of a “golden age” or in the philosophical notion of a “totality of Being,” of a “unity of world and self.” (*DR* 11)

As critics have long noted, Eliot's search for a “golden age” and his lamentations for lost authority can be discerned throughout his poetry, in his conversion to Anglicanism, and in his private life.¹³ I want to emphasize that Spariosu's careful delineation of prerational play elements within Western culture allows us to conceive of Lévy-Bruhl's prelogical mindset in ways that do not depend on the language of primitivism and the concepts of anthropology's white mythology. Again, the work of extending Spariosu's prerational/rational schema to cultures that have not been influenced by Heraclitus and Plato or Kant and Nietzsche remains to be done. I am not suggesting that what Spariosu identifies as the prerational is simply the vestige of Lévy-Bruhl's “primitive” in the “civilized” West. The difference between anthropology and play, here, is the difference between the revelation of repressed primitive urges buried under a sheen of civilization and the momentary prominence of reason in its ceaseless struggle with prerationality. Likewise, the *agon* of rationality and prerationality should not be considered yet another binary,

¹³ I just cited David Spurr on Eliot's nostalgia, but over the last century, Eliot has practically been a metonym for a holistic age of “high culture.” In his Introduction, Chinitz traces the trade in Eliot as a symbol of high modernism, tradition, and elitism over the course twentieth century.

albeit one which replaces civilized/primitive or Western/Other. Rather, my critical stance owes something to the prelogical rejection of the law of non-contradiction: the *agon* of rationality and prerationality must be understood to keep the two terms distinct even as it conflates them. In other words, we should take a cue from the epigraph to “Burnt Norton,” Heraclitus’ fragment 60: “The way up and the way down are one and the same” (*CPP* 171).

I turn now to Eliot himself, through three play concepts as they appear in both their rational and prerational guises, and in turn, as they relate to Lévy-Bruhl’s prelogical mentality. My reading begins with the earliest poetry, first taking up the *agon* between mediated, rational-play social conventions and the prerational immediacy of experience. Second, I examine how play as an “*as-if* mode of being” leads, third and finally, to the bifurcated mimesis-play and mimesis-imitation of *The Waste Land* (*DR* 17-20). My argument is that while Lévy-Bruhl inspired Eliot to consider cultural mentalities beyond a universal rationalism, the poet understood the impact of the primitive on the modern through a nuanced conception of play—a conception that, while powerful, remains only subtly apparent. The subtlety is due to both the appropriation model of criticism as well as Eliot’s own continued insistence on the vocabulary of primitivism and anthropology in his prose and lectures. We ought to read Eliot’s insistence as itself a mask, as I will show that he added Lévy-Bruhl to his ludic modernism. I am tempted to say that we should not take Eliot’s later ethnographic vocabulary at “face” value, but in fact my argument suggests that we forego thinking about a singular individual’s face behind a mask at all: instead, we must remember the compulsive force of collective representations, and the way that the holistic bonds between members of a community, their totems, and their ancestors are wrought and tempered in the forge of participatory ritual.

Prerational and Rational *Agon*

Eliot's earliest poetry displays a concern for the faces that masks could be made to present. In "Humouresque (After J. Laforgue)," he writes of a marionette whose "common face / (The kind of face that we forget)," is ultimately admired for its "mask *bizarre*." He imagines the marionette in Limbo with "other useless things / Haranguing spectres," discussing fashion, style, the latest trends from New York, and the comparative romance of gas- and moonlight. The Marionette's trivial conversation is imputed to his flawed philosophical reasoning, "Logic a marionette's, all wrong / Of premises"—hence the conflation of mind into body, his being "weak in body and in head" (*CPP* 602). Eliot was still preoccupied with philosopher-marionettes two months later in "Convictions (Curtain Raiser)," the January 1910 poem that opens *Inventions of the March Hare*.¹⁴ The narrator plays with his peers as a child might manipulate puppets from behind a screen, insisting that "They see the outlines of their stage / Conceived upon a scale immense." A pair "in a garden scene / go picking tissue paper roses" while another, "a lady with a fan," cries out for an idealized lover before whom she might prostrate herself. Parenthetical asides let Eliot's sardonic commentary waft in from the wings. The narrator notes their playacting at such ephemeral, cliché routines, casting aspersions on their expectation of "an audience open-mouthed / At climax and suspense" (*IMH* 11). There is certainly a gendered aspect to Eliot's scorn for feminine convention, but he pulls no punches for his "Paladins," who

Are talking of effect and cause,
With "learn to live by nature's laws!"
And "strive for social happiness
And contact with your fellow-men
In Reason: nothing to excess!"
As one leaves off the next begins.
(*IMH* 11)

¹⁴ All dates are from Christopher Ricks' invaluable chronology (*IMH* xxxvii-xlii).

These Paladins are equally wrong of premise, formulating a trite, rationalistic materialism that, in the face of the poet's metaphorical transformation, threatens to strip them of any individual agency and leave them the literal marionettes of a mechanistic natural order. "Reason," they claim, must mediate all sociality and interpersonal contact, but the sanctimoniousness of such pieties suggests their shallowness. The Delphic "nothing to excess" comes to sound like an advertiser's slogan for the *via media*—as if they had lifted the phrase from a carton of mild cigarettes, confusing modern marketing with philosophy. While "Reason" might seem to offer fertile ground for cultivating social relations, the garden of Enlightenment only bears "tissue paper roses" under propriety's care. It cannot offer tangible connection, merely the gossamer of proto-Prufrockian "promises and compliments / And guesses and supposes" (*IMH* 11).

Lee Oser argues that the poet in "Convictions (Curtain Raiser)" is "liberated only in mind" from musty convention: "Trapped by the same formalities of meter and manner, the poet and his marionettes bear a family resemblance. They dramatize his dilemma of what to say and do" (44). The "dilemma of what to say and do" is an overriding theme of Eliot's early work, and his study of "family resemblances" between himself and his marionettes was sometimes just so, as with "Aunt Helen" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service." Although "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is the central testament to scripted and anxious social relations, the earlier "Goldfish (Essence of Summer Magazines)" also explores the mire of routine in which Eliot felt trapped. The poem's four parts lament the oppression of social gatherings, when "Always the August evenings come / With preparation for the waltz" (*IMH* 26). Sanctioned social rituals cloud the understanding and restrict physical, intellectual, and emotional experience. The detour of convention stifles contact by rendering the body enigmatic:

the waltzes turn, return;
The Chocolate Solider assaults

The tired Sphinx of the physical.
 What answer? We cannot discern.
 (IMH 26)

Such conventions reduce the emotions to mere decoration, the filigree of fine taste: “why should we not proceed . . . To porcelain land, what avatar / where blue-delft-romance is the law” (IMH 27). The repetitious “white flannel ceremonial” limits the intellect to “guesses at eternal truths / Sounding the depths with a silver spoon” (IMH 28). Philosophy is only admitted “through a paper straw,” and remains “Inconsequent, intolerable,” like “the cigarettes / Of our marionettes” (IMH 26-27). Propriety pulls the strings, and polite society has written the rational-play script that Eliot, like Prufrock with his face carefully prepared, must perform.

Straying from the script would invite social ostracism, which remains a fate worse than willful ironic remove. Eliot chafes not only at the limits of what he may say and do, but also at the limited liberation won through poetic posturing, finding himself too often yet another marionette.¹⁵ In “*Entretien dans un parc*,” written in Paris in February 1911, he describes a springtime walk under “April trees” with an unidentified girl. He seizes her hand boldly and uncharacteristically, but she interprets the gesture as another stage direction. At her mildly bemused smile, he thinks, “It is not that life has taken a new decision— / It has simply happened so to her and me.” The deflation of his agency at the moment he finally asserts it causes an outburst: “It becomes at last a bit ridiculous / And irritating. All the scene’s absurd!” His exasperation boils over “upon the fire of ridicule” (IMH 48). The final stanza wonders whether their relationship will flower into future physical and emotional connections, but tosses hope aside to end on an ambiguously ironic note. Eliot reflects, “if we could have given ourselves the slip / What explanations might have been escaped” (IMH 49). There is no escape, however, as

¹⁵ Eliot’s social analysis parallels my account of Stein’s struggle with rational-play conventions. My Woolf chapter focuses directly on the marionette as a metaphor for rational constraint.

there is no apparent way to give oneself the slip, both because the couple merely mimes the conventional scene and because the Laforguian mask of ironic remove already attempts to do so.

In these early poems detailing the civilized heights of Boston society, Eliot could not yet turn to Lévy-Bruhl's vocabulary of collective representations, and so one imagines the shock of recognition when the latter writes of primitive people living with a prelogical mentality: "except for the emotions which are strictly individual and dependent upon the immediate reaction of the organism, there is nothing more *socialized* among primitives than are their emotions" (*HNT* 92). Eliot's early poems discover and trace precisely this socialization of emotion, through the routines of what we might call bourgeois collective representations. It is significant that the vocabulary Eliot *did* adopt and adapt from French Symbolism was based in metaphors of marionettes and the *commedia dell'arte*. He approached his critique of socialized emotion and its effects on the individual through play. Beyond the simple fact that puppet theater is most often associated with child's play, there are two levels at which to engage his strategy. The first has to do with the nature of the *commedia* itself. Martin Green and John Swan find its playful aspects throughout modernism, noting that its various Pierrot and Columbine figures are often evoked as means of protest by artists who "rebelled against social norms and norm-subordinated art" (7). As Robert Crawford suggests, the *commedia* strains of French Symbolism attracted Eliot for fusing "self-conscious rebellion against tired conventions with a sense of renewed religious mission" (*Young* 108). Historically, the *commedia* was a popular form, and Green and Swan note the paradoxical "vulgarity" of its appearance in modernism. A further paradox inheres in the fact that despite the *commedia*'s usefulness as protest, "there remains something nonserious in

intentions, something defiantly frivolous or sullenly crude” in its application (xiv).¹⁶ This dissertation seeks to nuance this “unserious” sense of play, although Eliotic irony certainly traffics in comic ambivalence, as in the parenthetical asides that cut through the dour veneer of “Prufrock” and so many other early poems.¹⁷

The second level at which Eliot turns to play in his early work reveals his nascent understanding of the *agon* between prerational and rational play mentalities. The bourgeois collective representations depicted in early poems like “Convictions,” “Goldfish,” and “*Entretien*” are problematic because rational social rituals mediate interpersonal relationships. Such mediation dulls the senses, inhibits personal expression, and enforces soulless materialism. Eliot chafes at the restrictions, but initiates a two-fold project of examining this state of affairs for its essential contingency and irrationality—and again, Lévy-Bruhl’s vocabulary would later offer “scientific” evidence that the socialization of emotion was “primitive”—while exploring prerational means of navigating, challenging, and ultimately changing this culture. In a pithy encapsulation of Nietzsche’s early sense of play, Spariosu essentially summarizes what I am

¹⁶ Green and Swan also attribute its popularity to its adaptable imagery and ability to capture the “consciously brittle” moods exerted upon the imagination by modern society. In what reads like a précis of “Prufrock,” they write, “all commedia moods are characterized by a readiness for reversal, an insecurity about their source, a moral self-doubt—by a sense of the artifice of emotion” (xi-xii). They cite the opening of Huizinga’s *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, which echoes Lévy-Bruhl’s descriptions of holistic societies: “When the world was half a thousand years younger all events had much sharper outlines than now. The distance between sadness and joy, between good and bad fortune, seemed to be much greater than for us; every experience had that degree of directness and absoluteness that joy and sadness still have in the mind of a child” (1). Eliot similarly invokes European cultural unity in the “Dante” essay: “in Dante’s time Europe, with all its dissensions and dirtiness, was mentally more united than we can now conceive” (207). John D. Morgenstern has demonstrated that Eliot’s idea of a mentally united Europe is founded in the work of W. H. Schofield; including his 1906 *English Literature: From the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, the two courses with Schofield Eliot took as an undergraduate, and, possibly, Schofield’s four lectures at the Sorbonne in March 1911 (Morgenstern 420-24).

¹⁷ Lyndall Gordon notes, “Eliot’s impulse towards caricature was probably reinforced by a native tradition of burlesque,” citing Conrad Aiken’s comment that “‘For all his liturgical appearance . . . he was capable of real buffoonery’” (45).

calling Eliot's prerational *agon* with the rational in the early poems: "the play of the senses and the imagination gains priority over the play of understanding and reason" (*DR* 75).¹⁸

Two contemporaneous poems demonstrate Eliot's dawning realization of the prerational immediacy of experience: "The smoke that gathers blue and sinks" and "Portrait of a Lady." Written in February 1911, "The smoke" struggles to life in the morass of a dinner that reeks of *fin de siècle* decadence: torpid cigar smoke, stifling and "glutinous liqueurs," the "After dinner insolence / Of matter 'going by itself'" (*IMH* 70). As in "*Entretien*," the scene simply happens. Eliot underscores this inexorable script as prototypically modern by equating it with industrial technology: "hardly a sensation stirs / The overoiled machinery . . ." (*IMH* 70; ellipsis in original). The second stanza of the poem, however, abruptly shifts into a new register. Eliot projects a different voice through the mask: assertive, aggressive even, its language wrenches free of the torpor preceding it to confront the reader directly:

What, you want action?
Some attraction?
Now begins
The piano and the flute and two violins
Someone sings
A lady of almost any age
But chiefly breast and rings
"Throw your arms around me—Aint you glad you found me"
(*IMH* 70)

Given this unexpected eruption, David E. Chinitz reads "The smoke" as "jazz poetry *avant la lettre*," asserting that it "depicts proto-jazz performance and dance, quotes an actual lyric, includes appropriate slang ('action,' 'the stuff'), and strikingly replicates the angular rhythms

¹⁸ Spariosu has a reading of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" that traces the *agon* of Prufrock's divided self, insofar as the poem dramatizes his interior monologue. As an earlier piece of criticism, it utilizes a less bifurcated sense of play than he came to develop, which is apparent in his conclusions on Prufrock's character: "despite his sense of humor and his intellectual games, Prufrock cannot be described as truly playful; he hardly ever forgets himself, taking himself far too seriously, even in his self-deprecating moods" ("Games" 165).

and sudden, unpredictable rhymes of popular ragtime lyrics of the period” (36-37). I would further highlight the overt sexuality of both the singer—shades of Grishkin’s “pneumatic bliss”—and the fraught, yet transgressive, specter of miscegenation: “Here’s a negro (teeth and smile) / Has a dance that’s quite worth the while” (*CPP* 52; *IMH* 70). The speaker’s gin cocktail in the penultimate line is a bracingly clear improvement over the glutinous liqueurs of the dinner.

To Chinitz, the ellipsis that closes the first stanza enacts the “confluence of Laforgue’s modernity with [Eliot’s] experience of jazz” (36). Laforgue “showed Eliot how to adapt his voice to the popular material around him,” a process that Chinitz traces to ragtime music, but which also reflects the “vulgarity” of the *commedia* (Chinitz 36; Green and Swan xiv). In my view, the ellipsis between the two stanzas indicates Eliot’s dawning realization that Laforguian marionette-play is unable to emend convention’s scripts or to bring about anything more than merely mental liberation from the dilemma of what to say and do. “The smoke” is not just the confluence of poetic and musical modernism in dialect and jazz. It is also an instance of Eliot formulating and comparing two conceptions of cultural play: one circumscribed and mediated by reason and convention, the other immediate and unconstrained. I do not mean to imply that “The smoke” signals Eliot’s new understanding in a strictly chronological sense, since he continues to toy with Symbolism for years to come.¹⁹ Eliot, however, offsets the development typographically: the first stanza follows “Convictions,” “Humoresque,” “Goldfish,” and “*Entretien*,” to pit the nonserious dissent of ironic remove against the mediating power of convention—again, interrogating the complicity of “reason” in such mediation. These poems demonstrate what Theodor Adorno calls the “lightheartedness” of art, as noted in my Introduction. Like the paradoxical vulgarity of the *commedia*, art—simply by existing—“is a critique of the brute

¹⁹ Green and Swan rightly compare Sweeney to the *commedia*’s Harlequin and detect a Pierrotesque note in “The Hollow Men” (246-48).

seriousness that reality imposes upon human beings” (Adorno, “Is Art Lighthearted?” 248). The Laforguian ironist, slouching back into a pose of studious detachment, imagines he might loosen the hold of convention simply by identifying the state of affairs. The prerational play toward which I claim Eliot is moving is a more active and overtly serious ludic strategy.

In turn, the second stanza of “The smoke” both meditates on and engenders immediate experience. Its meditation is thematic, insofar as the titillation of the singer’s décolletage, her seductive lyrics, and the impropriety of partnering with a black man further vivify the physical joy of dancing. Through its diction and cadence, moreover, its words are *felt* as much as they are rationalized. The reader enacts the syncopations, triggering the experience of being in the club more directly than would a simple report of ordering cocktails to jazz accompaniment. There is a nascent performativity to this proto-jazz poetry, although I do not want to overstate the formal distinction, as it is likewise the case that the first stanza’s languid sibilance transmits the torpor it represents. The difference in the “performativity” between the stanzas is one of degree and of the self-consciousness with which the exuberant syncopations advertise themselves as just as fresh and anti-conventional as the scene they evoke. The thematic and formal specter of turpitude answers the first stanza’s torpitude, with a new register of seriousness driving its play.

“The smoke” thus juxtaposes themes of mediation and immediacy, broadly understood, typographically signaling their separation through the use of a sudden ellipsis. The presence of “reason” undergirding social convention is more pronounced in the other poems I have cited, although the remainder of Eliot’s early work bears out the comparison, with music often cutting through rational mediation. Next to the titularly-philosophical “First” and “2nd” “Debate[s] between the Body and Soul,” we have the titularly-musical “Nocturne,” “Suite Clownesque,” “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” “Preludes,” and the various “Caprices” and “Interludes,” among

others.²⁰ Amid J. Alfred Prufrock's lament, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," his thoughts turn inexorably to the "music from a farther room" (*CPP* 14). A mystery hides behind that ellipsis in "The smoke," especially as the tactic is sparsely employed in the manuscript poems.²¹ Eliot's understanding of the *agon* between mediating convention and immediate experience as two types of play can be clarified by looking to "Portrait of a Lady."

Eliot began "Portrait of a Lady" early in 1910, completing it in parts over the course of a year and a half, interspersed with "Humoresque," "Convictions," and "Goldfish," and "The smoke." This chronology suggests that the bifurcated view of play coalescing in "Portrait of a Lady" belongs to a longer development. Although Eliot stages the *agon* between rational and prerational play, he does not pick a winner: the outcome of this contest is equivocal, and while Eliot vacillates between play mentalities (hewing closer to the prerational), the Lady is a concatenation of the rational-mentality marionettes that populate the early poems. We move from an encounter in a park to an *entretien dans un salon*. Like the earlier marionettes who believed that they could "see the outlines of their stage," the Lady expects Eliot to play a flirtatious game of bourgeois collective representations (*IMH* 11). She arranges her room like a still life or stage set, "as it will seem to do," as if its "atmosphere of Juliet's tomb" is somehow natural and not yet another scripted scene (*CPP* 19). Her public life seems to be just as "composed" as the bric-a-brac in her private apartment, and the tautology of defining a friend based upon the "qualities upon which friendship lives" recalls the Paladins' uncritical acceptance

²⁰ Dancing, to which I will return, is another trope that Eliot uses similarly. See also "Suite Clownesque IV" (*IMH* 38), "Suppressed Complex" (*IMH* 54), "The Burnt Dancer" (*IMH* 62), "The Death of St. Narcissus" (*CPP* 605-606), and again, "The smoke" (*IMH* 70).

²¹ Excluding "Prufrock" and his "Pervigilium," Eliot uses ellipses in only six of the remaining manuscript poems, generally to indicate the ineffable. The instance in "First Caprice in North Cambridge" includes five dots, but the sense remains (*IMH* 13). Curiously, the ellipsis is not used for the ineffable in the untitled "Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?", but only to mark the passage of time (*IMH* 80).

of “natural” laws (*CPP* 19; *IMH* 11). The structures provided by habit and convention—serving tea, corresponding with friends abroad—are of primary importance, not least because they lead to a modicum of mutual understanding. She laments, “I have been wondering frequently of late . . . Why we have not developed into friends,” and the fact that “I myself can hardly understand” seems to bother her more than the lack of connection (*CPP* 20-21). As Socrates knew, although conventions discipline pleasures, they provide useful epistemological clarity. Eliot’s irony adds the caveat that one must remain either willfully or naively ignorant of their contingency.

Music provides a metaphorical connection between the two characters, becoming the field upon which the *agon* plays out. As in numerous other early poems, it has the potential to unsettle the outcome. The Lady displays a philistine relationship to music and is more interested in superficial context than in its emotional power. She says:

“So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
Should be resurrected only among friends
Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room.”
(*CPP* 18)

Although it is ephemeral as a tissue paper rose, that bloom mediates the experience of the performance, stifling the intimacy of friendship. Her desire to leave the bloom intact echoes in the “velleities and carefully caught regrets” of their conversation, which are heard through “attenuated tones of violins / Mingled with remote cornets” (*CPP* 18). As time and their meetings pass, her voice becomes the “insistent out-of-tune / Of a broken violin on an August afternoon,” simultaneously grating and stultifying to the senses. Her discordant reflections—or rather, Eliot’s record of her reflections—show their relationship straining through the sieve of the rational intellect and its social categories: “I am always sure that you understand / My feelings, always sure that you feel, / Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand” (*CPP* 19). There is a

subtle conflation of the knowledge of emotion with the experience of emotion, a substitution of reason for prerational experience. Despite her surety, his hand is only proffered metaphorically, and her understanding precedes and precludes any emotional or physical connection.

Throughout the poem, Eliot largely plays the role that the Lady has assigned him. In the notebook manuscript, he was explicit about their performing a script. Between the Lady's reminiscence of her youthful "buried life" and the last stanza I quoted, Eliot had reflected:

Oh, spare these reminiscences!
How you prolong the pose!
These emotional concupiscences
Tinctured attar of rose.
 (The need for self-expression
 Will pardon this digression).
 (IMH 328-29)

Had Eliot included these lines in the published version, the ambiguous paradox of an emotional concupiscence—carnal lust that is merely emotive, unaccompanied by a physical reaction—would have framed more concretely the Lady's conflation of understanding and sensation. Likewise at stake in their playacting is Eliot's self-expression. Although he asserts himself with the Laforgian parenthetical in the manuscript, the excision of these lines suggests a departure from the strategy of nonserious dissent and ironic remove. Eliot instead leaves the weight of self-expression to be carried by three moments in which the prerational surges up in its *agon* with the rational. These three moments allow not only poetic release, but also hint at a potential freedom for self-definition and a potential alternative to taking up roles in sanctioned compositions.

First, while the Lady's voice drones on in the first section, Eliot responds, "Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins / Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own, / Capricious monotone" (CPP 19). The tom-tom's music is a "definite 'false note,'" insofar as its monotony is literal: this is a unique sensation to the parlor. It is capricious for being nascent and new, and thus Eliot is

unsure if he can trust it, how it may fit with his sense of self, or whether it belongs in this stage production. In the manuscript the tom-tom is “droll,” another link to the humor of the *commedia* elided in the published poem (*IMH* 328).²² The pun on Eliot’s name sharpens the banality of the “true” Tom Eliot’s emotionally-dulled dumbshow. As “absurd” (*ab-surdus*), the tom-tom—like Tom—is etymologically out of tune, uncivilized, ridiculous, and intimating of the irrational. Whereas he decried the whole scene in “*Entretien*” as “ridiculous / And irritating . . . absurd!”, here he questions that earlier judgment, as now the nascent prerational play of the tom-tom’s absurd prelude is precisely what Tom Eliot needs to hear (*IMH* 48).

In the second part of the poem, Eliot imagines another scene in a park, where he reads the lighter fare in the morning paper: “the comics and the sporting page. / Particularly I remark / An English countess goes upon the stage” (*CPP* 20). This last line puns again on the marionettes onstage in “*Convictions*” (*IMH* 11). Eliot, too, keeps his countenance and sees the outlines of his stage, “Except when a street piano,

mechanical and tired
reiterates some worn-out common song
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
Recalling things that other people have desired.
(*CPP* 20)

The eruption of the street-piano’s music is as out of place and vulgar as a tom-tom might be in a sitting-room recital of Chopin. Although it is “mechanical and tired,” it still shakes Eliot’s self-possession, and so it carries with it not only the possibility of expression—on other stages, for other audiences, and with other interlocutors than the Lady—but also the desire and intimacy rendered dim and indiscernible by the arc of footlights cast upon him by the Lady’s insistence that he act according to convention.

²² The manuscript reads: “Inside my brain a droll tom-tom begins / Hammering a prelude of its own / Capricious monotone . . . [sic]” (*IMH* 328).

The third eruption of prerational music, in the third section, approaches the ontological dimensions of the *agon* between play mentalities. In the penultimate stanza, after the Lady's last quoted lines in the poem, Eliot asserts:

And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression . . . dance, dance
Like a dancing bear,
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.
Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance —
(*CPP* 21; ellipsis in original)

Here, the music is neither a dim drumbeat in the back of the mind, nor a melody carried on a breeze, but something that Eliot must embody and become, making himself a dancer indistinguishable from his dance. A year earlier within the poem's diegetic timeline, the tom-tom was capricious and singular, but now Eliot hears many tunes through which he might "find expression." Borrowing "every changing shape" suggests a more active, empowered, and strategic usage of masks than Prufrock's meek acceptance of preparing, according to accepted bourgeois collective representations, "a face to meet the faces that you meet" (*CPP* 14). This recalls the distinction between mimesis-imitation and mimesis-play. When Eliot donned the mask of Laforgian irony, he essentially reproduced an original model. Irony can only mark—and thereby enforce—his distance from the crowd and his intellectual remove from modernity's sordid materialism. It can scoff and chafe at convention and at reason's disciplining of pleasure, but it cannot rewrite the rules.²³ The protean dance is instead a vision of the *methetic* power of mimesis-play: transformative, participatory, and performative.

²³ Storey claims Eliot abandoned Pierrot "because of the insoluble, solipsistic dilemma that he seemed to pose" (166). Spariosu reads the character Prufrock as a Pierrot and a Shakespearean Fool simultaneously, writing, "Prufrock derives a great deal of rhetorical delight from seeing himself as playing second fiddle, but he still has the vanity to cast himself in the [venerable] role of the jester. He wants to have his cake and eat it too" ("Games" 165).

Critics have read these three moments as precursors to Eliot's later adoption of the vocabulary of primitivism, and not least because the tom-tom, dancing bear, and chattering ape cry out for such a reading. Rather than parrot them here, I will note that David Spurr has argued that the "animal mimesis" and tom-tom recall "certain forms of primitive ritual; the poem draws on this ritual to effect a kind of emotional release from the stultifying sentimentalities of the speaker's hostess" (271). Although Spariosu insists that the prerational play mentality does not precede the rational as a "primitive" or developmental stage, Eliot's invocation of the "primitive" stands broadly in opposition to the Lady's rational categories. Spurr's recognition of "a kind of emotional release" further suggests *methexis*. While I cited Spariosu's reading of Nietzsche to suggest that the play of the senses and of self-expression were integral to Eliot's understanding of the prerational mentality, Spurr goes farther to claim, "Eliot's early poems often struggle to contain a barely controlled atavism that threatens to shatter the fragile veneer of civilization" (271).²⁴ Eliot certainly sees the fragility of civilization's veneer: regrets must be caught ever so carefully; desire lurks behind a veil of velleities. In my view, however, "Portrait of a Lady" does not find Eliot crouched and defensive against an encroaching atavism as much as it sees him clearing the ground to show the proximity of the rational and prerational. Spariosu can again clarify the essential dichotomy: "If in the Kantian hierarchy of the arts music occupies the last place because it is too far from rational language, and too close to the play of Becoming, in Nietzsche it occupies the first place for precisely the same reason" (*DR* 78). Eliot's need to "borrow every changing shape"—in this case, through music—endorses the prerational play of becoming over a rational mentality's static ideal of Being.

²⁴ Chinitz more convincingly argues for the "primitive" in the early poems by first linking primitivism to jazz; see especially Chapter 1.

Crucially, however, each time the prerational wells up to meet convention in “Portrait of a Lady,” Eliot falls back on the habitual epistemological safety of rational play. The first time, he wishes for the ritual of taking “the air, in a tobacco trance,” engaging in the appropriate small-talk of public monuments and “late events.” What could be more rational than correcting “our watches by the public clocks,” set to Greenwich Mean Time (*CPP* 19)? The second moment begins to question the consequences of leaving behind rational ritual. The scent of the hyacinths prompts Eliot to wonder, “Are these ideas right or wrong?” (*CPP* 20). His concerns are validated in their final meeting, where the two are bereft of reason’s guiding light: “My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark” (*CPP* 21). After the vision of dancing like a dancing bear to find expression, he does not start tapping his toe, but returns to the ritual of the tobacco trance. The conclusion of the poem again raises the specter of being left in the dark. If the Lady “should die some afternoon,” Eliot would not know “what to feel or if I understand,” playing again with the conflation of reason and emotion.²⁵ On the one hand, the prerational might seem to win the day with the assertion that “This music is successful with a ‘dying fall’”—that is, in the change of cadence from rational to prerational play. But on the other hand, the closing line, in which Eliot asks “And should I have the right to smile?”, can be read not only as darkly sardonic, but as a straightforward question: If the prerational wins the day outright, how indeed can he know how to behave, what to think, or how to define and relate to his emotions without the useful, if suspiciously contingent, dictates of reason (*CPP* 21)? Undermining the epistemological clarity of rational play simply to dodge its disciplining of pleasure would leave Eliot in a thoroughly Nietzschean world beyond good and evil, bereft of his habitual categories and routines.

²⁵ The denotative slippage between feeling and understanding recalls Stein’s similar strategy in “Melanctha,” just as both Jeff Campbell and Adele in *Q.E.D.* are wary of leaving familiar epistemological categories behind to embrace the unknowns of prerational play.

The poem's concluding ambivalence thus suggests an *agon* in the broadest sense, showing successive moments in which each side seems to gain prominence over the other, but leaving neither with a clear victory. Despite the burial of its flirtatious foundations under sedimented teatime ritual and stylized presentation, "Portrait of a Lady" remains a primal scene of seduction. Its play is simultaneously immediate and physical as well as removed and abstracted through convention. Eliot's vacillation, and his willingness to let the contest stand as such, thematically exemplifies ludic modernism. It enacts the *agon* of the prerational and rational, showing the struggle through play. With its roles, reliance on quotation, and thematic artifice, "Portrait of a Lady" can feel like a closet drama for two parts. For the character Eliot, the prerational wells up time and again only to be repressed by manners, custom, propriety, and class. For the poet Eliot, however, the prerational had its release in the closet of his notebooks. He waited five years before publishing the poem, during which time he opened other outlets.

Play and *As-If* Modes of Being

As "Portrait of a Lady" sat unpublished, Eliot completed his graduate coursework, taking the Josiah Royce seminar that marks his earliest engagement with Lévy-Bruhl. The summer of 1914 saw a flurry of poetic activity, leading to the first fragments of what would become *The Waste Land*: "So through the evening," "After the turning," and "I am the Resurrection." Lyndall Gordon has culled these and other poems of the period like "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" as the seeds of Eliot's eventual conversion to Anglicanism, planted in the intellectual tillage of the seminar. She writes, "Eliot's comments both in Royce's class and in his dissertation showed his disillusion with logic" (87), summarizing that summer's poetry thus:

In the new cluster, a bold convert, martyr, or saint displaces the frustrated philosopher of 1911-12. There is a confusing night visitation and the poet's fear of divine commerce.

There is a monastic impulse to isolate himself from the crowd, to take off for mountain or desert in search of initiation and purification. There is, most persistently, a fantasy of a martyr's passion. (87)

Eliot's turn to mysticism does indeed hinge on his "disillusion with logic," but Gordon's account overstates the matter in such a way as to obfuscate the attendant turn to the prerational already evident in "Portrait of a Lady." Likewise, when Spurr calls Eliot's need to "borrow every changing shape / To find expression" a moment of "animal mimesis," he reveals the limitations of the appropriation model, finding only a reactionary fear of atavism. Here and in the final section of the chapter, I want to introduce two further play-concepts, the first of which—play as an *as-if* mode of being—is a preoccupation of the "martyr poems," which eventually leads Eliot into the second concept: the aesthetics of both prerational mimesis-play and rational mimesis-imitation. The latter I will explore fully below, with recourse to *The Waste Land*.

Where "Portrait of a Lady" sets out a series of similes by which the poet might find expression (dancing *like* a bear, chattering *like* an ape), "The Burnt Dancer" of June 1914 suggests a more comprehensive and complicated metamorphosis than mere similitude, one bound up with problems of ritual and prophecy, interpretation and expiation. Eliot watches a moth dancing around a flame, "Caught in the circle of desire . . . Distracted from more vital values / To golden values of the flame." The moth's dance is first interpreted as a ritual "expiation," although Eliot wonders for what possible virtue, as both he and the moth are in a Nietzschean world beyond or "Too strange for good or evil." He imagines that the moth has been "drawn here from a distant star" for some sort of ritual: "a mirthless dance and silent revel" (*IMH* 62). The epigraph, "*sotta la pioggia dell' aspro martiro*" ("beneath the rain of the sharp torment") introduces Dante and draws the outlines of the poet's turmoil. Christopher Ricks notes that the circle of desire alludes to the most recurrent passage of Dante in Eliot: the close of

Purgatorio XXVI, where Guido Guinicelli and Arnaut Daniel speak from their refining fire (IMH 221, 4n).²⁶

The refrain, “O danse mon papillon noir!” complicates the first stanza’s implication that Eliot is watching a moth circle a flame (IMH 62). A “papillon noir” is indeed a black moth or butterfly, but *papillons noirs* are “dark thoughts,” suggesting that the poem dramatizes Eliot’s thoughts—what Gordon calls his “disease of doubt” (Gordon 89). The second-person address that opens the second stanza raises the possibility of a split “I,” the calm and rational narrator of the poem turning to examine a dark and irrational train of thought running on broken rails.²⁷ The “tropic odours . . . From Mozambique or Nicobar” of the moth’s conspicuously unstated name carry a whiff of the exotic and primitive, “like perfumed oil upon the waters” of some ritual that might be faithfully repeated without full understanding of its import or its provenance. The rational narrator tries to interpret the moth’s dance as an omen, asking, “Of what disaster do you warn us / Agony nearest to delight?” (IMH 62). He revels in his vatic voyeurism:

Dance fast dance faster
There is no mortal disaster
The destiny that may be leaning
Toward us from your hidden star
Is grave, but not with human meaning.
(IMH 62)

The narrator’s observations do not allow him to interpret the dance from without, nor to put it in “human” terms, because it offers a mystical meaning. The “human,” in turn, is blithely equated with a rational mentality. The problem, as Lévy-Bruhl has it, is that only a rational mentality

²⁶ The passage also provides the title of Eliot’s 1920 *Poems, Ara Vos Prec*, and is variously quoted in the “Dante” essays, in *The Waste Land*, and elsewhere. It is foundational to his work.

²⁷ The distinction between physical torment and mental repose is also related to *Purgatorio* XXVI, where Daniel says “in / thought I see my past madness, and I see / with joy the day which I await before me” (lines 142-44). See Ricks’ note for Eliot’s letter to John Hayward (qtd. from Helen Gardner’s *The Composition of Four Quartets*) paraphrasing the significance of the *Purgatorio* XXVI passage (IMH 221, 4n).

“perceives the phenomenon as distinct from the interpretation” (*HNT* 32).²⁸ The poem suggests that one answer to this problem is to seek out and embrace the phenomenon—here, of ritual expiation—and let an interpretation follow.

The third stanza relocates the moth yet again as the narrator admits “Within the circle of my brain / The twisted dance continues” (*IMH* 62). Now the dance is not just the moth around the flame and reason’s dance with dark thoughts, but also the second-order reflection upon both of these, making the narrator’s mind itself the arena of refining fire. The admission that the poem is a sort of thought experiment leads to the closing vision of martyrdom. The moth is “Losing the end of his desire,” persevering because he “Desires completion of his loss” (*IMH* 63). The expiation of desire must be the expiation of the self, and although the poem only suggests that the moth “may not return” to its distant star, the final refrain again encourages self-sacrifice. Gordon’s biographical reading, which sees Eliot moving toward a religious epiphany, is based on the eager acceptance of martyrdom through the dance of expiation. More to the point for my purposes is the way that Eliot, with his simultaneously rational and prerational, materialist and mystical impulses, seems to merge with the moth. His identification with the “patient acolyte of pain” goes beyond the encouraging approval of the moth’s martyrdom to suggest that Eliot’s own mind is, somehow, the moth.

Making a *papillon noir* into one’s own *papillons noirs* goes further than the similitude of dancing like a bear. In its ambivalence to the law of non-contradiction, “The Burnt Dancer” approaches a prelogical mentality, essentially presenting Eliot and the moth in a totemic relationship. The moth’s warning is intuited as portentous, yet incomprehensible as portent. It

²⁸ Eliot quoted this line in Royce’s seminar. He returned to the formulation numerous times, for example, in the “Introduction” to Charlotte Stearns Eliot’s “Savonarola” and in a review of A. J. Balfour’s *Theism and Humanism*, where he begrudged a point in Balfour’s favor, writing, “That the experience and its interpretation are not completely distinguishable may be admitted” (285).

cannot be rationalized, precisely because this totemic relationship “cannot be expressed by a concept . . . the wholly mystic relation consists of a participation which cannot be comprised within the limits of logical thought” (*HNT* 76). Without recourse to explanation by concept, Eliot can still embrace the mystical, adopting the moth as a totem in an attempt to experience, as if by proxy, the ritual expiation. The poem sees Eliot toying with the possibility of entering a mystical mindset, as he would later paraphrase the position of a Bororo tribesman (in the review of C. J. Webb cited above): “he is capable of a state of mind into which we cannot put ourselves, in which he is a parrot, while being at the same time a man” (“*Group Theories*” 116). This totemic identification is not limited to the moth, but rather, it extends by cultural allusion to Eliot’s poetic forefathers Guido Guinizelli and Arnaut Daniel, eagerly swimming in their own fire of expiation.

The series of poetic identifications, dancing, and ritual I have described tracks Lévy-Bruhl’s description of how totemism ties individuals not only to plant and animal species but also to key ancestors. Such identification relies on the law of participation to reinforce the holistic strength of communities:

The ceremonies and dances, therefore, are intended to revive and maintain, by means of the nervous exaltation and ecstasy of movement not wholly unlike that seen in more advanced societies, the community of essence in which the actual individual, the ancestral being living again in him, and the animal or plant species that forms his totem, are all mingled. To our minds, there are necessarily three distinct realities here, however close the relationship may be. To the primitive minds, the three make but one, yet at the same time are three. (*HNT* 76)²⁹

Despite the overwhelmingly Christian overtones of the “martyr poems”—overtones which Frazer would have found contiguous with older, less “developed” cultural practices—what interests me here is Eliot’s manner of mingling individual, ancestor, and totem, especially as these thematic elements appear in his poetry so closely following his reading of Lévy-Bruhl.

²⁹ Lévy-Bruhl does not comment on the proximity of this description to the Christian Trinity.

“The Love Song of St. Sebastian” is a second attempt to identify with an archetypal ancestor. The opening lines reimagine the third section of “Portrait of a Lady,” where Eliot writes, “I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door / And feel *as if* I had mounted on my hands and knees” (*CPP* 20, emphasis added). As with the shift away from mere similitude in “The Burnt Dancer,” “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” promises a more literal (and shockingly visceral) abjection. The poet appears as a Christian flagellant, wearing a hair shirt, coming in the night to “sit at the foot of your stair” (*IMH* 78). He continues:

I would flog myself until I bled,
And after hour on hour of prayer
And torture and delight
Until my blood should ring the lamp
And glisten in the light;
I should arise your neophyte
And then put out the light
To follow where you lead
(*IMH* 78)

His blood traces another circle of desire, akin to that of “The Burnt Dancer,” while the expiation is more pointed here than the general atonement in the earlier poem. The dearth of feeling from “Portrait of a Lady” is carried to opposing extremes of sex and murder. The woman that he imagines addressing becomes his guiding light, anointing him her neophyte. Eliot becomes a priest to their macabre love, which needs its interpreter because it is based in a ritual utterly foreign to conversations that slip between “velleities and carefully caught regrets” (*CPP* 18). Out of the *agon* of “Portrait of a Lady,” Eliot now invokes a strange and uncomfortable law of participation, couched in an equivocating conditional.

“The Death of Saint Narcissus,” which was drafted roughly six months later in late 1914 or early 1915, takes the identification with a martyr further, more clearly exploring totemism and several other aspects of Lévy-Bruhl. The plot identifies the saint as a Christian ascetic who

“became a dancer before God,” while the language itself describes a “primitive” figure. The second stanza reveals his holistic relationship with nature. The wind, meadows, and river grant mystical knowledge, making him “aware of his limbs smoothly passing each other.” His cohesion with his environment lends an immaterial agency to the physical matter of his body: “His eyes were aware of the pointed corners of his eyes / And his hands aware of the pointed tips of his fingers” (*CPP* 605). I noted earlier how Lévy-Bruhl’s prelogical mentality is less concerned to distinguish between properties of the animate and the inanimate, and is, moreover, incapable of understanding any phenomenon as strictly physical or empirical (*HNT* 27-31). When Saint Narcissus’s surroundings speak to him, he is “Struck down by such knowledge,”

He could not live men’s ways, but became a dancer before God
 If he walked in city streets
 He seemed to tread on faces, convulsive thighs and knees.
 So he came out under the rock.
 (*CPP* 605)

The ways of men within their city streets—like the “human meaning” of “The Burn Dancer”—are beholden to a logical mentality. The “rock,” which in a Christian reading evokes the metaphorical Rock of St. Peter, is here a place ripe for mystical knowledge.³⁰

Saint Narcissus undergoes three totemic identifications, each returning to the question of experience and interpretation: “First he was sure that he had been a tree,” integrated into a community, “Twisting its branches among each other / And tangling its roots among each other.” The “surety” of the tree-totem leads to more secure knowledge “that he had been a fish,” while

³⁰ These lines will echo in the “stony places” of *The Waste Land*. Eliot was concerned with the disjunction between the natural and human worlds even before reading Lévy-Bruhl. From April 1911, “Interlude in London” evokes hibernation “among the bricks” and ritual “marmalade and tea at six,” which keeps the narrator “Indifferent to what the wind does / Indifferent to sudden rains / Softening last year’s garden plots” (*IMH* 16). This indifference relinquishes the possibility of mystical knowledge. Eliot likewise lamented the inaccessibility of the visionary three months earlier, in “Interlude: in a Bar.” Life “seems / Visionary, and yet hard; / Immediate, and far; / But hard . . .” The ellipsis suggests the impossibility of articulating visionary experience, while the emphasis on its “hardness” presages Lévy-Bruhl’s assertion that collective representations have a performative power as they are “translated into action” (*HNT* 24). The titles of these poems reiterate, etymologically, both life and poetry as play.

the final totem is presented with the clearest identification between the saint and another figure: “Then he had been a young girl / Caught in the woods by a drunken old man” (*CPP* 605). At each turn, Saint Narcissus becomes more assured of his totems as well as more secure in his mission, dancing on the hot sand “until the arrows came” and “his white skin surrendered itself to the redness of blood, and satisfied him” (*CPP* 606). Unlike “The Burnt Dancer,” where Eliot himself undergoes the totemic identification, here he attempts to record another’s totemic possibilities as a guide for his own desired transformations.³¹ The poem’s opening lines, which were salvaged for *The Waste Land*, have Eliot’s narrator beckoning to the reader:

Come under the shadow of this gray rock—
Come in under the shadow of this gray rock,
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak, or
Your shadow leaping behind the fire against the red rock:
I will show you his bloody cloth and limbs
And the gray shadow on his lips.
(*CPP* 605)

Where Saint Narcissus’s knowledge of the rock was mystical, the narrator’s is archaeological. Confronted with the saint’s example, which cannot be interpreted without the direct experience, the narrator must attempt to move from the vague shadow to the empirical fact of “his bloody cloth and limbs.” Recourse to empirical evidence—a mark of a logical mentality—can only offer the sign of the ineffable. His call to “come under the shadow of this gray rock” asks us to believe that we might share in the mystical experience, to understand our own dancing shadows as something other than the physical phenomenon of blocked sun- or fire-light.

³¹ This is not to deny the level of Christian martyrdom. I cannot address the sexual violence and perversity of either “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” or “The Death of Saint Narcissus,” although I certainly do not mean to dismiss it. Gordon finds “no adequate explanation” for Eliot’s social and sexual prejudices (108). This sounds like an evasion, but is simply an understatement. In these two poems, at least, the sexual violence speaks to a world that is “too strange for good or evil,” as “The Burnt Dancer” has it (*IMH* 62).

Although “The Death of Saint Narcissus” does not show Eliot himself in the totemic relationships, the opening stanza announces his project: to participate in mystical experience through the imagined identification with a totemic community. That community extends even to poetic ancestors like Arnaut Daniel, recalling in spirit, if not in form, Joyce’s adoption of Daedalus. Eliot’s project began as a means to escape the marionette-like playacting and socialized emotion of bourgeois collective representations. It became an attempt to save the self through recourse to other selves. Some version of this project is at work in Eliot’s numerous other identifications—Prufrock, Polonius, Gerontion, the roles of “Mélange Adultère de Tout,” Tiresias, even the Hollow Men—that may not explicitly invoke the prelogical. Eliot’s project, in short, exemplifies the play concept that Spariosu calls *as-if* modes of being. Prerational *as-if* play derives from ritual, while its rational counterpart provides the many usefully propositional fictions of philosophy, science, and autonomous art. As Spariosu briefly describes it: “Originally, play as an *as if* mode of being or human activity is inextricably bound with ritualistic simulation and role playing (e.g., in archaic ritual practices involving masks), but later on, notably in philosophy, it will also involve an abstract, rational operation that can be termed an *as if* approach to knowledge” (*DR* 20).³² In his early poetry, Eliot exercises the latter, abstract and rational form of *as-if* play. The mask of Laforguan irony is a face already prepared, sanctioned by bourgeois collective representations. Eliot plays the *fin-de-siècle* Fool. Although “The smoke” and “Portrait of a Lady” recognize the *agon* between play mentalities, he only takes up prerational *as-if* play with the *methetic* mask that I see in *The Waste Land*.

³² Eugen Fink likewise argues, “The enchantment of the mask is the most ancient prop of human play . . . the mask is not a plaything, is not something with which one plays but rather something in which one plays, something that constitutes cultic play in the very first place” (*Play* 151).

The “martyr poems” mark Eliot’s transition, borrowing from Lévy-Bruhl’s description of the prelogical mentality to make his playacting into an ontological endeavor. In their attempts to mingle the individual with his ancestors and totems, they allow Eliot to explore the possibilities of holistic identifications that might be more transformative than merely hiding behind different masks and guises. Eliot’s projections *as-if* he were a *papillon noir*, *as-if* he were a flagellant neophyte or an ascetic saint, are useful fictions insofar as they offer private escape from the banal materialism of his world, but they fall short as ritual for failing to bring about the sort of transformations that the law of participation promises to wring from collective representations. These poems cannot make Eliot into Saint Narcissus as a Bororo might be a parrot, nor can they bring Eliot and his readers together through a shared mystical experience. They glimpse prerational *as-if* modes of being, but through a rational lens.³³ Saint Narcissus may be a dancer before God, but he is alone. His exile is solipsistic, and in the Christian interpretation, all the more divine for being so. Eliot, like the mythical Greek to whom he alludes, is caught staring at his reflection, while the many promises that the prelogical and prerational mentalities offer for cultural renewal echo in his ear, resounding off of a gray rock. He can only beckon to readers to

³³ Several issues, deserving fuller treatment, arise with Eliot’s rational *as-if* play mentality. I can only outline them here. Hans Vaihinger is the exemplary theorist of rational *as-if* play, seeing thought as a biological function, which in humanity had become overdeveloped past the point necessary to satisfy the end of survival. As he has it, thought “has gradually lost sight of its original practical purpose and is finally practiced for its own sake as theoretical thought”; that is, as purposiveness without a purpose (xlvi). Vaihinger argues that reason is not an immutable power like the soul, but rather, is a product of biology. He sees this in a positive and pragmatic light, arguing that although “many thought-processes and thought-constructs appear to be consciously false assumptions, which either contradict reality or are even contradictory in themselves,” they remain useful (xlvi-xlvii). These “Scientific Fictions,” are “distinguished as conscious creations by their ‘As if’ character” (xlvii). Such fictions, whether religious dogmas or more recent scientific postulations like dark matter, are the scaffolding that has enabled the construction of all knowledge. Vaihinger recognizes Nietzsche’s famous definition of truth as “lying in an extra-moral sense,” arguing that Nietzsche might have formulated a *positive* theory of necessary fictions, had he remained healthy. *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* appeared in 1911 (translated by C. K. Ogden as *The Philosophy of “As If”* in 1924). I have found no evidence that Eliot read it in the original, but his dissertation on F. H. Bradley offers a similar definition of thought as provisional. Eliot writes: “There is no absolute point of view from which real and ideal can be finally separated and labeled. All of our terms turn out to be unreal abstractions; but we can defend them, and give them a kind of reality and validity (the only validity which they can possess or can need) by showing that they express the theory of knowledge which is implicit in all our practical activity” (*Knowledge and Experience* 18).

“come in under the shadow” of such mystical experience, he cannot bring them under the shadow, nor yet cast the shadow over them. The form of the “martyr poems” and their rational play limits their transformative power. They carry none of the compulsive force that Lévy-Bruhl ascribes to collective representations (*HNT* 15). They are private performances—as I earlier intimated that “Portrait of a Lady” resembles a closet drama—evacuating the poet’s voice of public import, reducing it to a dry wind rattling dead grass.³⁴ In order for Eliot to turn from the mirror, for his poetry to *do* something more than echo, he would need to forget himself as masked dancer in order to become his dance, doffing the mask of Laforgian irony and donning one of ritualistic mimesis-play.

From Mimesis-Imitation to Mimesis-Play

While Sparsos relates prerational *as-if* play to “archaic ritual practices involving masks,” his discussion of mimesis further exemplifies the relationship between his prerational and Lévy-Bruhl’s prelogism, insofar as both can bring about holistic communal identification (*DR* 20). A brief look at their respective understandings of imitation and representation will frame my reading of *The Waste Land* as ludic modernism, which turns on the poem’s play with

³⁴ Chinitz and Jed Esty each claim Eliot begins to think through cultural renewal at later dates than I do. Chinitz sees it inaugurated by *Sweeney Agonistes*: “Whereas *The Waste Land* was torn out of Eliot under great psychological pressure, *Sweeney* was a calculated first step toward ‘making the modern world possible for art’—for Eliot did not expect to alter modern culture by writing poems. And not coincidentally, it is in *Sweeney Agonistes*, his one pre-Christian play, that Eliot today appears stylistically most avant-garde” (82, quoting “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” 178). Granting that a poem written in seven languages was not aimed at a *popular* readership, I am not sure I agree that *Sweeney* is more formally radical than *The Waste Land*. Regardless, my aim is to demonstrate how *The Waste Land* sought to bring Eliot and whatever audience he could expect into a more playfully primitive relationship, attempting to fulfill what, in “The Poetic Drama” of 1920 he called “‘a kind of unconscious co-operation’ between artist and audience” (qtd. in Chinitz 88). I also place these concerns much earlier than Jed Esty, for whom they begin with *The Rock* (1934): “Of course, the conversion of London from ghastly metropolis into organic community was Eliot’s desideratum all along. What marks a shift in his writing during the 1930s is not simply the petrification of youthful agony into middle-aged dogmatism but a growing sense that organic community might possibly be achieved, or at least adumbrated, in a new way. Pointing the way out of the waste land, Eliot’s chorus identifies a newly apparent faltering of the entire modern enterprise” (72).

representational and performative aesthetics. I earlier suggested that the “compulsive force” Lévy-Bruhl ascribes to collective representations has participatory and performative aspects (*HNT* 15). This force compels the “law of participation” through which an individual’s web of totemic associations extends to her name, shadow, the content of her dreams, and crucially, representations of the individual:

Every picture, every reproduction “participates” in the nature, properties, life of that of which it is the image. . . . Primitive mentality sees no difficulty in the belief that such life and properties exist in the original and its reproduction *at one and the same time*. By virtue of the mystic bond between them, a bond represented by the law of participation, the reproduction *is* the original, as the Bororo *are* the araras. (*HNT* 64; emphasis in original)

Collective representations, understood as beliefs, overlap with the more familiar sense of representations as pictures, likenesses, names, or words. In a striking rebuttal to the Platonic fear of shadowy copies removed from ideal truth, Lévy-Bruhl contends that the prelogical mentality can accept the similitude and original as one and the same—“copying” does not come into play.

Of course, no recourse to Lévy-Bruhl is necessary to find artists and authors of the early twentieth century using performativity in their work, rejecting Platonic conceptions of original-and-copy by consciously forcing viewers, auditors, and readers to acknowledge their roles in the creation of meaning. Even when modernist primitivism is inextricable to a movement—as in cubism—critics usually understand performativity as a function of artistic experimentation within Western traditions of one-point perspective and realist representation.³⁵ This is certainly

³⁵ Hence Stein defended modern art against those whom it “annoyed” by defining oil painting as simply that, putting oil paint on flat surfaces: “one comes to any oil painting through any other oil painting” (“Lectures” 232). Stein elides any non-Western influence in such art, implying a certain cultural tautology. Simon Gikandi reveals that erasure of Africa from “institutions of commentary” (which insisted on the “purity of modernism”) and the “process of containment” initiated by modernists themselves. To Gikandi, modernists “needed the primitive in order to carry out their representational revolution, but . . . once this task had been accomplished, the Other needed to be evacuated from the scene of the modern” (“Picasso” 457). In his concern for “African bodies,” Gikandi glosses over the aesthetic question of whether African artistic forms could be responsibly considered “performative” in their own right—a question Ramazani and Friedman are eager to explore.

the case with Picasso's proto-cubist "Portrait of Gertrude Stein," which forces viewers to recognize how their habits of looking chafe against the way he put oil paint on a flat canvas. The same could be said for the more overtly performative demands of later cubist works, whose self-referentiality collapses the traditional separation between the perceiving subject and the painting, asking viewers to acknowledge their collaboration with the painter in "making" the work of art. Granting this, we still conceptually separate the subject of a painting—whether sitter or scene—and its presentation in paint, no matter how abstract, performative, or constructivist it is. And yet such is exactly the radical conflation that Lévy-Bruhl suggests: that the "Portrait of Gertrude Stein" and Gertrude Stein share the same properties, just as the Bororo are the araras.³⁶

There is a palpable uneasiness in Lévy-Bruhl's vocabulary as he describes the paradox of an "original" and a "reproduction" that are one and the same. Spariosu quells any such unease by rejecting the term "representation" in the first place. Instead, as I recounted in my Introduction, he defines prerational mimesis-play against rational mimesis-imitation. As he argues:

[In archaic Greece,] the *mimesis* semantic group was employed in a ritualistic-dramatic context, designating a performative function that we moderns associate with play. Consequently, this semantic group, at least before Plato, should not be understood as conveying the idea of imitation in the sense of "representation or reproduction of an original or model," but rather the idea of "miming," "simulating," or even "presencing" (invoking, calling something forth). (*DR* 17)

Mimesis-play as "presencing" or "calling forth" accords with the performative force of Lévy-Bruhl's prelogical representation. Spariosu could be discussing a totemic community's ritual participation in collective representations when he comments: "The archaic audience totally

³⁶ Stein offers this well-known anecdote about the reception of the portrait: "After a little while I murmured to Picasso that I liked his portrait of Gertrude Stein. Yes, he said, everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will, he said" (*ABT* 12). Lévy-Bruhl helps to show how deeply Picasso understood the compulsive force of his—and Stein's—experiments, and their power to change categories of knowledge. Michael North follows Picasso's dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, to suggest something like Spariosu's bifurcated sense of mimesis: "the duality of masks forces a confrontation between representation by likeness and representation by convention or habit" (71).

identifies with the performer through mimetic participation (*methexis*), which is a kind of hypnotic trance eventually leading to catharsis or a pleasurable relief of pent-up emotions” (*DR* 19). He paraphrases Lévy-Bruhl’s vocabulary, writing, “Because it combines the auditory-visual with emotion-action and collective participation, mimesis-play gives the bard considerable power over his audience, which he can move at will to laughter or tears, to pleasurable composure or violent emotion” (*GMN* 19).³⁷ Plato’s redefinition of mimesis as duplication is, in part, a response to the immediacy of *methetic* participation and identification. When the bard or the masked actor assumes the power of *methexis*, he combines an *as-if* play mentality with mimesis-play in an artistic practice more “primitive,” yet perhaps more socially efficacious, than one based in disinterested Kantian autonomy, at least when it is reduced to isolation.³⁸

Understood in the terms of the visual arts, rational mimesis-imitation includes all painting that follows the Renaissance concerns for the illusion of depth and a one-point perspective privileging a single perceiving subject. Likewise, cubism is just one example of a prerational aesthetics of mimesis-play: fracturing its objects, eschewing a single perspective, forcing viewers to acknowledge their participation in the creation of meaning, spatially and temporally. That brief description of cubism’s mimesis-play might just as easily describe Eliot’s formal technique

³⁷ In such disparate pieces as “Euripides and Professor Murray” (1920) and “The Social Function of Poetry” (1940), Eliot displays a similar sense of Greek drama as a collective and immediately visceral experience. Of Murray’s *Medea*, he writes: “we imagine that the actors of Athens, who had to speak clearly enough for 20,000 auditors to be able to criticise the versification, would have been pelted with figs and olives had they mumbled so unintelligibly as most of this troupe. But the Greek actor spoke in his own language, and our actors were forced to speak in the language of Professor Gilbert Murray” (“Euripides” 47). Euripides’ 20,000 viewers is around 25 times the size of the circulation of Eliot’s *Criterion*, which Ackroyd notes never exceeded 800 subscribers (Ackroyd 248).

³⁸ Eliot recognized the more nuanced view of autonomous art that I summarized from the new aestheticism. In a 1940 appreciation, he extolled Yeats’ example: “Born into a world in which the doctrine of ‘Art for Art’s sake’ was generally accepted, and living on into one in which art has been asked to be instrumental to social purposes, he held firmly to the right view which is between these, though not in any way a compromise between them, and showed that an artist, by serving his art with entire integrity, is at the same time rendering the greatest service he can to his own nation and to the whole world” (“Yeats” 262).

in *The Waste Land*, as critics have long recognized.³⁹ In this view, the poem shores its fragments against ruin in the verbal equivalent of those tribal masks whose fractured planes were so integral to modernist primitivism. In a different vein, however, we have also long recognized the poem as deeply autobiographical, a “personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life,” as if it played at mimesis-imitation, copying Eliot’s fractured persona.⁴⁰ Could this copy have something of Lévy-Bruhl’s prelogism about it? Can *The Waste Land* be a poetic similitude the same as its original—poet and parrot at once?

My argument regarding the play of *The Waste Land* proceeds from each of these broad categories of criticism. The formal and the biographical approaches, varied and contentious as they are, hearken to two aspects of Lévy-Bruhl’s prelogical mentality: first, the performative power of collective representations to change the world of lived experience; and second, a fluid conception of the individual, in which one’s identity is suffused throughout his or her totems, ancestors, and representations. In my view, these ideas coalesce in *The Waste Land* as a prelogical “representation” of Eliot himself, crafted according to the aesthetics of primitivist

³⁹ Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley are representative in describing Eliot’s “cubism”: “[he] juxtaposes slices or fragments of city life, so in *The Waste Land* he presents many broken perspectives on many cities in and out of time. The juxtaposition of these many partial fleeting perspectives leads to the formation of an abstract city (the real “Unreal City”) in the mind of his reader collaborator” (31). Nancy Duvall Hargrove chronicles Eliot’s experiences with various avant-gardes during his 1910-11 sojourn in Paris, including his friendships with Jean Verdenal and Alain-Fournier (brother-in-law of Jacques Rivière, the later editor of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*). Of his exposure to cubism through friends and through the 1911 exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants, Hargrove writes, “while all the avant-garde art movements of the early 20th Century contributed to *The Waste Land*, Cubism was a particular and significant gift of his Parisian residence, which introduced him to new modes of seeing, thinking, and creating” (109). Other treatments of cubism and Eliot include Korg, Tomlinson, and Perloff, who emphasizes Pound’s editing, calling *il miglior fabbro* “the great master in English of collage form” (72).

⁴⁰ Valerie Eliot included his comment about “rhythmical grumbling”—from a 1933 lecture at Bryn Mawr—in the headnote to the manuscript (*WLF* 1; Loucks 28). A partial list of criticism advancing primarily biographical readings would include: James E. Miller, Jr., who argued that Pound had “turned a somewhat personal, confessional poem into a public didactic poem with the assistance of an author who was filled with uncertainties about the personal-confessional content to begin with” (155); Calvin Bedient posits a single narrator, “not Tiresias but a nameless stand-in for Eliot himself,” who performs all of the voices in a “distinctly theatrical” way (ix); Gordon argues for the poem as a spiritual autobiography in the Puritan tradition: “From the beginning Eliot had in mind the traditional form of the spiritual journey through deathly ordeals” (148); see also Ackroyd, Bush, *T. S. Eliot*, and Smith.

modernism's ritual object *par excellence*: the tribal mask.⁴¹ We should understand Eliot's deployment of the prelogical mentality as a moment of prerational play welling up in its ceaseless *agon* with the rational, with both mentalities present in the poem. It is not simply a rational portrait-copy of the wasted cultural landscape of modernity, and likewise, Eliot has moved beyond the poem-as-mask which covers up the poet's face hidden beneath. *The Waste Land* is itself the mask—rendered with the angular planes and abstracted perspective of the figures in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*—even as it is also the poet and his dance, brought together in a holistic ritual. It mingles the history, myths, and collective representations of Eliot's culture together with his personal identity, his presumed predecessors and ancestors, and—through the compulsive force of the law of participation—his readers.

The ludic modernism of *The Waste Land* rests on its simultaneous treatment of mimesis-play and mimesis-imitation. My reading in terms of such play proceeds through two engagements with the poem. The first will examine “A Game of Chess” through a vocabulary derived from the visual arts. The second, beginning with the end of “The Burial of the Dead” and skipping through the poem at large, will establish more minutely how Eliot crafts *The Waste Land* as a cultural ritual. The generative tension between mimesis-play and mimesis-imitation is most apparent in “A Game of Chess.” The woman's room in the opening vignette consistently evokes representational painting. We are told, “Above the antique mantel was displayed / As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene / The change of Philomel” (*CPP* 64). The narrator's “As though” suggests the painting's illusory depth, while the framing above the mantel

⁴¹ To be sure, this first step in my reading is largely a selective retelling and reemphasis of long-established criticism. Insofar as my recourse to Lévy-Bruhl highlights the *use* of the prelogical mentality for the revaluation and renewal of Eliot's own society, I am at least momentarily trafficking in the appropriation model of criticism.

suggests a one-point perspective meant to be viewed from the middle of the room.⁴² The painted illusion of depth recurs: “other withered stumps of time / Were told upon the walls; staring forms / Leaned out” (*CPP* 64). The leaning forms echo the hiding and peeping *putti*, reliefs on the standards of the mirror. The mirror itself reflects the entire scene, duplicating the candle flames in its own sort of window. The smoke, rising with the perfumes’ odor, calls attention to the laquearia of the coffered ceiling, the depiction of which was a standard trope and *tour de force* of perspectival painting.⁴³ The “carved dolphin” swimming in the fire’s “sad light” speaks of a careful chiaroscuro (*CPP* 64). At 33 lines, it is the longest single passage of description in the poem, and on the whole, might easily be taken for an ekphrastic replication of some lost, lovingly-detailed van Eyck.

Duplication, painting as through a window, and cast and sculpted forms in relief are hallmarks of post-Renaissance painting, and these invocations of rational mimesis-imitation frame the allusion to the story of Tereus and Philomela. In light of the rest of “A Game of Chess,” it can be tempting not to look far past the sexual violence in Ovid’s tale, and even then to see it as a warning against confusing the natural order, as Philomela indicts Tereus. Indeed, the social register of *The Waste Land* echoes her charge against him: “*Omnia turbasti*” (VI.537). The story, however, also cautions against the neglect of proper rituals. Tereus and Procne’s marriage is not blest by Juno or Hymen, but by the Furies (VI.429-35). In order to spring her revenge, Procne invents a fictional festival to bring Tereus to the table where the macabre meal is set out for him (VI.648-51). In what Spariosu would call a demonstration of prerational power,

⁴² Charles Altieri has gone so far as to suggest that representationalism in both painting and poetry follows a “logic of the window and the narrative account”—a phrase that might have been tailor-made for Eliot’s description of “The change of Philomel” here (Altieri 395).

⁴³ And this would extend to the selective manipulation of perspective to virtuosic ends, as in Giovanni Panini’s *Interior of the Pantheon* (in the National Gallery, Washington D.C.).

the story is about the failures of language in the face of brute force. It is, finally, about the metamorphoses of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela into the hoopoe, swallow, and nightingale. In Lévy-Bruhl's terms, Ovid's story describes the creation of a totem through which an individual might not only escape private horror, but also transcend time and history to become part of a community's myth and collective representations. Modernity may have reduced the nightingale's song to "'Jug Jug' to dirty ears," but the poet can both hear her call and ensure that it sounds again by echoing it in his own song (*CPP* 64). When Eliot returns to the myth at the end of the poem, citing the refrain from the *Pervigilium Veneris*—"Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow"—he reiterates his interest in the possibilities of transformation (*CPP* 75).

One of the more explicitly autobiographical passages of *The Waste Land* follows, with the nervous woman speaking to her silent partner. She begins: "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad . . . I never know what you are thinking. Think." Pound recognized the passage's proximity to life, asking on the typescript: "Photography?" (*WLF* 11). He repeated the sentiment when she later asks: "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (*WLF* 13). We need not question how precisely Eliot rendered the scene to see why metamorphosis is still on his mind, evident when the man thinks to himself "I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes" (*CPP* 65).⁴⁴ Physical transformations that carry existential consequences run throughout the next vignette. According to the unnamed narrator in the pub, Lil's domestic happiness has been strained by five births, the dubiously-procured abortion of a sixth, and may only be salvaged by radical dental surgery. Valerie Eliot notes that the Albert and Lil passage was also drawn from

⁴⁴ Cyrena N. Pondrom has used this passage to link Eliot's performative aesthetics to his understanding of gender as a construct. She argues, "with the collaboration of the reader, the narrator performs a failed masculinity" (429). Such performance is significant here because the manuscript originally tied this passage to the earlier "hyacinth girl" episode, suggesting a fluid, "quite different, homoerotic rather than heterosexual" conception of gender (*WLF* 13; *CPP* 62; Pondrom, "T. S. Eliot" 433). While I emphasize play, the performativity of *The Waste Land* works on several levels at once.

life, based on a story recounted by Eliot's maid, Ellen Kellond (*WLF* 127, 5n). Without downplaying the social register of these passages, I want to highlight Eliot's practice of inserting ostensibly "real" episodes into the poem, as if "photographically."

Taken alone, the transcription of a conversation is a form of mimesis-imitation, the poetic version of a painting rendered as a window giving on a scene. Like the allusion to Philomela, the boudoir and pub scenes have their rituals, but none of them, from the hot water at ten and game of chess, to the Sunday ham, or even closing down the pub, are satisfactory. Albert and Lil's marriage seems no more properly blest than that of Procne and Tereus or the couple modeled on Tom and Viv. The desires for metamorphosis, for identification with others, and for community loom large. Yet these scenes, whose presentation is preoccupied with mimesis-imitation, are presented as fragments of "real" life through prerational mimesis-play (like "A Game of Chess" within *The Waste Land* itself). That is, they are placed side-by-side, paratactically, like planes of color meant to show different sides of a face in an analytical cubist portrait. As with the painting of Philomela, the "other withered stumps of time," and the lengthy description of the boudoir—all of which might be taken to copy "reality"—the purportedly photographic conversations function like those postcards and pieces of wallpaper pinned to canvases in synthetic cubism. They force the reader to acknowledge the poem's artifice and construction as well as her collaboration in the mental juxtaposition of fragments. The compulsive force, upon the reader, of Eliot's performance parallels the nervous woman's command to her silent partner: "Think," which, at its base, is a call to connect (*CPP* 65). At the same time, however, we can understand the poem as a prelogical "representation" of Eliot himself, a concatenation of his memories, tribulations, hopes, and fears, whether these are narrated or indicated through allusion. The personal nature of the poem is evident even without the biographies and the vast critical

apparatus undergirding its reception. Following Lévy-Bruhl, this “representation” of Eliot participates in his identity and properties. The portrait—the *cubist* portrait—and the sitter are one and the same.

Eliot’s specific blending of mimesis-imitation and mimesis-play is most visible when discussed in terms of painting and photography and, again, this ludic modernism is the means by which he turns *The Waste Land* into a playful mask. The performative ritual into which we are drawn by the law of participation’s compulsive force also seeks to create a holistic community with its own set of collective representations. I just argued that “The change of Philomel” is one such collective representation, and that it appears in *The Waste Land* because of its concerns for the roles that ritual, myth, and totemic identification play within a culture. With such a densely allusive poem, I can only offer a partial account of how the cultural artifacts Eliot has chosen to emphasize work toward his larger ends (or mine, as the case may be). As such, I will concentrate on another moment where he toys with a rational-mentality sense of doubling and mimesis-imitation, paratactically juxtaposed to “A Game of Chess”: the “Unreal City” passage that closes “The Burial of the Dead” (*CPP* 62-63).

The first line of the passage is “Unreal City,” which Eliot annotates: “Cf. Baudelaire: / ‘Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves, / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant’” (*CPP* 60; 76, 60n.). These are the first two lines of Baudelaire’s “Les sept vieillards,” which Richard Howard translates: “Swarming city—city gorged with dreams, / where ghosts by day accost the passer-by.”⁴⁵ Such is the plot of the original, and “a ghost of sorts stops a man in the street” also sketches the encounter with Stetson that this passage of *The Waste Land* relates. Dwelling on

⁴⁵ Here and with “Au lecteur,” all French citations are taken from the Gallimard edition (127-29; 33-34). The rather free paraphrase of “Les sept vieillards” is my own, with the consultation of translations by Martin (230-33), Howard (92-93), and Goudge, this last given in Rainey (83-84). In *To Criticize the Critic*, Eliot claimed Baudelaire’s “significance for me is summed up in” these first two lines (qtd. in Crawford, *Young* 108).

Baudelaire will be illuminative, however, as “Les sept vieillards” shares many of the preoccupations I have traced thus far in Eliot’s early work. Baudelaire’s narrator describes himself as an actor on a stage, whose mood matches the dank and foggy morning (“*décor semblable à l’âme de l’acteur*”). Stricken with *ennui*, he walks alone, communing with his soul (“*discutant avec mon âme déjà lasse*”), when his progress and his meditation are arrested by the apparition of an old beggar tramping along, as if spiteful of the dead (“*écrasait des morts*”). The beggar’s body is broken, at a right angle to the ground, presaging the break with rational experience he will affect for the narrator (“*Il n’était pas voûté, mais cassé*”). As he passes, he replicates himself seven times in as many minutes, by the narrator’s count (“*Car je comptai sept fois, de minute en minute, / Ce sinistre vieillard qui se multipliait!*”). In a warning to those who might not feel a frisson of brotherly sympathy (“*un frisson fraternal*”) with his plight, the narrator implies that these apparitions look like they might have eternal life (“*avaient l’aire éternel*”). They may just make other visitations. He turns to run from them, like a drunk seeing double (“*Comme un ivrogne qui voit double*”), returning home to close the door against the threat. The poem closes with his reflection on the encounter:

*Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre;
La tempête en jouant déroutait ses efforts,
Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre
Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords!*
(Baudelaire 129)

For which Goudge gives:

And in vain did my reason attempt to take charge,
For its efforts were foiled by the tempest in me,
And my soul began dancing a jig, like a barge [*gabarre*]
Without masts on a monstrous and infinite sea.
(qtd. in Rainey 84)

Goudge renders the narrator's soul "like" a barge—a scow or a lighter would be more precise—whereas Baudelaire uses a metaphorical correlation that is stronger than the translation's simile, just as Eliot moved from simile to metaphor between the dancing bear of "Portrait of a Lady" and the totemic identification with the *papillon noir* of "The Burnt Dancer." Nevertheless, the encounter has devastated the narrator's rational mentality. The image of the seven old men shuffling into the unknown distance evokes a shattered mirror, and a vague hint of identification between the narrator and the men seeps in, as if he sees himself reflected there. The brotherly frisson that readers are asked to feel shows us reflected in the poem as well. Baudelaire's narrator is "*Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité*," which is literally "wounded by the mystery and by the absurdity" of the apparition (Baudelaire 129). The meticulous translator of Poe, however, would surely condone the pun on the false friend, and there is certainly room in his aesthetics to find a blessing in the sublime fear provoked by an encounter with irrationality.

From Baudelaire, Eliot got fear out of the fog, which he transmuted into a handful of dust. I do not mean to imply a narrowly causal connection, but I do want to suggest that Eliot doubles or "copies" his predecessor's poem in ways that interrogate the rational conception of mimesis-imitation, which is itself a shared theme. There are certainly other thematic repetitions. There is the conceit of the poet-actor (which might just as easily be Eliot's reflection of Laforgue or Shakespeare). There is the dancing metaphor, which, again, recurs in Eliot's early poems as a trope for release of some sort or another, often from social codes and rational-mentality strictures. As with several of Eliot's narrators, Baudelaire's has a mystical experience.⁴⁶

Although the latter's Paris and St. Narcissus' wilderness are mirror-image locales, the two share an intimate connection to their immediate environments, much as Jessie Weston describes the

⁴⁶ In addition to those already discussed, see "Silence" (*IMH* 18), which Gordon pairs with the fountain scene in "Burnt Norton" as indicative of the ineffable in Eliot (Gordon 23; *CPP* 172).

ailing Fisher King as a metonym for his barren realm (Weston 114).⁴⁷ The manuscript version of “Death by Water” expanded the closing metaphor of “Les sept vieillards” further, as it included the story of a mystical experience on a storm-tossed fishing boat.⁴⁸ Eliot’s “copy” of Baudelaire’s “original” carries these themes throughout the “Unreal City” passage, laying London over Paris and suffusing both with Dante’s Hell.⁴⁹ Rome and Carthage enter with the battle of Mylae—an ancient iteration of “the West” versus the purportedly barbarian “Other”—while the dead of the Punic Wars speak to both the British soldiers flowing over London Bridge off to the trenches, as well as Dante’s multitudes of the unbaptized. Elizabethan drama is included in the register of cultural references with the allusion to John Webster, in the lines before the second, closing quotation of Baudelaire: “You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—frère!” (*CPP* 63). This last line closes the narrator’s address to Stetson, but still serves the same function it had in Baudelaire’s “Au lecteur,” with the narrator speaking directly to the reader. In light of Eliot’s mimesis-play, this direct address further indicates how the law of participation exerts a compulsive force over our reading of *The Waste Land*.⁵⁰

This allusive collage of collective representations is full of autobiographical details, although they did not raise Pound’s suspicions of “Photography?” (*WLF* 11). Bertrand Russell

⁴⁷ And again, St. Narcissus is called to leave the city, where he “seemed to tread on faces, convulsive thighs and knees,” not unlike Baudelaire’s old man crushing the dead underfoot (“*écrasait des morts sous ses savates*”). Edna St. Vincent Millay’s freer translation underscores the connection: “like someone crushing the faces of the dead” (*CPP* 605). I see Eliot much more eager to converse with the dead—like Dante, through the refining fire of aesthetics—than to tramp on them.

⁴⁸ The sailor-narrator recounts: “And another night / Observed us scudding, with the trysail gone, / Northward, leaping beneath invisible stars” (*WLF* 59). I will return to Baudelaire’s closing metaphor momentarily.

⁴⁹ Brooker and Bentley discuss the overlapping of London and “Ante-Hell” in terms of cursive and recursive images like Wittgenstein’s duck/rabbit. These similarly conflate mimesis-imitation and mimesis-play, insofar as the viewer “performs” (i.e. fixes in her understanding) the interpretation of either a duck or a rabbit, while even so, the image continues to represent its counterpart.

⁵⁰ Eliot also uses the strategy of the direct address (which again, highlights the reader’s performative role) in the “Son of man” passage and in the narrator’s warning in “Death by Water”: “Gentile or Jew / O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you” (*CPP* 61; 71).

had described to Eliot the vision of a crowd flowing over London Bridge (Gordon 136). Their course replicates Eliot's daily commute through the City to Lloyd's bank (Rainey 85, 67n.). Eliot's lifelong engagement with the *Divine Comedy* was integral to his sense of self (Gordon 262). In short, by conflating allusive shards of shared culture with "real" personal reminiscences, these sixteen lines exemplify ludic modernism in the same way as I just argued of "A Game of Chess." In keeping with Eliot's cubist presentation of a primitive mask, snippets of these shards appear elsewhere in the poem, seen from different angles.⁵¹ In the doublings of the "Unreal City" passage, therefore, Eliot asks us to reconsider our notions of mimesis as imitation. He reproduces Baudelaire's original in such a way that it now carries a host of collective representations selected from Eliot's culture as well as from his own life. It is a copy of a small sliver of a culture, rendered as a palimpsest. My argument is that this passage is emblematic of the larger method of *The Waste Land*, which is itself a collocation of collective representations. In another context, this might be called a canon—one with astonishing cultural breadth and historical depth—or, in turn, a tradition. This collection certainly reflects Eliot's cultural idiosyncrasies and personal biases, but again, it seeks to function as a holistic ritual for the culture in which Eliot, playfully reinterpreting Lévy-Bruhl, would have us participate. His doubling of "Les sept vieillards" is emblematic of his larger aesthetic practice because ludic modernism works in the same way: the prerational hails the rational in the light of day.

Eliot's method of blending public or "cultural" allusions with private ones recalls the prelogical indifference to the law of non-contradiction. Public and private bleed together and overlap, like London, Paris, and Hell (and later, Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, and Vienna).

⁵¹ For example, the "corpse" Stetson has planted recalls April, "breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land" (CPP 61). Likewise, the "Unreal City" returns in "The Fire Sermon"—just after Tereus and the nightingale are similarly glimpsed again—and is then multiplied to include "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal (CPP 67-68; 73).

Even thus far in *The Waste Land*, Eliot has been preoccupied with scenes of interstitial betweenness and with terms that are neither *a* nor *b*: the ambivalence of April, the Hofgarten as an urban park, the inability to either say or guess, a shadow neither rising nor falling (*CPP* 61); Isolde on Irish Sea (*CPP* 61-62); being “neither living nor dead,” the respectively wishy-washy and equivocating Madame Sosostris and Mrs. Equitone, a city as real/mythic/unreal, the City as a separate jurisdiction within London, and the Purgatorial dead who will be neither saved nor damned (*CPP* 62). Although this turn away from the law of non-contradiction derives from a prerational play mentality—recall the epigraph to “Burnt Norton,” from Heraclitus—the emphasis on being both/and rather than either/or is central to ludic modernism.

As I have tried to show over the course of this chapter, Eliot was a poet disillusioned with “reason” and concerned for the direction of his culture. He had been toying first with play and then with anthropology as means of forging his personality, finding his poetic voice, and invigorating a crass and materialistic culture that left him little room for self-expression. The question of how Lévy-Bruhl and primitivism entered his aesthetics has, again, often been read through an appropriation model of criticism. Chinitz nicely summarizes the uses toward which Eliot put the prelogical: “the *mentalité primitive* . . . becomes a way of preserving the authority of the poet when the station of poetry within modern culture seems considerably diminished” (79). He asserts that Eliot’s primitivism is one piece of a larger project meant to make art a central, rather than a fringe cultural activity. That primitivism is only one means to a larger end tends to get lost, and in my view, Eliot’s play is also elided, despite its earlier provenance in the oeuvre. The *mentalité primitive* did not just suggest that fertility rites might structure modern poetry, nor that atomized and dissociated Westerners might learn from Others how to regain a holistic culture, nor that tribal masks offer new forms for art; rather, the primitive is what

allowed Eliot to aestheticize the prerational play mentality within Western culture, which was temporarily superseded by its rational counterpart at the time when modernism came to prominence. Eliot's identity, his totems and ancestors, the myths and collective representations of his culture are all mingled in *The Waste Land* as a masked dancer's ritual performance. The experience and interpretation are inseparable, and moreover, they are both an exuberant rejoinder to the bourgeois conventions decried in the manuscript poems and also a solution to problem of the prerational raised by the rhetorical question that closes "Portrait of a Lady": in such a wasted land, how can we claim the right to smile? To whatever extent that Eliot's ritual steals from the primitive, it is also a form of bifurcated play. He goes beyond rational *as-if* play, invoking the *methetic* and performative power of the prerational to offer his hand to readers, that they might join in his masked, ritual dance.

By way of conclusion, I want to address the specific tenor of these meetings, the prerational *agon* with the rational and Eliot's mask-dance with his readers, because I see in *The Waste Land* an open affirmation, not imperialist antagonism or rote and reactive fear of atavism. The convergence of several threads of my argument in the last lines of the poem will demonstrate as much. In his canon of collective representations, Eliot forces readers to recognize and perform what in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" he called the "historical sense," which "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (38). *The Waste Land* shows us the past—"culture"—as through a glass, darkly; as Baudelaire saw his reflection in the seven old men and as Eliot refracted that reflection. By borrowing the metaphor of seeing through a glass darkly, I mean to imply that the note to the final line—which borrows Philippians' "peace which passeth understanding" for "a feeble translation" of "Shantih"—is not

Eliot's only reference to St. Paul.⁵² Paul's faith, hope, and charity are rendered as the Buddhist give, sympathize, and control (*CPP* 80). Eliot gives: a holistic culture and set of collective representations, which might weather the storm modernity if only we submit to "the awful daring of a moment's surrender" and join his ritual (*CPP* 74). Eliot sympathizes: the poet identifies with his audience through mimesis-play. Although he laments the prison of private experience,

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
(*CPP* 74)

his *methetic* sympathy is a strategy for escape, a means of reviving "a broken Coriolanus" and breaking through the "closed circle" of experience, as his note cites Bradley (*CPP* 74; 80). Eliot controls: he revises the ending of "Les sept vieillards." There, reason could only wish in vain to take the tiller of the ship of the soul ("*Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre*" [Baudeliare 129]); it could not control the irrational. Here and throughout *The Waste Land*, however, Eliot has flaunted his control. His sure hand utilizes the prelogical and prerational such that "The boat responded / Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar," tacking through the breakers of modernity (*CPP* 74).⁵³

If we take this ritual to show us culture through a glass, then Eliot reverses the ethnographic supposition of the primitive as "childlike," paradoxically imbuing Paul's claim to

⁵² *CPP* 80. In seeing "through a glass darkly," I do mean to pun on the earlier description of mimesis-imitation as seeing through a window. The full passage from I Corinthians echoes much of my discussion. Eliot might be said to "speak with the tongues of men and of angels" and purport to "have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge" (I Cor. 13:1-2). We have seen in his *as-if* play the desire to "give my body to be burned" (I Cor. 13:3).

⁵³ And again, the play with the metaphor of reason as a storm-tossed boat was stronger in the draft, with the full narrative of "Death by Water." In the subsequent lines, "Your heart would have responded / Gaily, when invited, beating obedient / To controlling hands," I see a revision of and rejoinder to the sadism of "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" (*CPP* 74).

understanding “as a child” with the profound potential to revitalize a civilization.⁵⁴ Through the lens of this ludic vision, the fragments that Eliot collects in the final lines of the poem bring *The Waste Land* into focus as an act of charity. He returns to select shards, a litany of his totems that commences, crucially, with a nursery rhyme: “London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down” (CPP 74). Out of this play, he gives voice to Dante, whose “*Pio s’ascese nel foco che gli affina*,” closes Arnaut Daniel’s lines in the “*Ara vos prec*” passage Eliot had invoked in “The Burnt Dancer” and elsewhere. Daniel’s circle of refining fire touches the *Pervigilium Veneris*, again emphasizing the desire for metamorphosis and an authentic poetic voice. Then comes “*Le Prince d’Aquitaine*” with his ruined tower, another Fisher King in need of someone to heal his lands. The reflection, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins,” foregrounds Eliot’s shaping and forming of these collective representations and totems, his control over what he has given, the choreography of his dance that is now an act of charity toward his readers and his culture (CPP 80). For his part, Paul goes on to note, “he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God” (I Cor. 14:2). The mask of *The Waste Land* is Eliot’s gift, one that employs many tongues to fulfill modernity’s need for a ritual that could restore not religion per se, but what he would later call “religious sensibility.”⁵⁵ His Babel does not yet

⁵⁴ The full verse reads: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (I Cor. 13:11).

⁵⁵ In the conclusion to the lecture “The Social Function of Poetry,” Eliot warns, “Much has been said everywhere about the decline of religious belief; not so much notice has been taken of the decline of religious sensibility. The trouble of the modern age is not merely the inability to believe certain things about God and man which our forefathers believed, but the inability to *feel* towards God and man as they did.” Lacking such feeling, the argument goes, we lose access to the meaning of past struggles with God—hence, with culture. Note the recurring ludic modernist trope of juxtaposing thought and feeling (25). Eliot made this distinction in 1945, and as it accords with his later Christian project, I want to emphasize that I see the ritual of *The Waste Land* as a secular or pan-religious solution to the dearth of religious sensibility. Although the symptom in 1922 was the same, the remedy had changed after 1927. Eliot closes the lecture cryptically, with an insular sense of the consequences for poetry. His foreboding is at odds with what I see as the defiantly difficult pluralism of *The Waste Land*: “It is equally possible that the feeling for poetry, and the feelings which are the material of poetry, may disappear everywhere: which might perhaps help to facilitate that unification of the world which some people consider desirable for its own sake” (25).

speak solely to Paul's god. Rather, as the final two lines make clear, Eliot's gift, his sympathy and control, are meant to propitiate social—and personal—demons by invoking a broad range of human thought. Eliot implies that like Hieronymo, he may be “mad againe,” but to embark upon such a project at all one must be mad, irrational, or as Prufrock worries, “a bit obtuse; / At times, indeed, almost ridiculous— / Almost, at times, the Fool” (*CPP* 16). Eliot's madness, superficially apparent in the sheer breadth and idiosyncrasy of his canon—from Buck and Ruby to the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*—suggests his full acknowledgment of its contingency. Like Joyce—and as we are about to see, like Woolf—there is an underlying glee in Eliot's cultural excess.⁵⁶ As the new aestheticism is quick to realize, this is *a* canon, not *the* canon, but what matters for Eliot, for us, and for the continuance of human culture, is that we dance; that we play. There are many other masks to don, but the fact that we are still playing with this one suggests the lasting power of its pluralism and its continued cultural potential. This, modernism's totem.

⁵⁶ *The Waste Land* repudiates the “Paladins” of “Convictions (Curtain Raiser),” who “strive for social happiness / And contact with your fellow-men / In Reason: nothing to excess!” (*IMH* 11).

Chapter Four

The Shadow on the Wall: Virginia Woolf's Platonic Puppetry

I have no philosophy of life he says; my people are puppets, moved hither & thither by fate.

-Virginia Woolf, on Leonard's reaction to
Jacob's Room (*Diary* II:186, 26 July 1922)

Introduction

Virginia Woolf—whose first story under her own imprint meditated upon thought itself; whose criticism descried modern fiction's "point of interest" in "the dark places of psychology"; who feared that she might be "dealing in autobiography and calling it fiction"; whose novels see us wading through the current of "that stream which people call, so oddly, 'consciousness'"; and whose critics bandy buzzwords like impressionism and interiority—never once used the word "puppet" in her fiction.¹ If much of her oeuvre traces the subtle shadings that perception scores on the palimpsest of the mind, perhaps it is unsurprising that the only time Woolf set "puppet" down in any of her major works is at the outset of *Three Guineas* (1938). "How in your opinion," Woolf is asked in the conceit of the epistolary essay, "are we to prevent war?" (5). She frames her response by noting that for an expensively educated man to ask a correlatively uneducated woman such a question, he must believe that war is not a matter of impersonal forces, but of human nature, "the reasons, the emotions, of the ordinary man and woman." She speculates on his reasoning: "You must have argued, men and women, here and now, are able to exert their wills; they are not pawns and puppets dancing on a string held by invisible hands. They can act, and think for themselves. Perhaps even they can influence other people's thoughts and actions" (8). By placing the figure of the puppet beside the Kantian notion of individual autonomy, Woolf

¹ "First story" ("The Mark on the Wall"); "the dark" ("Modern Fiction" *Essays* IV:162); "dealing" (*D* II:7 14 Jan. 1920); "that stream" ("Middlebrow" *E* VI:475).

implies a few questions of her own: To what extent are our actions, thoughts, and arguments, our reasons and emotions alike, not free, but the machinations of “some such reasoning,” the visible effects of an invisible hand moving behind the screen of a puppet theater? Can our capacity for rationality, justly celebrated, cease to be a tool at our command? Can it turn us, impotent and unwilling, into its tools? Are we, in short, autonomous or are we automata?

This chapter approaches the binary between autonomy and automatism in *Between the Acts* (1941). As another ludic modernist with a bifurcated conception of play, Woolf generally refuses to choose between polarities, electing instead to show how purported opposites coincide and overlap, and to explore the philosophical, aesthetic, and social implications that follow from such interplay. I approach her ludic modernism through the figure of the puppet, which inhabits the novel in various guises, from the automaton to the marionette. The chapter proceeds through three stages. First, I address Woolf’s understandings of aesthetic and personal autonomy, with a preliminary foray into Kant that distinguishes her invocation of the puppet. Second, I trace the ludic in Woolf’s later career, beginning with her use of nursery rhyme and playful rhetoric in *Three Guineas*, before examining the traces of that polemic in the flat characters—“caricatures” might be more accurate—that populate *Between the Acts*. In this section of the chapter, I read the novel’s cast as mere types in thrall to the logics over which, we are told, “reason holds sway”: the Empire, the economy, religion, art, and civilization itself as it is glimpsed through social and sexual relations (*BA* 85). Woolf grants that such discourses are socially, epistemologically, and politically necessary, while questioning the ends to which they are put. Her characters are enchanted by the respective logics they represent, playing out so many scripts as if under their own volition. Manipulated behind the mere appearance of autonomy, they are reason’s puppets.

Even as reason's sway can become the flick of the puppeteer's finger, the third section of this chapter examines Woolf's strategy for cutting the strings. The question of individual autonomy inflects aesthetics with the ritual pageant depicted in the novel, whose genre is an inherently didactic form of rational play. According to convention and context, this annual rite should reflect and extoll the glories of English literature, the British Empire, the capitalist social order, and the Anglican Church. Through her avant-garde aesthetics, Miss La Trobe attempts to flip the script and sully those subjects. In consequence, La Trobe's production exemplifies what Woolf called the "loud speaker strain" of art ("Leaning Tower" *E* VI:272; hereafter "LT"). As is clear from her criticism, Woolf thought that such art could only offer propaganda from the other side, as it were, and would not sustain society. This, I argue, is the compromise that La Trobe accepts in her pageant's idiosyncratic blending of rational forms and prerational execution. Woolf distances herself from La Trobe by rewriting Plato's Allegory of the Cave (the foundational reflection on reason's power to establish peace, harmony, and community) as a puppet play. On the heels of *Three Guineas*' polemics, the efficacy of *Between the Acts* lies not in broadcasting engagement, but in playing at autonomy. The novel is acutely aware that it is a product of, and a response to, its contextual moment, even as its ludic aesthetics whisper beneath La Trobe's megaphone. Woolf herself does not speak for her audience, nor dictate what they should think (as a ventriloquist speaks for her dummy) but demonstrates the proximity of reason to emotion, showing how the shadow of blind automatism stalks autonomy, and suggesting that the survival of the individual must lie in the mutual care of the community.²

² In "Notes for Reading at Random," Woolf planned a survey of English literature: "Division of novelists into ventriloquists; soliloquists" (Silver, "Anon" 374). Maria DiBattista finds that Woolf's "attempts to orchestrate [these] two kinds of literary performance not harmonically, but in counterpoint" produce the "peculiar affect of Woolf's narrative voice" (*Imagining* 72-73).

Critics commonly approach *Between the Acts* as an ambivalent meditation on community, as its narrator recognizes about its characters: “Their minds and bodies were too close, yet not close enough. We aren’t free, each one of them felt separately, to feel or think separately . . . We’re too close; but not close enough” (45). Recent work has stressed Woolf’s concerns with nationalism, fascism, and the decline of the Empire.³ The present chapter joins a distinct sub-strain of criticism that has looked to the influence of Greek culture on the novel. The Cambridge classicist Jane Ellen Harrison (whose work Woolf knew well) is a key figure in these readings, as is Woolf’s seminal “On Not Knowing Greek” (1925). That essay establishes a number of themes that inflect my argument: Greece as a holistic culture with a store of common knowledge (*E* IV:39); the influence upon art of local and natural context (*E* IV:39-40); dramatic characters who, although “bound, and restricted to a few definite movements” are still “alive enough, subtle enough, not mere figures, or plaster casts of human beings” (*E* IV:41); a concern for original and copy, reality and appearance, with the Greeks as archetypal humans who “are the originals, Chaucer’s the varieties of the human species” (*E* IV:42). Woolf lauds the technical advance of the dramatic chorus for freeing the authorial voice without constraining the action: “the old men or women who take no active part in the drama, the undifferentiated voices who sing like birds in the pauses of the wind; who can comment, or sum up, or allow the poet to speak himself or supply, by contrast, another side to his conception” (*E* IV:43). She praises Plato’s “dramatic

³ The field began with Brenda Silver’s archival work on Woolf’s late manuscripts. More recently, Jed Esty remarks that Woolf repeatedly “reverses course between collective and recuperative ideas of Englishness and her fundamental wariness (as both artist and woman) about any kind of national or collective participation” (87). For Jessica Berman, the novel resists fascism and the “lure of the corporate state” by endorsing an “oppositional cosmopolitan politics” (156). David Wanczyk finds the novel suspicious “of both rabid individualism and collective consciousness, of both being yoked to history and split from it” (110). Steve Ellis sees Woolf extending the vision of “The Leaning Tower” through the egalitarian freedoms invoked in *Three Guineas*: “The privacy and liberty of the individual response remain sacrosanct as an index of the individual’s wider privacy and liberty” (189). To Maria DiBattista, Woolf found a model of cultural literacy in the Greek chorus, in which shared values “emerge out of along and common experience of living and thinking together.” In *Between the Acts* this voice became a way to reject what Woolf called “the damned egotistical self” (*Imagining* 73; *D* II:14).

genius” for bringing the theater indoors in the *Symposium*, while *Between the Acts* will cross the experience of reading an English novel in a sitting room with the communal experience of outdoor drama—Hellenizing the island, as Buck Mulligan might put it (Joyce, *Ulysses* 1.159). Woolf views classical Greek culture through a lens akin to what Spariosu calls the “agonistic play of chance-necessity” and the prerational immediacy of experience (*DR* 16):

With the sound of the sea in their ears, vines, meadows, rivulets about them, they are even more aware than we are of a ruthless fate. There is a sadness at the back of life which they do not attempt to mitigate. Entirely aware of their own standing in the shadow, and yet alive to every tremor and gleam of existence, there they endure, and it is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age. (Woolf, *E* IV:51)

Under the guise of the Greek-Christian dichotomy, Woolf finds a bifurcated play mentality.

Woolf studied Greek from age fifteen, first with George Warr at King’s College, then privately with Clara Pater, and finally with Janet Case (Lee 141-43).⁴ From Harrison’s *Themis* (1912), Woolf would have known of the distinction between performative *methexis* and representational imitation; what Spariosu calls prerational mimesis-play and the rational mimesis-imitation that supplanted it as “literature” (125).⁵ Earlier critics have shown the range of pre-patriarchal cultural allusions that Harrison made available to Woolf.⁶ These accounts valuably demonstrate the allusive range of Woolf’s tightly compressed language, in which cultural associations echo in multiple directions. As Shattuck writes, “The layers of reference are

⁴ Her reading encompassed the extant drama, Homer’s *Odyssey* (at least), and Plato’s *Euthyphro*, *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, *Protagoras*, and *Symposium*. Rowena Fowler quotes Woolf’s confident assessment in a notebook that Benjamin Jowett’s Plato is “not happily rendered” (224). Emily Dalgarno notes “there are ample indications in her work that she had read *The Republic*”; indications that this chapter will augment (43).

⁵ See my Eliot chapter for *methexis* and mimesis. Harrison was also influenced by Lévy-Bruhl’s “law of participation” and the “collective representations” of primitive communities (although she works more directly from Durkheim on the latter). See also Huizinga (15).

⁶ Evelyn Haller and Sandra D. Shattuck track Egyptian myths and May-day festivals, respectively, in *Between the Acts*. Patricia Maika posits distinct symbolic roles for the characters (e.g. Isa as Isis) and argues that Woolf recreated the theater at the Acropolis in Athens, based on her own memory and on Harrison’s schematic (19; 9-10).

many but the layer of ritual should not be ignored” (284). My own approach is similar, if more playful, reading the cast and setting symbolically and toying further with Woolf’s allusions.

More recent critics have placed varying degrees of emphasis on prerational *methexis* (to impose my ludic terminology) as a means of fashioning community, often in ways that recall my description of T. S. Eliot’s desire to transcend the limitations of the atomized individual through appeals to the communal. Christine Froula cites a well-known diary entry in which Woolf describes the novel’s drive toward a communal voice: “‘I’ rejected: ‘We’ substituted [. . .] we all life, all art, all waifs & strays—a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole” (*D V*:135 26 Apr. 1938). Froula argues that “Woolf envisions not ‘thick little egos’ (in Clive Bell’s phrase) but a loose, inclusive, ‘we’ composed of ‘all life, all art, all waifs & strays’ in a modern English pageant *re-formed* in the image of the outsider’s patriotism” (290; my emphasis). In my view, the pageant is not “re-formed” from its generic prescriptions enough to transcend them. Woolf and her pageanteer aim for similar ends, but even if *La Trobe* is a self-portrait, I read a wider disparity of aesthetic means between them than is generally recognized. For most critics, drama and the theater are the primary focal points for reading *Between the Acts* through a Greek lens. My contribution to this body of criticism will be to reveal the ludic substrate of these Greek foundations, evidenced in unacknowledged echoes of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.⁷ Like many, I find the novel skeptical of extremes, both of solipsistic individualism and of blind collectivism. Finally, the figure of the “puppet” and the keyword “puppetry” must be understood broadly, as Woolf pulls together under these headings disparate conceptions of how individuals and societies can be manipulated, bound, captivated, imprisoned, and compelled. Were Woolf’s references to

⁷ There are precedents for reading Woolf through Plato, irrespective of *Between the Acts*. Following Dalgarno, Lorraine Sim reads Woolf’s “moments of being”—to which I will return—as glimpses of an ordered pattern underlying experiential reality, like intelligible Platonic Forms undergirding the sensible world (“Tracing”). *To the Lighthouse* has been read as a retelling of both the *Symposium* (Wyatt) and the Allegory of the Cave (Hoffmann).

so many types of puppetry more manic, her allusions might be seen as so much Joycean *jeu d'esprit*. But unlike the swirling eddies and jocosurous streams of *Finnegans Wake*, the language of *Between the Acts* works through quieter—but quite ludic—methods of accretion and compression, sifting cultural currents to give us many-layered pearls.

Disinterested Influence

For Woolf, personal and aesthetic autonomy are inextricable: art can only arise from a position of disinterested freedom. She never spoke of reading Kant, but she was familiar with his ideas, not least through the influence of G. E. Moore.⁸ Her view of aesthetic autonomy is clear as early as “Character in Fiction” (1924) and its kin, where she posits that a novel must express “things in themselves,” be “complete” and “self-contained,” and leave one “with no desire to do anything, except indeed to read the book again, and to understand it better” (*E* IV:427). Her accusation that the Edwardian materialists put agenda before art is later leveled against Charlotte Brontë, whose anger stalled the expression of her genius (*A Room* 69-70). In an argument from the 1930s that will frame my reading of La Trobe, Woolf chided the didacticism and “loud speaker strain” of those whom she called “leaning tower” poets (“LT” *E* VI:272). Case by case, art is compelled and constrained by didactic or otherwise external ends, violating Kant’s broad definition of aesthetic autonomy: “In a product of art one must be aware that it is art, and not nature; yet the purposiveness in its form must still *seem to be* as free from all constraint by arbitrary rules *as if* it were a mere product of nature” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 183;

⁸ Although Sim concurs, writing “there is no evidence that she read Kant,” I note traces of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* below (*Patterns* 124). Woolf read Moore’s *Principia Ethica* throughout August 1908 (*L* I:340-64, *passim*). Tom Regan calls Moore *Bloomsbury’s Prophet*. Paul Levy cites the Cambridge Apostles’ “neo-Kantian argot,” before claiming that Leonard Woolf “maintained strongly that Moore was the only philosopher who had any influence upon his wife’s work—meaning specifically to exclude Bergson—and thought that Moore was the only modern philosophy Virginia Woolf ever read” (66; 275). Levy cites an “Interview” for Leonard’s strong claim, without any corroborating information. See also S. P. Rosenbaum, Andrew McNeillie, and Jesse Wolfe.

my emphases). Whether an artist turns propagandist by choice or by compulsion, the distinction turns on the difference between writing “as an art” and writing as a “method of self-expression,” to borrow terms from *A Room* (79-80). The distinction may seem academic—How many Angels in the House can dance on the head of a pin?—but it is central to Woolf’s understanding of art and to her ludic modernism. As her decision to split the novel-essay *The Pargiters* into *Three Guineas* and *The Years* suggests, engagement cannot precede autonomy, but autonomy does not preclude engagement.

Like its aesthetic counterpart, Kant’s conception of personal autonomy is rational *as-if* play. And like the Third Critique, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* rests on *a priori* principles of pure reason.⁹ “Disinterestedness” in both realms means freedom in the sense of having no determined cause.¹⁰ Kant writes, “freedom is only an *idea* of reason, the objective reality of which is in itself doubtful” (*Groundwork* 4:455 [64-65]). The autonomy of the will is a matter of propositional logic, what Hans Vaihinger would call a scientific fiction.¹¹ It is this

⁹ Woolf’s quotation of Louis MacNeice’s *Autumn Journal* in “The Leaning Tower” suggests that she knew the *Groundwork*. MacNeice refers to art’s “fancy price,” after Kant’s distinction between things that can be ends in themselves—which have “dignity” and an “inner worth”—and things that cannot, which have either a “fancy” or “market” price (“LT” *E* VI:270; *Groundwork* 4:434-35 [46]). Art has a fancy price. As Kant writes, “that which, even without presupposing a need, conforms with a certain taste, i.e. a delight in the mere purposeless play of the powers of our mind, has a *fancy price*” (4:435 [46], emphasis in original). Woolf is skeptical of MacNeice and company for “profiting by a society which they abuse” and decries not their goal of creating “a society in which every one is equal and every one is free,” but the fact that it constrains their art: “They must teach; they must preach. Everything is a duty—even love” (*E* VI:271-72). By invoking “duty,” Woolf turns MacNeice’s use of “fancy price” into the basis of her critique. Kant’s categorical imperative (acting in such a way that “*the will could through its maxim consider itself as at the same time universally legislating*”) must be followed out of duty and its inner worth. Morality proceeds without “any other practical motivating ground or future advantage” (4:435 [46]). The problem with the “loudspeaker strain” is that it endows an idiosyncratic conception of morality with “dignity,” elevating it above its “fancy price” to the status of a “duty.” That is, trying to make an interested end into a disinterested one.

¹⁰ On the autonomy of the will, Kant writes: “Reason must view herself as the authoress of her principles, independently of alien influences, and must consequently, as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, by herself be viewed as free; i.e. its will can be a will of its own only under the idea of freedom, and must thus for practical purposes be ascribed to all rational beings” (*Groundwork* 4:448 [58]).

¹¹ Kant uses an *as-if* formulation to close the third section of the *Groundwork*, writing that we can only fully realize his categorical imperative if we “conduct ourselves according to maxims of freedom as if they were laws of nature [*als ob sie Gesetze der Natur wären*]” (4:463 [71]).

sense that is assumed at the outset of *Three Guineas*, again: “men and women, here and now, are able to exert their wills; they are not pawns and puppets dancing on a string held by invisible hands. They can act, and think for themselves” (8). To be sure, Woolf never forgets the myriad material and social barriers that constrain an individual’s experience: as *A Room* has it, “One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well” (18). The basic human potential to act and think for oneself, however, captures Woolf’s view of personal autonomy, which this chapter sets against automatism or puppetry.

Kant’s eighteenth-century appeals to autonomy were directed against the influence of Church and State. Woolf modernizes the concept for a contemporary threat in “Professions for Women,” where she boasts of killing off that “phantom” of the patriarchal order, the “Angel in the House.” She pleads self-defense against intellectual dishonesty, arguing that the Angel “made as if to guide my pen.” Whenever Woolf reviewed a novel by a man, the Angel would order her: “Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own” (*E* VI:480-81). Of course, the conceit of *A Room* is that disinterested art depends upon the artist collecting interest, and Woolf long credited her inheritance for allowing her to write freely. *Three Guineas* articulates such freedom in economic, social, and gendered terms, celebrating the fact that the “educated man’s daughter” is now “in possession of an influence that is disinterested” (21). Financial freedom, and eventually a printing press, exempted Woolf from the old influences of the Victorian mother: sympathy, charm, self-effacement, and domestic economy, traits which reflect an individual “so constituted

that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others” (480).¹²

As an individual, the Angel in the House is beholden to the patriarchal domestic logic structuring her society. Despite the fact that, within propositional logic, she is an autonomous subject, insofar as she has internalized and follows a rational discourse that constrains her freedom, she prefigures the “puppet” of this chapter. Woolf was able to mitigate the Angel’s influence even before she herself could fully claim what Kant elsewhere calls “civil independence” with the rights to vote and to own property.¹³ Even so, Woolf identifies the “extreme conventionality of the other sex” as the source of a second form of intellectual dishonesty in her career, one that locks her up with the Angel (“Professions” *E* VI:483).

Referring to herself in the third-person, Woolf glimpses a flash of “unconscious” truth:

she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her *reason told her*, would be shocked. The consciousness of—what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist’s state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. (*E* VI:483, my emphasis)

Woolf’s self-censorship over the body is neither irrational, nor unconscious. It is enforced by conscious reason, even as it underscores Woolf’s theoretical lack of autonomy: in Kant’s terms, Woolf’s reason is not “authoress of her principles” (*Groundwork* 4:448 [58]). Rational social convention wins this *agon*. Echoing Gertrude Stein, Woolf argues that patriarchal rationality denies the experience of the body and refuses the epistemological validity of unmediated

¹² On the power of Hogarth Press, Woolf wrote: “To think of being battened down in the hold of those University dons fairly makes my blood run cold. Yet I’m the only woman in England free to write what I like” (*D* III:43, 22 Sept. 1925). It likewise freed her from her half-brother Gerald Duckworth, who molested her as a child and later published *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*.

¹³ Kant distinguishes “active” and “independent” citizens (male property owners) from “passive” and “dependent” citizens (everyone else) in *Metaphysics of Morals*, asserting that what we might call inequalities of circumstance in no way constrain autonomy (6:314ff.). The discussion is, again, purely speculative.

experience. “Professions” reveals the extent to which she had learned the “correctly disciplined pleasures” of the Victorian regime of *paideia* (Plato, *Laws* II.653e). Here the social and material constraints of experience counter the ethereal realm of propositional logic: How can an artist or her art be autonomous if neither can speak the truth about passion? In the least, one must have a robust understanding of the *as-if* nature of autonomy to grant it to either the Angel or to Woolf. And thus, where reason occludes both the emotions and the body, perhaps a serious form of prerational play might begin to lead to freedom from the reasoned conventions of the other sex.¹⁴

One World, One Life, Many Games

To the extent that the defining feature of ludic modernism is the strategic commingling of rational and prerational play, many of the readings I have presented in this dissertation argue against rigid binary distinctions. Woolf follows suit throughout her work. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsay represents civilization: the patriarchal, rational, public realm. Mrs. Ramsay represents the matriarchal, emotional, domestic realm, upholding the values not of civilization per se, but civility. Woolf, however, presents the Ramsay’s relationship as linked and mutually complementary.¹⁵ Stein exploited a similar structural situation in “Melanctha,” confronting Jeff’s

¹⁴ This chapter might also have looked to contemporary ethics of care to modify what Martha Nussbaum calls the “anti-compassion tradition” of Kantian rationalism. Nussbaum echoes Spariosu’s framing of prerational epistemologies in a book subtitled “*The Intelligence of the Emotions*.” She argues that normative rational theory must admit ostensibly prerational experience: “an account of human reasoning based only upon abstract texts such as are conventional in moral philosophy is likely to prove too simple to offer us the type of self-understanding we need” (3). See Carol Gilligan for the ethics of care. Jean Hampton reads the Angel as an example of “care” taken to a negative extreme (6-7). David A. J. Richards finds the Angel a precursor to 1960s liberation movements (83-84). Selma Sevenhuijsen credits *Three Guineas* for originating the metaphor of the “stranger within” (151, 13n.). For literary critics engaging moral and ethical philosophy, see Jessica Berman, Kirsty Martin, Lee Oser, and Sim.

¹⁵ Mrs. Ramsay is in part modeled on Harrison’s description of Themis, the Greek complex of goddess of the banquet, principle of civility, and collective consciousness. See Harrison (*Themis* 480ff.), Jean Mills (78-80), and Martha C. Carpentier.

“reason” with Melanctha’s “emotion,” although Woolf renders those categories more fluidly.¹⁶

With wry paradox, she describes Sir William Bradshaw in *Mrs. Dalloway* as “the priest of science” (94). Although his rationalism is as regular and mechanical as his pocket watch, he fails to save Septimus Smith precisely because he refuses to admit any emotional counterpoint to his religion of mathematical proportion and timely appointments (94).

Orlando flaunts the fluidity of gender and the interpenetration of the categories “male” and “female,” yet for as much fun as Woolf has with Orlando’s play, she never loses sight of its seriousness. The performativity of gender is beholden to social context, and can thus both free and oppress. Orlando becomes “poisoned through and through” by the Victorian invention of marriage, “dragged down by the weight of the crinoline which she had submissively adopted” (178). To cure the affliction spreading from the second finger on her left hand, she dons a gold band, submitting to the only profession open to her: marriage. In *The Waves*, the young Bernard can still regard gendered traits as innate, repeating the masculine-is-logical, feminine-is-emotional typology, imagining his own future biographer writing, “joined to the sensibility of a woman . . . Bernard possessed the logical sobriety of a man” (76). But for some dry satire on his undergraduate pomposity, Woolf leaves his thinking unchallenged until the novel closes by redefining individuality: “I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am—Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis: or how to distinguish my life from theirs” (276). Foreshadowing *Between the Acts*, personal identity is contextually conditioned and bound up in the collective, recalling the interplay of individual and community under Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s “prelogical” mentality, as recounted in my chapter on T. S. Eliot.

¹⁶ Hence James Naremore could open *The World Without a Self* by finding Woolf representative of what Gaston Bachelard called “the material imagination of water” (2).

In short, by the final phase of her career, Woolf had long been following one of the fundamental strategies of ludic modernism, exposing what Spariosu would recognize as various manifestations of the *agon* between rational and prerational play. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf eschews the *agon* metaphor, with its implication of masculine competition, in favor of circular metaphors, much as Joyce circles the square of Christian and classical traditions.¹⁷ Woolf toys with rational linear argument, making her polemic circuitous on several fronts, not least where it demonstrates how rational and prerational play mentalities overlap. She consistently finds that what is called “rational” is contingent, dependent upon certain self-serving delineations of an “irrational” counterpart. The title, for instance, alludes to the circular guinea coin, representing the marriage of British capitalism and imperial expansion (in both its materially rapacious and its evangelizing guises). The guinea was first minted from gold extracted from Angola, Guinea, and Benin, after Charles II’s purchase of stock in the slave-trading company, Royal Adventurers into Africa (Woolf, *TG* 223n). In Woolf’s symbolism, the fundamental facts of slavery and imperialism circle back to confront the triumph of capitalism and the hypocritically complacent upper classes. Any rationale supporting their inherent injustices must necessarily forget or obscure this history, which is unearthed here as the polemicist’s buried treasure.

Three Guineas argues against a patriarchal worldview that would dismiss the slave-poured foundations of British wealth as irrelevant to its present moment—as irrational considerations, in short. Woolf diagnoses Europe’s headlong rush into war by looking to correlative “irrationalities.” She asks after the ends toward which the educational system, professions, and church are headed: “Where is it leading us, the procession of educated men?”

¹⁷ Harrison is influential here as well. In writing of pre-Homeric, “primitive” societies, she prefigures *Three Guineas*’ critique of patriarchy: “this primitive form of society is *matrilinear* not *matriarchal*. Woman is the social centre not the dominant force. So long as force is supreme, physical force of the individual, society is impossible, because society is by cooperation, by mutual concession, not by antagonism” (*Themis* 494; emphasis in original).

(77). She argues that education is tantamount to epistemology. Centuries of sex-segregated education have resulted in men and women seeing the world differently.¹⁸ Men's education merely justifies force, greed, and power.¹⁹ The possession of capital and money produces a similarly distorting lens. Even though professions from law to medicine to civil service were newly open to women, joining them would impose a heavy ransom: "If you succeed in those professions the words 'For God and the Empire' will very likely be written, like the address on a dog-collar, round your neck" (85). The Church of England enforces the separation of the domestic and public spheres upon which patriarchal and totalitarian societies—which here amount to the same thing—rest.²⁰ The processions of educated men and the logics that support them lead only to war, the domination of women, and the exploitation of the poor. Against such "insiders," to include her correspondent and his society, Woolf eventually proposes that a "Society of Outsiders" might passively and actively resist the status quo to promote "freedom, equality, peace . . . by the means that a different sex, a different tradition, a different education and the different values which result from those differences have placed within our reach" (134).

Crucially for my account, Woolf consistently frames those patriarchal, rational discourses as child's play. The differences in sex, education, and values upon which the Society of

¹⁸ This challenges Kant's understanding of phenomenal sensibility and noumenal understanding. He distinguishes the "*world of sense* from the *world of understanding*, the first of which can be very dissimilar according to the dissimilar sensibility of many kinds of observers of the world, whereas the second, which is its foundation, always remains the same" (*Groundwork* 4:451 [60], italics in original). For Woolf, our dissimilar sensibilities cause us to both experience the world differently and know it differently as well.

¹⁹ A series of rhetorical questions summarizes her view of Oxbridge education: "Do they [facts] not prove that education, the finest education in the world, does not teach people to hate force, but to use it? Do they not prove that education, far from teaching the educated generosity and magnanimity, makes them on the contrary so anxious to keep their possessions . . . that they will use not force but much subtler methods than force when they are asked to share them? And are not force and possessiveness very closely connected with war? Of what use then is a university education in influencing people to prevent war?" (38).

²⁰ "The emphasis which both priests and dictators place upon the necessity for two worlds is enough to prove that it is essential to their domination" (214).

Outsiders depends will come to ground Woolf's calls for personal and aesthetic autonomy. In setting out her conditions for changing the professions, the second letter of *Three Guineas* figures the compulsions of capitalism as a game:

If we encourage the daughters to enter the professions without making any conditions as to the way in which the professions are to be practised shall we not be doing our best to stereotype the old tune which human nature, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is not grinding out with such disastrous unanimity? "Here we go round the mulberry tree, the mulberry tree, the mulberry tree. Give it all to me, give all to me, all to me. Three hundred millions spent upon war." (71-72)

The game enchants the professionals whom she excoriates, blinding and binding them into an inexorable logic of acquisition.²¹ The nursery-rhyme refrain reappears several times. The mulberry tree "of property" overshadows both the physical grounds of the colleges and intellectual property, understood as the right to partake of a certain discourse. As the Oxbridge Beadle protects his turf, so too are the professions policed (*A Room* 6; *TG* 81). Woolf presents a stark choice between the private world of Victorian patriarchy and the public potential of the professions: "One shuts us up like slaves in a harem; the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. It is a choice of evils. Each is bad. Had we not better plunge off the bridge into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and so end it?" (90). The rhetoric is shocking to read in retrospect against Woolf's biography, but one solution turns on intellectual liberty and cultural freedom.²² Writers have an active, and readers a passive, obligation

not to subscribe to papers that encourage intellectual slavery; not to attend lectures that prostitute culture; for we are agreed that to write at the command of another what you do

²¹ Here, as elsewhere in *Three Guineas*, Woolf does not fully elide the working classes. See Marcus's Introduction for the nursery rhyme's resurrection of the forgotten labor of silk workers (silkworms were fed on mulberries) and other allusions (Woolf, *TG* xlvii).

²² Her definitions: "let us define culture for our purposes as the disinterested pursuit of reading and writing the English language. And intellectual liberty may be defined for our purpose as the right to say or write what you think in your own words, and in your own way" (109).

not want to write is to be enslaved, and to mix culture with personal charm or advertisement is to prostitute culture. By these active and passive measures you would do all in your power to break the ring, the vicious circle, the dance round and round the mulberry tree, the poison tree of intellectual harlotry. The ring once broken, the captives would be freed. (117)

The personal and aesthetic autonomy that traverses Woolf's oeuvre answers the "disastrous unanimity" enforced in professional life (72).²³ At stake is our collective enchantment to the patriarchal discourses around which we play like children: some naïvely, others with the visceral and reactionary malice of a bully. Breaking the spell would change the rules of the game.

Through the ludic nursery rhyme, Woolf defines the "worm" of the Dictator, which, "if it spreads, may poison both sexes equally" (65). The antidote to its poison conflates rational and prerational play. After granting her third guinea, Woolf hesitates at her correspondent's invitation to join his pacifist society:

What reason or emotion can make us hesitate to become members of a society whose aims we approve, to whose funds we have contributed? It may be neither reason nor emotion, but something more profound and fundamental than either. It may be difference. Different we are, as facts have proved, in both sex and education. And it is from that difference, as we have already said, that our help can come. (123)

Differences in sex and education have given Woolf a clearer perspective on the autonomy of individual difference, which offers an alternative epistemology to either reason or emotion.

Woolf continues momentarily, "those reasons and emotions have their origin deep in the darkness of ancestral memory; they have grown together in some confusion; it is very difficult to untwist them in the light" (123). She thus evokes the *agon* between play mentalities. As we will see in *Between the Acts*, the artist's role is not to elevate either reason or emotion at the other's expense, but to trace their embrace, bringing it to light from the dim recesses of cultural memory.

²³ Woolf earlier extended the logic of *A Room* to insist that disinterested intellectual freedom is predicated upon financial independence and stability (21). While here she has in mind such freedom for the "educated man's daughter," she later acknowledges that, because "those who are economically dependent have strong reasons for fear," class divisions consist of an active denial of intellectual liberty to those who are denied capital (142).

Woolf's appeal to individual difference becomes a rejection of "the conglomeration of people into societies" for releasing "what is most selfish and violent, least rational and humane in the individuals themselves" (124-25). She redoubles the ludic rhetoric, claiming that all societies are conspiracies that are, paradoxically, antithetical to civility:

Inevitably we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially; where, daubed red and gold, decorated like a savage with feathers he goes through mystic rites and enjoys the dubious pleasures of power and dominion while we, "his" women, are locked in the private house without share in the many societies of which his society is composed. (125)

Rather than "merge our identity in yours" and "score still deeper the old worn ruts in which society, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is grinding out with intolerable unanimity 'Three hundred millions spent upon arms,'" Woolf proposes the Society of Outsiders (125). The image of a savage drawing up categorical cages arbitrarily—not unlike a philosopher—bleeds into the Dictator "making distinctions not merely between the sexes, but between the races" (122). Despite the implicit reification of a reductive civilized/savage binary, by arguing that such exclusive demarcations are both mystical and of dubious intent, Woolf foreshadows her later argument that patriarchal reason is actually a form of emotion; which, moreover, coerces support from the science that purports to mark European society's triumph over the primitive. Summarizing the justification for excluding women from societies ranging from Oxbridge, to Whitehall, to Westminster Abbey, she writes, "Nature was called in; Nature it was claimed who is not only omniscient but unchanging, had made the brain of woman of the wrong shape or size. . . . Science, it would seem is not sexless; she is a man, a father, and infected too. Science, thus infected, produced measurements to order" (165). The desperate need to separate the private

brother from the monstrous male, as if saving Dr. Jekyll from the logic that leads to Mr. Hyde, is an ethical imperative and a central trope of *Between the Acts*.²⁴

If the scientist circling around the mulberry tree of reason is but a painted savage, then his categories can only support the insiders' barbaric order. The final aspect of the ludic in *Three Guineas* comes with Woolf's rejection of insider nationalism, following her famous declaration, "as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (129). What sounds misanthropic is actually, in light of her play, a call for a new nationalism, defined not according to the rational-patriarchal patriotism of pageants and processions, but according the prerational immediacy of experience that escapes such cages:

And if, when reason has said its say, still some obstinate emotion remains, some love of England dropped into a child's ears by the cawing of the rooks in an elm tree, by the splash of the waves on a beach, or by English voices murmuring nursery rhymes, this drop of pure, if irrational, emotion she will make to serve her to give to England first what she desires of peace and freedom for the whole world. (129)

Woolf appeals to an epistemology of experience and place that is not based in "rationality," but in an obstinate emotion no less valid as a means of knowing the world. In a footnote, Woolf upholds the "pleasure of a country walk" against the "pleasure of dominance . . . in the educated class, closely allied with the pleasures of wealth, social and professional prestige" (214). Such knowledge is aesthetic (OED: "of or relating to sense perception") and returns in outsider beauty:

the outsiders will dispense with pageantry not from any puritanical dislike of beauty. On the contrary, it will be one of their aims to increase private beauty; the beauty of spring, summer, autumn; the beauty of flowers, silks, clothes; the beauty which brims not only every field and wood but every barrow in Oxford Street; the scattered beauty which needs only to be combined by artists in order to become visible to all. But they will dispense with the dictated, regimented, official pageantry, in which only one sex takes an active part—those ceremonies, for example, which depend upon the deaths of kings, or their coronations to inspire them. (134)

²⁴ Woolfian individual autonomy approaches Badiouan infinite difference, as in the framing of my Stein chapter. Stein and Woolf share a sense of how rationally-produced categories affect the lived experience of the people penned in and separated by such abstractions.

Woolf juxtaposes outsider aesthetics with official pageantry throughout *Between the Acts*. I will continually refer to outsider aesthetics as a manifestation of prerational play, especially with regard to the distinction between “nature” as such and “the view” of the countryside.²⁵

In sum, *Three Guineas* indicts the rational logics of patriarchal society for enchanting, blinding, and binding individuals to the mere trappings of reason and autonomy. There is an implicit pragmatism to how Woolf understands the human power of reason: it is a tool that we use. In the terms of the new aestheticism, *Three Guineas* argues that reason has ceased to be “self-legislating and future-oriented,” perpetuating rather than “systematically discarding the beliefs and mystifications” of the past (Joughin and Malpas 9). There is a great extent to which Woolf’s critique of “insiders” parallels Eliot’s attempts to escape the prison of bourgeois “collective representations”—and, of course, European fascism depended upon a modern version of what Lévy-Bruhl calls the socialization of emotion (*HNT* 92). For Woolf, our salvation may lie in a form of irrationality different from such enchantment, one that would question the ends of our logics and thus “break the ring, the vicious circle” (117). The ring is not just the ludic dance around the mulberry tree, but also Orlando’s wedding ring, a golden guinea coin, the “dog-collar of the professions,” the egg of the Dictator, a gramophone record under a skipping needle, the “magic circle” of primitive ritual, society letters circulating the West End with their requests for guineas and signatures, and Woolf’s circling rhetoric itself. Tracing, naming, and then breaking the ring is a means to reorient a culture toward the future.

²⁵ Woolf rightly finds aspects of *prerational* epistemology in Plato. Central to the discovery of truth in the *Symposium* is the “laughter and movement; people getting up and going out; the hour changing; tempers being lost; jokes cracked; the dawn rising. Truth, it seems, is various; Truth is to be pursued with all our faculties. Are we to rule out the amusements, the tendernesses, the frivolities of friendship because we love truth? Will truth be quicker found because we stop our ears to music and drink no wine, and sleep instead of talking through the long winter’s night?” She concludes, “we are made to seek truth with every part of us” (“On Not” *E* IV:46-47).

“There to lose what binds us here”

Where *Three Guineas* imagined so many people enchanted in their dances around the mulberry trees of empire and nation, the economy and professions, organized religion, and culture, *Between the Acts* introduces the similarly-ludic metaphor of the puppet, manifest in direct description as well as in allusive symbolism. This section of the chapter focuses on the dogmatic believer Lucy, the frustrated poet Isa, and the stockbroker Giles as puppets, bound to and pulled around their respective mulberry trees of religion, art, and the economy. I discuss their puppet- and marionette-like qualities in terms borrowed from Plato’s *Laws*, letting these three stand as indicative of how others (like the Imperialist Bart and the Aesthete Dodge) are also pulled about, eschewing extended treatment of them for reasons of space.

The pageant at the center of *Between the Acts* exemplifies rational play. Jed Esty has traced the development of the English pageant from its revival in 1905 by Louis Napoleon Parker through its appeal to artists of the 1930s.²⁶ He reads the interwar pageant-play as a particularly English response to the public spectacles of Mussolini and Hitler. The genre promised to be a “vessel of inherited folk consciousness” that could “produce a pastoral, apolitical, and doughtily cohesive version of national identity” (55). Esty continues:

Moreover, it was perfectly suited to the tenets of English civic nationalism, likely to promote and express just enough collective spirit to bind citizens together but not to trip over into the frightening power of fascist mob fever. At a time when the masses began to assert themselves on both the literary and political stages of Europe, the English pageant-play was refitted to perform insular and interclass harmony. (55)

²⁶ He also reads John Cowper Powys’s *A Glastonbury Romance*, E. M. Forster’s *Abinger Pageant* and *England’s Pleasant Land*, and Eliot’s *The Rock*. Froula notes that Woolf missed Forster’s pageants—“both far less advanced than La Trobe’s”—but that she “did attend (possibly with Eliot) Stephen Spender’s *Trial of a Judge*: ‘A moving play: genuine; simple; sincere; . . . the end, where they murmur Peace freedom an artist’s, not an egoist’s end’” (299; 408-09, 33n.; citing *D* 5:131, 22 March 1938). Fowler documents Woolf’s reactions to Eliot’s plays (230-31).

The pageant, in other words, offered a mouthpiece for nationalist propaganda directly on the Platonic model of censorship I have laid out elsewhere.

To recapitulate, however, aesthetics and education are linked in the *Republic*, where Socrates forbids “*any* stories about gods warring, fighting, or plotting against one another, for they aren’t true” (*Republic* III.378c; emphasis in original). Poetry must obey the dictum that “a god isn’t the cause of all things but only of good ones” (*Republic* II.380c).²⁷ The *Laws* underscores the rationality of Socratic censorship in terms that prefigure Woolf’s use of the puppet. Plato’s Athenian character argues that because “man . . . has been created as a toy [*paignion*] for God,” he should thus “spend his whole life at ‘play’—sacrificing, singing, dancing—so that he can win the favor of the gods” (*Laws* VII.803c-e).²⁸ The pageant exemplifies this sort of “play” (*paidia*). Like the play of education (*paideia*), it is a community-building tool that should likewise produce in its audience “a keen desire to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled as justice demands” (*Laws* I.644a). Conceding the tinge of logical absurdity, here, pleasing the gods is eminently rational. Pitched by reason as a means for creating communal solidarity, promoting virtue, justice, and peace, rational play works in the world by enforcing “correctly disciplined pleasures”—keeping calm and carrying on, as it were (*Laws* II.653e). The Athenian character uses a ludic metaphor to describe reason’s control of desire, asking us to imagine that “each of us living beings is a puppet [*paignion*] of the gods” (*Laws* I.644d). Pain and pleasure are our “witless and mutually antagonistic advisers.” The expectation of the former guides us as “fear,” versus the “confidence” we have in anticipation of

²⁷ Woolf’s decision to reproduce only comedies—and not tragedy—in La Trobe’s pageant has been explained in many ways, but it can also be understood as a sardonic response to this dictum.

²⁸ Trevor J. Saunders translates *paignion* as “toy” in this passage, and “puppet” in the quotations from book one, below. A. E. Taylor does the same. R. G. Bury’s translation in the Loeb edition gives the literal “plaything” here, and “puppet” in the book one passages.

pleasure. We adjudicate between them through what is called “calculation” at the individual level and “law” when the metaphor is extended to the state (*Laws* I.644c-d). He continues, “we have these emotions in us, which act like cords or strings and tug us about . . . back and forth we go across the boundary line where vice and virtue meet,” with only the “golden cord” of calculation to guide us: “this is the one we have to hang on to, come what may; the pull of the other cords we must resist” (*Laws* I.644e-645a). To Plato, individuals are puppets, pulled by the threads of fear of pain, confidence for pleasure, and a golden cord allowing the calculation between the two. Attention to properly prescribed rituals and art strengthens one’s grip on that golden cord.²⁹

By culminating in avant-gardist experimentation, La Trobe’s pageant will stretch the Socratic prescriptions past breaking. Etty Springett’s reaction to the Victorian act captures the tension between the facts of experience and their propagandistic representation, betraying her preference for an aesthetics of Socratic clarity: “Yet, children did draw trucks in the mines; there was the basement; yet Papa read Walter Scott aloud after dinner; and divorced ladies were not received at Court. How difficult to come to any conclusion! . . . She liked to leave a theatre knowing exactly what was meant. Of course this was only a village play” (112).³⁰ The pageant reveals the targets of Woolf’s scorn in *Three Guineas* to be manifestations of rational play, even as Woolf continues the polemic’s ludic critique. The prologue to the Restoration comedy, “*Where there’s a Will there’s a Way*,” is representative (*BA* 87). After an interval for tea, the gramophone recalls the audience, in part through the nursery rhyme “Sing a Song of Sixpence.” They assemble in a parodic procession of educated men: “Down the paths, across the lawns they

²⁹ The Platonic pulls of pleasure and pain recall another strain in Woolf criticism, based in her reading of Freud in the late 1930s and which focuses on *Eros* and *Thanatos*. See Ellis, most recently, for the ambivalent, love-hate relationship between the individual and the community.

³⁰ Later, within the dispersing audience’s chatter: “if we’re left asking questions, isn’t it a failure, as a play . . . I like to feel sure if I go to the theatre, that I’ve grasped the meaning (135).

were streaming again. There was Mrs. Manresa, with Giles at her side, heading the procession. . . . Giles would keep his orbit so long as she weighted him to the earth” (82).³¹

While Giles orbits the mulberry tree of Mrs. Manresa’s “goddess-like” sexuality, the narrator runs through the anonymous thoughts of the crowd, which reflect on the pageant itself as indicative of a potential “inner harmony.” The play becomes a communal reprieve from the “hard mallet blows” and depravations of modern life:

“The office” (some were thinking) “compels disparity. Scattered, shattered, hither thither summoned by the bell. ‘Ping-ping-ping’ that’s the phone. ‘Forward!’ ‘Serving!’—that’s the shop.” So we answer to the infernal, agelong and eternal order issued from on high. And obey. “Working, serving, pushing, striving, earning wages—to be spent—here? Oh dear no. Now? No, by and by. When ears are deaf and the heart is dry.” (82)

In a novelistic rendition of a Greek chorus, Woolf critiques the professions through characters’ combined consciousness. The narration retains the audience’s “we” within what is usually a solipsistic technique: this stream of consciousness has many currents. Professional life shatters the community that the pageant fitfully recreates. Individual atomization does not lead to autonomy, however, but obeisance to the mulberry trees of property and acquisition unto death. The compulsions of capitalism are understood as the commands of a deity. The strictures of what is in fact a historically contingent, highly compromised, and—in light of the narrow and inequitable ends to which it is put—fundamentally insufficient system of social and economic organization are taken as an “agelong and eternal order.” Although the choral voice can recognize this state as “infernal,” it is powerless in the face of its enchantment.

As the audience settles into the nursery rhyme’s tune, an enrobed Mabel Hopkins takes the stage, holding a scepter and an orb with “the majesty of a statue” (85):

³¹ Mrs. Manresa is the opposite of Lucy, of whom Bart concludes, “there was nothing in her to weight a man like Giles to the earth” (80).

England was she? Queen Anne was she? Who was she? She spoke too low at first; all they heard was

. . . *reason holds sway*

Old Bartholomew applauded.

“Hear! Hear!” he cried. “Bravo! Bravo!” (85)

The Nation and its royal figurehead are conflated with “Reason.” Like many “old men in clubs,” Bart is a stock ex-colonial officer, a puppet to the ideology of Empire (13).³² Reason herself purports wide dominion:

Time, leaning on his sickle, stands amazed. While commerce from her Cornucopia pours the mingled tribute of her different ores. In distant mines the savage sweats; and from the reluctant earth the painted pot is shaped. At my behest, the armed warrior lays his shield aside; the heathen leaves the Altar steaming with unholy sacrifice. The violet and the eglantine over the riven earth their flowers entwine. And in the helmet, yellow bees their honey make. (85)

Reason claims credit for wringing civilization from barbarism, confounding Time and guiding a recalcitrant Earth. Commerce is conflated with peace and Christianity. We are told next that she hold sway over music and children’s play. She puts the winds to sleep, quells the “*unruly tribes of Heaven*,” and will shortly survey the domestic drama of the Restoration comedy “from her lofty eminence unmoved,” like the god of creation paring his fingernails (85-86).

Miss La Trobe oversees this prologue from “over there, behind that tree . . .” (84). While Woolf’s ellipsis is silent on the tree’s species, the cast dances around the mulberry tree of reason, just as, in the Elizabethan act, they danced around the mulberry trees of nation and empire: “A long line of villagers in sacking were passing in and out of the trees behind her” (85).³³ The song that they sing, however, intimates a prerational connection to the natural world in spite of the

³² He presages the atomization of the office by distinguishing himself from Lucy: “she belonged to the unifiers; he to the separatists” (81). Woolf ironizes his former profession when he plays Mrs. Manresa’s game over coffee, in whose superstition he does not believe: “Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, apothecary, ploughboy. . . . It appears [. . .] that I am a thief” (35).

³³ Earlier, “Dukes, priests, shepherds, and serving men took hands and danced. . . . they danced round the majestic figure of the Elizabethan age,” aping the village idiot, Albert (64; 60).

control Reason asserts over nature: “*Digging and delving, the villagers sang passing in single file in and out between the trees, for the earth is always the same, summer and winter and spring; and spring and winter again; ploughing and sowing, eating and growing; time passes*” (86). Here, villagers excluded from the professions promote the “private beauty” of the Society of Outsiders (*TG* 134). As “The wind blew the words away,” their voices go unheard and their English labor (like the foreign labor of the sweating savage) is ignored (86). Woolf’s discovery of fascism both abroad and at home is doubled with the irony of captains of “Commerce” wringing “tribute,” less traders than warrior kings, marauders, or Popes chasing the tithe (86).³⁴ In a different form than in *Three Guineas*, Woolf distinguishes rational discourses like the logics of imperialism and commerce from the natural cycles and prerational grounds that they claim to control. My description of the novel’s flat characters as puppets will carry through on this *précis* of *Three Guineas* within *Between the Acts*.

After the Restoration act, Woolf offers a lucid example of Plato’s marionette metaphor. Lucy attempts to convey to La Trobe the power that the pageant is having over her, inadvertently revealing the existential inadequacy of her lifelong dance around the mulberry tree of faith. La Trobe’s art has caused Lucy to question

“This daily *round*; this going up and down stairs; this saying ‘What am I going for? My specs? I have ‘em on my nose.’ . . .”

She gazed at Miss La Trobe with a cloudless old-aged stare. Their eyes met in a common effort to bring a common meaning to birth. They failed; and Mrs. Swithin, laying hold desperately of a fraction of her meaning, said: “What a small part I’ve had to play! But you’ve made me feel I could have played . . . Cleopatra!” (104; my emphasis)

As she leaves, La Trobe corrects her: “‘You’ve stirred in me my unacted part,’ she meant” (104).

She continues in a vein that essentially summarizes the passages from Plato that I just cited:

³⁴ Patriarchal domination helps Reason hold sway in the ensuing Restoration act, as Lady Harpy Harraden and Sir Spaniel Lilyliver plot to rob Flavinda of both her inheritance (comprised of goods appropriated from abroad) and, through a forced marriage, the autonomy of her body.

“You’ve twitched the invisible strings,” was what the old lady meant; and revealed—of all people—Cleopatra! Glory possessed her. Ah, but she was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world. Her moment was on her—her glory. (104-05)

Lucy is a puppet, literally unmindful of the lenses through which she sees the world, despite the underlying clarity of her “cloudless” gaze. The pageant causes her to question her “daily round,” her dance around the mulberry tree of faith. The intimation of unacted parts twitches the strings in another direction. La Trobe works at cross-purposes to a properly Platonic pageanteer, and although she ends with “God Save the King,” there is no “Grand Ensemble, round the Union Jack” as Mrs. Mayhew predicts (107). With subtly Shakespearian syntax, La Trobe conceives of herself as a witch on a blasted heath, a sorceress who meets enchantment with enchantment, pulling her cord in opposition.³⁵ As she speaks, she reinforces the motif of blind circling by fitting Mrs. Rogers into costume, pulling “the voluminous flounces of the Victorian age over her head. She tied the tapes,” thus binding Mrs. Rogers within the Angel in the House’s sartorial prison, like Orlando dragged down by her crinoline (104; *Orlando* 178).³⁶

Isa, in turn, longs for her own unacted part. Like her namesake, Elizabeth I, and like the members of her extended family, she is held fast in the disparity between her private sense of self and her public role. Woolf introduces her as an individual from Bart’s vantage as “Isa, his son’s wife,” in the opening scene where snippets of Byron create “two rings, perfect rings” of emotion encircling her and Haines (4). They are both “entangled” by their spouses (5). She is recaptured

³⁵ See the Weird Sisters’ apparitions in *Macbeth* IV.i, as earlier, La Trobe had “brewed emotion” (65). Giles describes Dodge, the novel’s other homosexual aesthete, more aggressively: “a teaser and twitcher; a fingerer of sensations; picking and choosing; dillying and dallying; not a man to have straightforward love for a woman” (42).

³⁶ Dodge comments on Lucy’s religion: “Pendant from her chain her cross swung as she leant out and the sun struck it. How could she weight herself down by that sleek symbol? How stamp herself, so volatile, so vagrant, with that image?” (51). Likewise, Streatfield will be “a symbol” as he delivers his closing appeal “in the livery of his servitude” (129).

by her wedding ring the next morning and reintroduced as “Mrs. Giles Oliver,” in love with both the gentleman farmer and “her husband, the stockbroker—‘The father of my children,’ she added, slipping into the cliché conveniently provided by fiction” (10). Woolf indicates a lack of agency in Isa’s marriage through the passive voice: she is the one “whom he had chosen” after they met “in Scotland, fishing—she from one rock, he from another. Her line had got tangled; she had given over, and had watched him with the stream rushing between his legs, casting, casting . . . and she had loved him” (33). If Giles had pulled her in as if on his fishing line, she is less sure of the force Haines exerts: “‘In love,’ she must be; since the presence of his body in the room last night could so affect her; since the words he said . . . could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them like a wire, tingling, tangling, vibrating” (11).³⁷

Isa thinks in poetic fragments, but hides her writing “in the book bound like an account book in case Giles suspected. ‘Abortive,’ was the word that expressed her” (11). “Abortive” suggests an ongoing process, against “aborted” as something finished. For much of the novel it is difficult to say who Isa “is,” and she largely remains in between, caught in binary thinking. In the morning conversation over the weather, she simply notes, “Every year they said, would it be wet or fine; and every year it was—one or the other” (16). She does not comment on either Lucy’s faith in God (“It’ll rain, I’m afraid. We can only pray”) or Bart’s pragmatic faith in reason (“And provide umbrellas”) (17). Later, Lucy asks her about Streatfield’s interpretation of the pageant:

“Did you feel,” she asked, “what he said: we act different parts but are the same?”
 “Yes,” Isa answered. “No,” she added. It was Yes, No. Yes, yes, yes, the tide
 rushed out embracing. No, no, no, it contracted.” (146)

³⁷ Following Maika’s parenthetical aside “that ‘hain’ is Old English for hedge” (39), I would add that although “Haines” rhymes with “chains,” the obsolete English “haine” means “hatred,” balancing the equivocal love Isa feels for Giles (*BA* 11; 33; OED). Haine is cousin to the obsolete noun “hain,” an enclosure (OED). The verb to “hain” is to “enclose or protect with a fence or hedge; esp. to preserve (grass) from cattle,” and more briefly, “To shut up, confine, restrain,” like the discourse of the Angel in the house (OED).

Glancing again at Giles through the shorthand of cliché, Isa thinks: “Love and hate—how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot” (146). Isa lacks Platonic “calculation,” and is unable to adjudicate the threads that pull her: the titillating *bovarysme* of an affair in one direction, and her scripted marriage, traceable to a tangled line, in another.

While a new plot might offer a new cord, as her clichés suggest, Isa’s relationship to art and her own poetic practices are also in process. She admits that her generation is “book shy; and gun-shy too,” claiming, “the newspaper was their book” (14). If “Books are the mirrors of the soul,” then the library at Pointz Hall reflects a “tarnished” soul for being full of “shilling shockers” (12). In her autobiographical bent and in naming the newspaper as her canon, Isa recalls the “leaning tower” poets. But just as Lucy and La Trobe cannot “bring a common meaning to birth,” the poetry Isa hides in the ostensible “account book” will never communicate (104). So on the one hand, her poems are an impotent travesty of *l’art pour l’art*, so private that they cannot be otherwise than “disinterested.” On the other hand, they are held captive precisely where one tallies interest. Like Woolf herself, Isa has been denied a man’s education, and yet she feels the pull of a fundamental call to create, an opposing force to the patriarchal discourse of the Angel in the House. Isa’s only recourse at the outset of the novel is to an abortive art that cannot express because, as a wife and mother, she has no practical right to expression.

Isa first references the account book during the matutinal daydream about Haines, so her immediate fear is the discovery of her unsanctioned desire.³⁸ The book, however, is the crux of a larger thematic thread, intimating Isa’s dawning sense that outsider aesthetics might counter the controlling pull of rational discourses. Although ephemeral, her poetic oeuvre promises salvation

³⁸ Later: “It made no difference; his [Giles’] infidelity—but hers did” (76). Isa recognizes her multifaceted link to Dodge when he demurs his knowledge of art under the derisive glares of Bart and Giles. Isa reflects “‘Why’s he afraid?’ . . . A poor specimen he was; afraid to stick up for his own beliefs—just as she was afraid, of her husband. Didn’t she write her poetry in a book bound like an account book lest Giles might suspect?” (35).

in her metaphysical struggle against the Angel in the House. In a complementary passage to Lucy and La Trobe's encounter, she reflects on how the constraints of gender and motherhood have aborted her personal autonomy and self-expression:

She had come into the stable yard where the dogs were chained; where the buckets stood; where the great pear tree spread its ladder of branches against the wall. The tree whose roots went beneath the flags, was weighted with hard green pears. Fingering one of them she murmured: "How am I burdened with what they drew from the earth; memories; possessions. This is the burden that the past laid on me, last little donkey in the long caravanserai crossing the desert. 'Kneel down,' said the past. 'Fill your pannier from our tree. Rise up, donkey. Go your way till your heels blister and your hoofs crack.'" (106)

Isa had earlier corrected Bart on the story of "Buridan's Ass." That "donkey who couldn't choose between hay and turnips and so starved" encapsulates her dilemma (41). *Three Guineas* used the desert caravan to describe educated men heading to their offices, except, "now, for the past twenty years or so, it is no longer a sight merely, a photograph, or fresco scrawled upon the walls of time, at which we can look with merely an esthetic appreciation. For there, trapesing along at the tail end of the procession, we go ourselves" (*TG* 74). Trapped in the home, Isa can only imagine herself joining the procession as a trailing pack animal, neither autonomous nor fully human. The zoomorphism recalls the "stray bitch" in the barn "who had made the dark corner where the sacks stood a lying-in ground for her puppies" (69). Mrs. Sands highlights the animalization of purportedly autonomous women: "Bitches suggested only servant girls misbehaving" (70). Fingering the pears, Isa reinforces the complicated overlay of natural fecundity and cultural construction. Woolf crosses the Biblical "Flight into Egypt"—subject of many frescoes across time—to figure Isa as a half-human Mary. The burden of her profession,

marriage, is to populate the world. “What we must remember: what we would forget” is that the burden of fecundity has been forced upon one who is “abortive” (106).³⁹

The barn scene with the stray dog and her puppies saw Isa craft a poem that betrayed not only lassitude, but a fleeting thought of suicide: “Let me turn away . . . from the array . . . of china faces, glazed and hard. Down the ride, that leads under the nut tree and the may tree, away, till I come to the wishing well, . . . But what wish should I drop into the well? . . . that the waters should cover me” (71). Life and death: suicide is a binary extreme like love and hate. Here, it is only the murmur of her poetry that is “drowned”—in tea, with its ritualistic conventions, its hierarchies of gentry and peasant, and the “noise of china and chatter” (72).⁴⁰ Isa returns to her poem under the may/pear tree, strengthening the allusion to *Three Guineas* in what is both a rare moment of clarity and also a performance of melding experience with emotion as poetry. Her thought is first interrupted by passing voices, one of which (perhaps Streatfield’s) conveys a sermon on the Last Judgment, alluding to the story of the Nativity, in Matthew’s version of which the Flight into Egypt is the final chapter: “It’s a good day, some say, the day we are stripped naked. Others, it’s the end of the day. They see the Inn and the Inn’s keeper. But none speaks with a single voice. None with a voice free from the old vibrations” (106). The narrator returns to Isa’s thoughts:

She roused herself. She encouraged herself. “On little donkey, patiently stumble. Hear not the frantic cries of the leaders who in that they seek to lead desert us. Nor the chatter

³⁹ That Isa is *forced* to carry the burden of procreation recalls the rape reported in the newspaper, but she does not regard George and Caro in such violent terms. From her glimpse of the them in the garden (10), to George’s running up to her in the barn (73), to an imagined reflection on George as Haines’ son (141), it seems that while she obviously loves her children, she has difficulty placing maternal affection within the nexus of sexual desire for Giles and Haines. In the barn scene, Dodge describes the tension between maternal emotion and marital convention in sartorial terms. As Isa gives George cake and milk, Giles approaches: “Then again she changed her dress. This time, from the expression in her eyes it was apparently something in the nature of a strait waistcoat”; i.e. Giles forces her into a Victorian corset (73).

⁴⁰ This echoes J. Alfred Prufrock drowning in the chatter of bourgeois collective representations.

of china faces glazed and hard. Hear rather the shepherd, coughing by the farmyard wall;
the withered tree that sighs when the Rider gallops; the brawl in the barrack room when
they stripped her naked; or the cry which in London when I thrust the window open
someone cries . . . ” (107)

Unlike Lucy, Isa is not religious, yet at the invocation of the end-of-days, she revises her poetic meditation on suicide, renouncing death for whatever life her art will allow. To be sure, Woolf qualifies this moment, as the ellipsis breaks off where Isa espies Giles and Mrs. Manresa leaving the greenhouse, but it shows Isa moving toward outsider aesthetics, rejecting the megaphonic voice of patriarchal leadership, as well as the stilted conventions and hard china faces of the tea in the barn, in favor of pleasure in unmediated perception: shepherds and pastures and trees, rendered allegorical by the capitalized “Rider.” Even in the city, the cries of street vendors hawking their wares are part of a holistic vision of beauty that is private, yet available to all. This is not the sanctioned Socratic pastoralism that Esty found in Parkerian conventions, however, as it recognizes the historically-accurate rape recounted in the morning paper. Facing this hard kernel of fact, Isa finds the worm of the Dictator at home, in the center of British power at Whitehall, directly contrasting Bart and Giles, whose reading of the news only notices the Dictator abroad for his impact on their own economic concerns (*TG* 64-66).⁴¹

The paratactic placement of the sermon on the soul “stripped naked” with Isa’s power of poetic transformation refigures the account book that hides the intimacies of Isa’s oeuvre as the book by which she will be held to account. It joins an extended rhyme on the Domesday Book (named after the Last Judgment): Mrs. Haines’ family has been in Liskeard for centuries, with “graves in the churchyard to prove it” (3); the Olivers are *arriviste*, unlike “the old families who had all intermarried, and lay in their deaths intertwined, like the ivy roots, beneath the

⁴¹ Giles reads that “sixteen men had been shot, others prisoned, just over there, across the gulf, in the flat land which divided them from the continent” (32). Bart perseverates on the pegging of the franc to the pound and the weather (10; 16). When he skims the rape story, he falls half-asleep, whereas the story jolts Isa: “That was real” (147; 15).

churchyard wall” (5); those roots are doubled by the roots of great trees framing the terrace pageant, which “broke the turf” just as Isa’s pear tree raises flagstones to resist human encroachment (8; 106); the Swithins were in England “before the Conquest,” as was the delivery boy Mitchell’s family, whose name, like that of Liskeard and its neighboring villages, was “in the Domesday Book” (22).⁴² Woolf deploys the Domesday Book in a literalistic—rather than a legal—sense, as a record, ledger, or accounting of an island whose people were conquered by another. As if on her way to declaring “I have no country,” Isa is coming around to emphasize what exists in England over what is “English” (*TG* 129). She refuses the jingoistic exclusions of nationalism and the monstrous male’s chalk lines in favor of the unmediated actuality of experiential fact (*TG* 125). If insiders call chalk quintessentially “English,” Lucy asserts, “Once there was no sea” (*BA* 21). Dover Beach and the Cap Blanc Nez are of a piece. Woolf muddles rational distinctions while dramatizing Isa’s movement toward toward a prerational, outsider understanding.⁴³ La Trobe’s “douche” of reality later confirms this when Isa hears the “vibration of old voices” of nature speaking as chorus, the “voice that was no one’s voice” (106; 123).

To summarize, Woolf portrays Isa as a woman whose individual autonomy is constrained by class and convention, pulled by threads of love and hate according to clichéd scripts. We see her starting to acknowledge outsider aesthetics, such that when the rain shower summons the “voice that was no one’s voice,” Isa submits to its power: “The little twist of sound”—La

⁴² The Domesday rhyme is Joycean in its allusive over-determination. Deriving from the verb “to lie,” Isa’s “ledger” is linked to Greek *aloxos*, “wife.” Keats’ *Isabella* tells of merchant brothers whose “red-lin’d accounts / Were richer than the songs of Grecian years” (lines 125-26). With their attention focused on the “untired / And pannier’d mules” carrying wares, Keats wonders, “How was it these same ledger-men could spy / Fair Isabella in her downy nest?” (lines 134; 137-38). Both John Everett Millais and Julia Stephens’ suitor William Holman Hunt painted Keats’ *Isabella* (Bell 36n.). Keats’ source is Boccaccio, *Decameron* IV.5, where Lisabetta’s story is told by Filomena, the nightingale circling *Between the Acts*.

⁴³ Woolf scorns insider/outsider distinctions at large: gossips deride Ralph Manresa as “a Jew, got up to look the very spit and image of the landed gentry” (28); La Trobe is rumored to be not “pure English” (40). Giles labels Dodge a “half-breed” (34). Isa reprimands him, but only mentally, out of fear: “Why judge each other? Do we know each other? Not here, not now” (43).

Trobe's nursery rhyme—"could have the whole of her. On the altar of the rain-soaked earth she laid down her sacrifice," recalling the "obstinate emotion" evoked by "English voices murmuring nursery rhymes" (*BA* 123; *TG* 129). If the poetry she hides away in a ledger follows a prerational path, love and hate will resolve into the third term she seeks: peace (*BA* 64). As the work for which she will be held to account, it may even be a peace which passeth understanding.

Whereas Isa resists the Angel in the House's pull, Giles bears the professional man's correlative burden. We see the two playing children's roles amid an appeal to their civility:

Giles then did what to Isa was his little trick; shut his lips; frowned, and took up the pose of one who bears the burden the world's woe, making money for her to spend. "No," said Isa, as plainly as words could say it. "I don't admire you," and looked, not at his face, but at his feet. "Silly little boy, with blood on his boots."
Giles shifted his feet. Whom then did she admire? (77)

The novel eventually holds out hope that they will overcome the petulance of their mirrored roles and come together as individuals. The vibrating wire of hazy love for Haines balances Isa's vague feelings of hatred. Giles' hatreds are several, but are likewise countered by his clichéd attraction to Mrs. Manresa: "A thread united them—visible, invisible, like those threads now seen, now not, that unite trembling grass blades in autumn before the sun rises. She had met him once only, at a cricket match. And then had been spun between them an early morning thread before the twigs and leaves of real friendship emerge" (39). Mrs. Manresa embellishes the plot of their shilling shocker: "Somehow she was the Queen; and he (Giles) was the surly hero" (65). She repeats the sentiment in the barn, takes him "in tow" and "drew him down," pulling him "round the Barn in her wake" (74). In the procession noted above, "Giles would keep his orbit so long as she weighted him to the earth" (82). For all his circling, we might take Giles as a mock-heroic *polytropos*, an Odysseus with significantly fewer "wiles."

If there is something of a “man of many turns” about Giles, it is not only that Mrs. Manresa is a Siren whose pull can only be resisted through an opposing force, or that she “detains him by constraint,” as Calypso holds Odysseus (*Odyssey* XII.50-54; IV.557-58; V.14-15).⁴⁴ Giles understands himself to be powerless on several fronts, and even as he is pulled by the Platonic strings of pleasure (Mrs. Manresa) and pain (looming war; domestic lassitude), he is acutely aware that larger forces constrain his personal autonomy. Giles recalls Odysseus in having his life “spun out” for him by the Fates.⁴⁵ As Clotho is the Fate who spins the present, I approach Giles’ threatened autonomy through Woolf’s running thread on clothing, which is a means of dressing up the private brother as a monstrous male.⁴⁶ Puppet par excellence, inheritor of Bart’s rationality and the spoils of Empire, Giles is a Gordian knot in that thread, “damnably unhappy” for his automatism (a sentiment echoed in turn by Dodge and Isa) (119).

Woolf introduces Giles in a passage suffused with the tension between individual volition and the pull of rational-discourse convention. Coming out from London, he is surprised by Mrs. Manresa’s car: “The ghost of convention rose to the surface, as a blush or a tear rises to the

⁴⁴ Elsewhere, Giles is “manacled to a rock,” while Mrs. Manresa is “a rock. . . . the rock was raced round, embraced (41; 26).

⁴⁵ R. B. Onians notes seven variations on the phrase “the gods spun” (*epeklosanto theoi*) in the *Odyssey* (305). The novel echoes several images and themes from its opening: Odysseus “was detained by the queenly nymph Kalypso, bright among goddesses, / in her hollowed caverns, desiring that he should be her husband. / But when in the circling of the years that very year came / in which the gods had spun for him his time of homecoming / to Ithaka, not even then was he free of his trials” (I.14-18). For Onians “The ‘binding’ of the gods is no mere trick of language but a literal description of an actual process, their mode of imposing fate upon mortals, a religious belief and not a metaphor.” He continues, the “fortunes which the gods spin for men, they also fasten upon them in the form of a cord or bond” (331; 335). There is thus a deeply-rooted cultural precedent for Woolf’s varied invocations of the loss of autonomy as being pulled about like a puppet or marionette. Spariosu addresses the threads of the *Moirai* (the Fates) in distinguishing the arbitrary will of the gods as what one must do, from how one negotiates chance and strategizes within prescribed rational rules. He points out that *ananke* (necessity) is etymologically linked to *anchein* (to strangle), recalling the many images of not only binding in *Between the Acts*, but also nooses (*DR* 16; *BA* 9; 84; 122). Moreover, “Isa” echoes Greek *aisa*, which encompasses “fate.” Woolf twice describes her cache of poems, which have implications for her fate, as “bound like an account book” (11; 35; my emphasis).

⁴⁶ *Three Guineas* labels all uniforms and adornments—including university degrees and Royal orders—mere advertisements, which have “the same function as the tickets in a grocer’s shop” (26). Woolf had refused the Companion of Honor in May 1935 (*D* IV:314, 6n.). The pun on Clotho and clothing is superficial, not etymological.

surface at the pressure of emotion; so the car touched his training. He must change. And he came into the dining-room looking like a cricketer, in flannels, wearing a blue coat with brass buttons; though he was enraged” (32). His rage is at both the coming war and his perception of his own lack of agency in facing it. Through the simile of the blush or tear, the rational-play convention of dressing is revealed to be the tug of emotion, irrational as an apparition. The superficial leisure of the cricketer’s outfit belies buried rage, a public/private distinction that Bart notes when he thinks, “The family was not a family in the presence of strangers” (34).

We learn that “It was Aunt Lucy . . . who made him change. He hung his grievances on her, as one hands a coat on a hook, instinctively” (32). Ignoring the constraints of her religion and gender, Giles believes she is “free,” against a contradictory sense of his own position:

Aunt Lucy, foolish, free; always, since he had chosen, after leaving college, to take a job in the city, expressing her amazement, her amusement, at men who spent their lives, buying and selling—ploughs? glass beads was it? or stocks and shares?—to savages who wished most oddly—for were they not beautiful naked?—to dress and live like the English? A frivolous, a malignant statement hers was of a problem which, for he had no special gift, no capital, and had been furiously in love with his wife—he nodded to her across the table—had afflicted him for ten years. Given his choice, he would have chosen to farm. But he was not given his choice. So one thing led to another; and the conglomeration of things pressed you flat; held you fast, like a fish in water. So he came for the week-end, and changed. (32-33)

Setting aside Lucy’s patrician racism, the paradox of Giles having “chosen” to work as a stockbroker and his simultaneous claim that “he was not given his choice” captures the tension between the private brother and monstrous male. Justifiably, Woolf would have us feel little sympathy for the latter, another educated scion of Empire bearing the White Man’s Burden by other means than the sword. That Giles does not farm has much to do with his entanglement with and love for Isa, which is tellingly recalled in the past tense—although again, she is the one “whom he had chosen” (35). Woolf’s wry fun on his inaccurate simile of fish being pressed flat by water, formulated as he dines on sole (he admits he has “no command of metaphor”),

highlights his individual affliction of feeling trapped, serving forces beyond his control; a puppet to reason, in my terms (37).⁴⁷ The “conglomeration of things” is, directly, the process of rational play laying out the logic that he must follow, but it also reinforces, indirectly, that it is the logic of the market that pulls him. “The conglomeration of things” describes the burdens of acquisition and consumption that he impetuously blames on Isa and which the choral voice imputes to the degradations of “the office” (77; 82).⁴⁸

Giles seethes at his passivity as the luncheon party moves to the garden for coffee. Even as he vacillates in his visceral indictment of Lucy, his rage reasserts itself. He “blamed Aunt Lucy, looking at views, instead of—doing what? . . . His father, whom he loved, he exempted from censure; as for himself, one thing followed another; and so he sat, with old fogies, looking at views” (37). Dodge shortly gives him “another peg on which to hang his rage as one hangs a coat on a peg, conveniently” (42). By scapegoating Lucy and Dodge, while exempting his father, Giles reveals his blind circling, which is not purely “instinctive,” but at partially constructed. He fears Europe’s headlong slide toward war, but as yet another flat character, he does not see that the logic of capitalism is simply the manifestation of power as an ideology of unrestrained competition, the rational-play counterpart to war’s immediate physical violence.⁴⁹ If he exempts

⁴⁷ Odysseus, too, would have rather farmed. Lemprière’s *Classical Dictionary*—to whose authority Bart defers (*BA* 18)—explains: “Pretending to be insane, not to leave his beloved Penelope, he yoked a horse and a bull together and ploughed the sea-shore, where he sowed salt instead of corn” (Lemprière 648, s.v. “Ulysses”). Perhaps not incidentally for Woolf, the different stride-lengths of the animals would have caused Odysseus to plow in a circle. Plato’s Myth of Er, recounts that in choosing a new lot in a new life, the soul of Odysseus sought “the life of a private individual who did his own work” (*Republic* X.620c).

⁴⁸ As cited above, Woolf uses the same formula in *Three Guineas* to claim, “the conglomeration of people into societies” releases “what is most selfish and violent, least rational and humane in the individuals themselves” (124-25). The echo suggests an awareness—and wariness—of the specter of reification, the potential dehumanization of the individual within a collective mass. In Giles’ case, the market and the mass are twin evils.

⁴⁹ Woolf may be baiting us with Fisher King symbolism, but she reinforces the ichthyologic play on flat characters as “Halibut? Sole? Plaice?” when Candish brings in the “second post on a silver salver.” Bart snaps up the newspaper “Like a fish rising to a crumb of biscuit” (11; 146). The lily pond evokes the solipsism of the characters’

Bart consciously out of love, he exempts him unconsciously because, as men of the market and Empire, they essentially circle the same tree. He will not—indeed, cannot—admit that the patriarchal discourses to which he and his father owe all that they have are not only the root problem, but will not offer the solutions he seeks. Just as Lucy forgets the lenses through which she sees the world, Giles is blinded by the economic correlative of religious dogmatism. As I argued about Woolf herself struggling with the Angel in the House, Giles’ reason is not “authoress of her own principles” (Kant, *Groundwork* 4:448 [58]). In the scene with the snake swallowing the toad, he believes that only “action” will relieve him, but at the price of the circular violence he fears from Europe, “bristling with guns, poised with planes” (69; 37).

To be clear, Woolf directs her ire not at Giles as an individual, but as a puppet of the mulberry tree of the market. It is insofar as he is an *individual* puppet that Woolf sympathizes with him—just as she does, *mutatis mutandis*, for Lucy, Isa, et al. Woolf signals the necessity of such sympathy more directly in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” than in *Three Guineas*. The 1940 essay wonders whether the war will change human nature and whether disarmament will relieve men like Giles of their need for violence, whether immediate or mediated through rational play. If Europe disarms, she writes, “Othello’s occupation will be gone; but he will remain Othello. The young airman up in the sky is driven not only by the voices of loudspeakers; he is driven by voices in himself—ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition. Is he to be blamed for those instincts? Could we switch off the maternal instinct at

circling: “Water, for hundreds of years, had silted down into the hollow, and lay there four or five feet deep over a black cushion of mud. Under the thick plate of green water, glazed in their self-centred world, fish swam” (30). Giles also exempts Mrs. Manresa, “why, he could not say,” but likely because her flirtations validate his masculine identity—a characteristic he shares with Bart (38).

the command of a table of politicians?” (*E* VI:244).⁵⁰ Woolf does not condemn a desire for action, in and of itself—she believed “thinking is my fighting”—but she does suspect the ends toward which patriarchal rationality would direct action (*D* V:285 15 May 1940). As I will highlight again, what one takes for reason, alone, can prove to be inadequate guide, and Woolf’s fundamental concern is to keep “rationality” from reproducing social iniquities into the future.

With one thing following another, Giles considers what he is bound to do as fixed and immutable, rather than his being led around by a contingent logic. In my reading, breaking the ring and freeing Giles to be a private brother must consist in moving beyond the inherited discourses of Victorian society. His fate as a monstrous male is spun out by reason, as if by the threads of the *Moirai*, which I see symbolized in the figure of the Victorian mother knitting the clothes he wears. Woolf poses the question of whether this stockbroker can trade his bonds as the question of whether humans change. The choric voice finds the theme in the pageant: “Dressing up. That’s the great thing, dressing up. [. . .] D’you think people change? Their clothes, of course. [. . .] But ourselves—do we change?” (83). While Giles’ changing into cricketing flannels is a superficial change of role (as Dodge noted metaphorically of Isa in the barn), the Victorian act makes the question of changing character explicit (73).⁵¹ The act opens with Budge the Policeman reciting the “laws of God and Men,” confusing the contingency of the latter with the immutability of the former (110-11).⁵² The lake picnic acts out my reading of Isa’s poetry, presaging one possible fate when Mrs. Hardcastle, “a stout lady in black bombazine,” enters

⁵⁰ Ellis points out that Giles’ turning out the light in the final scene of the novel links him to Othello: “Put out the light, and then put out the light” (Ellis 192, quoting *Othello* v.ii.7)

⁵¹ The fluidity of Woolf’s nomenclature highlights this existential unease. Lucy’s name, “Lucinda,” is never actually given. For religion “changing, like the cat’s name,” see the chapel-turned-larder (23).

⁵² After Budge baldly declares “*Let ’em sweat at the mines; cough at the looms; rightly endure their lot. That’s the price of Empire; that’s the white man’s burden. . . . a whole-time white man’s job*,” Lynn Jones notes La Trobe’s critique of patriarchy: “somehow she felt that a sneer had been aimed at her father; therefore at herself” (111).

“upon a donkey, escorted by an elderly gentleman in a deer-stalker’s cap” (113).⁵³ The act ends with Budge pointing with his truncheon to Pointz Hall itself, exemplifying the “purity of Victoria’s land,” where “Mama” knits in anticipation of Father “the breadwinner, home from the city, home from the counter, home from the shop” (117).

Before the novel repeats the identification of Pointz Hall with the Victorian ideal, the audience ponders human character. Lynn Jones wonders if there was something “‘unhygienic’ about the home? Like a bit of meat gone sour, with whiskers, as the servants called it?” (118). Those whiskers grow into a reflection on superficial modernity and fundamental change:

Time went on and on like the hands of the kitchen clock. (The machine chuffed in the bushes.) If they had met with no resistance, she mused, nothing wrong, they’d still be going round and round and round. The Home would have remained; and Papa’s beard, she thought, would have grown and grown; and Mama’s knitting—what did she do with all her knitting?—Change had to come, she said to herself, or there’d have been yards and yards of Papa’s beard, of Mama’s knitting. Nowadays her son-in-law was clean shaven. Her daughter had a refrigerator. . . . Dear, how my mind wanders, she checked herself. What she meant was, change had to come, unless things were perfect; in which case she supposed they resisted Time. Heaven was changeless. (118)

Lynn Jones thinks individuals change with the fashion. Dodge will call this “history” against Lucy’s defense of changelessness: “‘The Victorians,’ Mrs. Swithin mused. ‘I don’t believe,’ she said with her odd little smile, ‘that there were ever such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently’” (118). Unbeknownst to them, they are now in La Trobe’s “douche” of “present-time reality,” slipping the “noose” of her game until the burst of rain (122). The audience is conscious of being “neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor

⁵³ Woolf plays with Isa’s conscious and unconscious identification with the pageant’s characters in each act, as when she tellingly misquotes “*old Elsbeth’s*” line “*There is little blood in this [Isa: ‘my’] arm*” (62). The Restoration scene refigures the sexual rejection implied by Giles’ infidelity when Lady Harpy Harraden laments “I that was Cassiopeia am turned to a she-ass” (100).

themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo.”⁵⁴ Isa completes La Trobe’s nursery rhyme, calling the crowd “Four and twenty blackbirds, strung upon a string,” like lifeless marionettes (121). The megaphonic voice will exhort them not to hide behind clothes: literally, “*Don’t hide among rags. Or let our cloth protect us,*” but also figuratively, imploring them to reject numerous rational-discourse distinctions in favor of their basic humanity and communal “harmony” (127; 133). La Trobe’s moral is thus aligned with Lucy’s “one making” and her sense of changelessness. Yet Dodge and Isa are skeptical: “Well, if the thought gave her [Lucy] comfort . . . let her think it” (119). Woolf suggests that our “going round and round and round” mulberry trees is not the result of immutable Time, but a product of human rationality, like a clock. The yards and yards of Mama’s knitting symbolize the machinations of convention, the Victorian ideal and the Angel in the House spooling out her puppet-strings. Woolf ties the metaphor back to the mother of Empire in the benediction over “Old Elsbeth,” beginning “*From the distaff of life’s tangled skein, unloose her hands*” (64).

The end of the novel dramatizes these conversational vacillations over whether more changes than clothing: perhaps Budge was correct to point to Pointz Hall as a living embodiment of Victorian ideals. The final scene opens with “the family” alone. While their memories and interpretations of the pageant recede, Isa, “sweeping her sewing from the table, sank, her knee doubled, into the chair by the window. Within the shell of the room she overlooked the summer night” (145). Lucy, in turn, “took her knitting from the table,” and again, asks whether “we act different parts but are the same” (146). Bart and Giles interrupt and “sat down, ennobled both of them by the setting sun. Both had changed. Giles now wore the black coat and white tie of the professional classes, which needed—Isa looked down at his feet—patent leather pumps. ‘Our

⁵⁴ Their limbo dramatizes Woolf’s declaration that “on or about December 1910, human character changed” and recalls the novel’s aversion to binary thinking (“Character” *E* IV:421).

representative, our spokesman,' she sneered" (146). As Mother knitting and Father back from the city, Isa and Giles come into the legacy of their Victorian progenitors, Lucy and Bart. Although Woolf's presentation of the scene as an archetype seems to validate Lucy's sense of human changelessness, the rich ambiguity of the ending depends on Isa and Giles removing their clothes, revealing not just their bare humanity, but also an animality beyond the constraints of rational discourse (bolstered by the allusion to Conrad): "Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night." It is only then that "Isa let her sewing drop," perhaps signaling an end to the pull of Mama's knitting. Putting her needles down, Isa slips out of many layers of metaphorical dress like Giles will slip off his patent pumps, shirk the shroud of his black coat, and unknot the noose of his white tie (148).

Giles has every reason to think that he is autonomous, from his education, to his profession, to his position in the household, yet he is frustrated by the knowledge that his autonomy is contingent. In my reading of him as a monstrous male, he is a rag doll hanging by a thread, a puppet pulled around by reason playing dress-up with him: now one role, now another. The question of how Giles wears his clothes approaches the fundamental concerns of *Three Guineas*: to what end do we practice the professions? What effects does such practice have on the community? To what extent do an individual's actions contribute to the justness of her society? For Woolf, these are as much post-war projections as wartime reflections.

The conceptual link between the individual and the community comes through in that final scene. Bart's reading lamp illuminates the parlor's "circle of the readers," with their newspapers, bills, business documents, and history books (147); outside, they are bounded by

prerational nature: evening flowers and birds (145); the “hollow of the sun-baked field” (147); and the breeze sweeping in after sunset (148). The parlor as an island of civilization under the lamp of enlightenment mimics in miniature the novel’s preoccupation with England as part of an island whose autonomy was, until so recently, guaranteed by the Channel. However differently, Lucy, Giles, and anonymous choric voices all persevere on fate of their homeland (6-7; 32; 37; 54; 75; 135). La Trobe describes the audience being “held together,” not only by their shared, if flawed, history, but by the concern for their shared future woven into their conversation: “Over the tops of the bushes came stray voices, voices without bodies, symbolical voices they seemed to her, half hearing, seeing nothing, but still, over the bushes, feeling invisible threads connecting the bodiless voices. . . . ‘No one wants it—save those damned Germans’” (103). Even as the pageant tries to unmask the dictator at home, the audience understandably focuses on his cousin abroad. An anonymous voice, speaking to Mrs. Parker amid the parked cars, will quote Whitman to underscore the island’s collective fate: “tell me, did you feel when the shower fell, someone wept for us all? There’s a poem, *Tears, tears tears*, it begins. And goes on, *O then the unloosened ocean* . . . but I can’t remember the rest” (136).

Woolf is less explicit about how England might be unloosed from the pull of the dictator abroad than she is about the actions of individuals. What is certain is that violence is fated to be circular. Any victory by violence will be Pyrrhic if it leaves the egg of the Dictator safely incubating in England. At the end of the *Republic*, Socrates claims that if we are “persuaded” by his philosophy, we will practice “reason with justice in every way” (*Republic* X.621c). And yet Woolf’s reimagining of *Three Guineas* in *Between the Acts* suggests that any “reason” followed by rote leads only to limited “justice.” Understood in this way, the “golden and holy” cord of calculation described in the *Laws* is merely a means of keeping individuals in tow, just as the

Socratic censorship of discourses, evident in education-as-*paideia* and in the propaganda of pageantry, produces “correctly disciplined pleasures” (*Laws* I.645a; II.653e). This is the basis of both the metaphysical and the practical paucity of Giles’ “action” of killing the snake and toad: it leaves him in the same “orbit” (*BA* 82).⁵⁵ The scene mingles prerational with rational play: “the path was strewn with stones. He kicked—a flinty yellow stone, a sharp stone, edged as if cut by a savage for an arrow. A barbaric stone; a pre-historic. Stone-kicking was a child’s game. He remembered the rules. By the rules of the game, one stone, the same stone, must be kicked to the goal. Say a gate, or a tree. He played it alone. The gate was a goal; to be reached in ten” (68). Whether a game is for children or adults, the imposition and observation of rules distinguishes it as rational play. So too does a rational mentality imbue a mere rock, a “flinty yellow stone,” with associations of savagery, barbarity, and violence. Indeed, an alternative way to think about blind circling around the mulberry trees of profit, empire, religion, and such is simply to question the adherence to its rules, heedless of consequence or context, as Giles so solipsistically does here.⁵⁶

In defining the “madness” or “ecstasy” of puppets, Kenneth Gross argues that in the right hands they “All acquire intentions, what looks like will, even if this belongs to things we think can have no will” (2). Put differently, a puppet’s loss of autonomy is perversely freeing, insofar it offers a ready excuse that might absolve it from the consequences of its actions. Once a rational logic is allowed to unfold, the puppet can enjoy its fruits without worrying overmuch

⁵⁵ The scene was drawn from life: “We saw a snake eating a toad: it had half the toad in, half out; gave a suck now & then. The toad slowly disappearing. L. poked its tail; the snake was sick of the crushed toad, & I dreamt of men committing suicide & cld. see the body shooting through the water” (*D* IV:338 4 Sept. 1935). I cannot adequately address the criticism here, but will note the larger concern with binaries between life and death, fate and agency, aggression and passivity.

⁵⁶ His thinking is structurally parallel to Lucy’s understanding of his imperialism (33). Implying that the “pre-historic” must also be savage and barbaric recalls Colonel Mayhew’s narrowly patriarchal definition of what counts as “History,” as well as the distinction between “Englishness” and what long existed on the island from the Domesday Book theme (107).

about its collateral effects. What can the puppet possibly do to mitigate the effects of her actions? She is just a puppet! Thus, Lucy, in her one-making “circular tour of the imagination,” dismisses individual pain and suffering as part of God’s plan (119):

Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one. If discordant, producing harmony—if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus—she was smiling benignly—the agony of the particular sheep, cow, or human being is necessary; and so—she was beaming seraphically at the gilt vane in the distance—we reach the conclusion that all is harmony, could we hear it. And we shall. (119)

Woolf subtly critiques Lucy’s religiously-sanctioned callousness as rational-play oppression. Her smile is both aristocratic (benign is *bene-genus*, well-born) and seraphic; that is, like an Angel. Shortly, La Trobe’s megaphone chastises Lucy for her blithe willingness to sacrifice some cows—if not a few servants—to the harmony of the spheres, imploring, “*Consider the sheep.*” It highlights the hypocrisy of the puppets’ simultaneous claims to acting within reason while acting helplessly, incriminating the entire audience: “*A tyrant, remember, is half a slave. . . . Then there’s the amiable condescension of the lady of the manor—the upper class manner. And buying shares in the market to sell ‘em*” (127). Just as Lucy justifies suffering in the name of ideal harmony, so too might Giles—concerned only with his own interest—act on the abstractions of market price without regard to the real fates of real people that are decided thereby. He merely follows the law of the market, which, like Lucy’s religion, has its own ideologically-inflected and narrow version of what is just. In an image to which I will return, the megaphonic voice even indicts itself in these blinkered conceptions of what “*we call, perhaps miscall, civilization*” (127). In short, acting according to a single rationality, without asking after its ends and without any prerational counterweight, can blind individuals to all that their contingent reason must ignore, producing a willful ignorance and a species of epistemological censorship that I will relate to Kantian “indifference” in the Conclusion to this dissertation. Here, though, I turn to

Woolf's attempt to "break the ring" by playing with Plato, writing over his elegant picture of how philosophy, artifice, and communal education combine to censor and control the power of "reason" itself.

On Not Knowing Plato

My analysis thus far has reduced Woolf's characters to caricatures, but not without her sanction. By arguing that they are puppets, representative of the blind circling around so many rational discourses and bound to their respective fates, I am approaching the novel rather allegorically. To be sure, Lucy, Isa, and Giles each play different roles despite their flatness, and I have emphasized their playacting as "monstrous males" over their status as individuals. The central problem of being bound and blinded by conceptions of truth whose outlines one cannot see, however, directly echoes Plato's vivid allegory of how individuals and communities come to the truth through reason in the first place. In what follows, I argue that Woolf casts her puppets in a ludic performance of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Not unlike the slippery and ludic descriptions of her puppet-like automatons, Woolf's use of the Allegory is playful—even impish. Along with several one-to-one correspondences, I will trace recurring images, ideas, and themes, broadly, as they echo across the centuries into the novel itself.⁵⁷ Woolf uses Plato's own methods to demonstrate that the sun-lit "truth" he approaches *as-if* it were immutable and natural is in fact an arbitrary human construction, a form of play. Plato himself is aware of a certain ludic flexibility and capaciousness to his account, not only couching it allegorically, but introducing it

⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Maika argues that the pageant reproduces an ancient Greek theater, with Mrs. Manresa, Giles, and Bart representing the priests of Dionysus, Apollo, and Olympian Zeus, respectively: "As in ancient Athens, the front row is occupied by officials of the state, those with priestly authority to administer sacraments" (43).

with an overt simile.⁵⁸ The point of contention for Woolf is, yet again, the ideological uses toward which contingent reason is put, which her own ludic fun seeks to show by the light of its prerational counterpart, a more “truly” natural sun.

Socrates likens humanity to prisoners shackled in a cave from a young age, prevented from moving or so much as turning their heads. With their sight focused straight ahead and their position down in the hollow bottom of the cave, they cannot see each other, but only the wall opposite. A fire burning behind them is the sole source of light. A path stretches along the width of the cave between the prisoners and the fire, along which a “low wall has been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers [*thaumatopoiōis*] above which they show their puppets [*thaumata*]” (*Republic* VII.514a-b). Other people move freely behind the screen-wall, carrying “artifacts [*skeue*] that project above it—statues of people and other animals, made out of stone, wood and every material” (VII.514c). Some of them talk, some are silent. The fire’s light casts the shadows of these artifacts onto the wall of cave. Bound as they are, and with “an echo from the wall facing them,” the prisoners can see and hear nothing but those shadows, and so Socrates conjectures, “the prisoners would in every way believe that the truth [*alethes*] is nothing other than the shadows [*skias*] of those artifacts [*skeuaston*]” (VII.515b-c). From the blinkered vision, to being trapped in a self-reinforcing echo chamber, to the mistaken identification of contextual contingency as immutable truth, Woolf’s conception of her puppets circling mulberry trees parallels the state of Socrates’ prisoners.

⁵⁸ Socrates acknowledges that his simile is only an approximation, beginning: “compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature to an experience *like this*” (*Republic* VII.514a; my emphasis). The final book of the *Republic* sees Socrates subtly intimate a sense of rational *as-if* play when he argues that one should not grieve at misfortune. He gives four reasons, the last of which is that “grief prevents the very thing we most need in such circumstances from *coming into play* as quickly as possible . . . Deliberation” (X.604c, my emphasis). While he goes on to liken those dwell on their misfortunes to “children,” by suggesting that the rational, deliberative part of the soul is “at play” with the appetitive part, Socrates embraces *as-if*.

From this basic picture, Socrates imagines the tribulations of someone freed from his bonds, shown the fire and the shadow-casting puppets, and dragged by force out of the cave where his eyes would slowly adjust to the light of the sun—source of truth and goodness—seeing first “shadows most easily, then images of men and other things in water, then the things themselves,” first at night and then finally during the day (VII.516a). This freed prisoner who comes to see by the light of the sun is akin to a Guardian of the ideal Republic, his upward journey analogous to acquiring knowledge of ideal forms from the shadows of Earthly phenomena. Compelled to return to the cave, the Guardian’s sight would need to re-adjust to the darkness, even as he would face the prisoners’ ridicule (VII.517a). His experience, and the knowledge that eyes must adjust to both darkness and light, however, would produce an empathic concern for his fellows, and seeing “a soul disturbed and unable to see something, he won’t laugh mindlessly, but he’ll take into consideration whether it has come from a brighter life and is dimmed through not having yet become accustomed to the dark or whether it has come from greater ignorance into greater light and is dazzled by the increased brilliance” (VII.518a). In educating his fellows, the Guardian acknowledges that they can see, but that their sight “isn’t turned the right way . . . and tries to redirect it appropriately” (VII.518d). Reason itself, Socrates contends, is a tool, “either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way that it is turned” (VII.518e). Socrates distinguishes noumenal reason, which must focus on static “being,” from its prerational counterpart, insisting that proper sight must be “freed from the bonds of kinship with becoming” (VII.519a). Again, *Three Guineas* repeats this concern for lines of sight and the ends toward which the tools of reason are directed, even as La Trobe’s pageant will toy with the Platonic prescriptions for rational laws:

It isn’t the law’s concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness through the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with

each other through persuasion or compulsion and by making them share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community. The law produces such people in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction they want, but to make use of them to bind the city together. (VII.519e-520a)

To quote Esty again, the pageant is just such a tool, “likely to promote and express just enough collective spirit to bind citizens together but not to trip over into the frightening power of fascist mob fever” (55). Of course, Miss La Trobe chafes at those bonds, using her own tools to tinker with the proper pageant’s rational vision of the Empire and its history. For the writer of *Three Guineas*, however, writing back to Socratic censorship in the same pageant form that effects correctly disciplined pleasures is a gesture as hollow as a cave.

Woolf intermingles the details of the Allegory within the setting, characters, and thematic preoccupations of *Between the Acts*. The setting toys with the imposition of order onto a “disordered” natural world in a constant state of becoming; as in the opening discussion of the cesspool that would both assert control over fertilization and hide humanity’s animal nature.⁵⁹ Pointz Hall is where the puppets live. The house was “built in a hollow, facing north” to “escape from nature” (6). We are told, “It was a pity that the man who had built Pointz Hall”—the patriarch—“had pitched the house in a hollow, when beyond the flower garden and the vegetables there was this stretch of high ground. Nature had provided a site for a house; man had built his house in a hollow” (8).⁶⁰ Down in its hollow, hidden from sunlight, “lying unfortunately low on the meadow with a fringe of trees on the bank above it so that the smoke curled up to the nests of the rooks,” the house replicates the position of Plato’s prisoners below the screen-wall

⁵⁹ Bart notes that technology makes the history of impositions visible: “From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars” (3-4).

⁶⁰ Lucy returns to the thought later, telling Dodge, “My brother says, they built the house north for shelter, not south for sun” (48).

and smoking fire. This is immediately reinforced by George's encounter with Bart, in which are woven several thematic threads. George and Caro are out on the terrace with their nurses:

The little boy had lagged and was grouting in the grass. . . . George grubbed. The flower blazed between the angles of the roots. Membrane after membrane was torn. It blazed a soft yellow, a lambent light under a film of velvet; it filled the caverns behind the eyes with light. All that inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling of yellow light. And the tree was beyond the flower; the grass, the flower and the tree were entire. Down on his knees grubbing he held the flower complete. (8)

Daniel Albright places this moment next to the opening of *The Waves* as one of “two passages in Virginia Woolf’s fiction that explore the structure of the chamber of maiden thought, the nature of the infant’s head prior to experience” (101). Woolf reinforces the animal nature underlying what Albright genders as “maiden” thought: George is “grubbing” and “grouting” like the thrush Lucy has just seen with “a coil of pinkish rubber twisted in its beak” (7).⁶¹ The description of “caverns behind the eyes” does not divide mind from matter, nor reason from experience, but rejects dualism. As a “hall,” that cavern parallels the “shells” of the parlor and dining room, the “hollow hall” of the Barn (with its own yellow light), and George’s presumptive inheritance, Pointz Hall itself. George comes to consciousness through an individuated counterpart to a community coming into reason out of the shackles of the cave (19; 69). His “complete,” holistic picture balances ratiocination with prerationally immediate experience, just as the “yellow” light flooding the cavern of his consciousness ambiguously describes both sun- and firelight.⁶²

⁶¹ The second definition of the verb “grout” is “to ‘muzzle’ or turn up with the snout,” citing Woolf’s own essay “Crabbe” (OED). Lucy’s morning view of the lawn presages several aspects of Bart and Isa’s own “views” that I am about to trace.

⁶² Woolf returns to the conceit when Lucy’s “eyes in their caves of bone were still lambent” (51).

There is an ineffable innocence to George's holistic, rational-prerational vision. It is a moment of being that embraces becoming.⁶³ In *Three Guineas*, Woolf had exploited the childlike/adult binary both rhetorically and conceptually by using a nursery rhyme to engage the compulsive circling of rational discourses, showing reason to be so much emotion. She repeats the tactic here, where George's moment is quickly quashed by Bart, playing the monstrous male: "Then there was a roar and a hot breath and a stream of coarse grey hair rushed between him and the flower. Up he leapt, toppling in his fright, and saw coming towards him a terrible peaked eyeless monster moving on legs, brandishing arms" (*BA* 9). Patriarchal rationality attacks in the instant that George starts to know the world, disciplining the newly sentient individual, as Bart will reproach George mentally (and shortly, Isa verbally), "His little game with the paper hadn't worked. The boy was a cry-baby" (9; 13). As a monstrous male, the "eyeless" Bart blindly circles the mulberry tree of militaristic empire, whose rationality Woolf again undermines as childish emotion. He "brandishes arms," yells at Sohrab, his Afghan hound, "as if he were commanding a regiment," and seeks his place "in the column" (of the newspaper) like a soldier on parade (9).⁶⁴ He asserts control over his dog just as his patriarchal rationality must subdue the prerational immediacy of George's experience, with a noose he carries for that reason. Woolf plays with the polarity of their positions, however, as "It was impressive to the nurses, the way an old boy of his age could still bawl," that is, cry like a baby boy. Bart's mastery of animal

⁶³ George's flower-vision recreates one of Woolf's now-famous "moments of being," her quasi-spiritual eruptions of focus that transcend the "nondescript cotton wool" of everyday life. On 18 April 1939, amid finishing *Roger Fry* and drafting *Between the Acts*, she wrote that the second "moment of being" she ever had "was also in the garden at St Ives. I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; 'that is the whole,' I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower" ("Sketch" 71).

⁶⁴ When he does find "his place in the column," he reads that "M. Daladier . . . has been successful in pegging down the franc" (10). Marcus notes that the undervaluation of the franc, which let France borrow at an advantage, was met with outrage in Britain, reinforcing the narrowness of Bart and Giles' concerns (*BA* 156n.). The rape reported in the next column indicates Woolf's view of soldiers' roles as monstrous males.

nature and his “game” are peacock-like assertions of virility and a narrowly defined masculinity (9). Summarizing her lifelong quarrel with her brother, Lucy later concludes that Bart would “carry the torch of reason till it went out in the darkness of the cave” (139). Bart’s torch of enlightenment—shining, too, in the lamplight of the final scene—is less artificial firelight than it is a flashlight, a latter-day product of human reason (147). Here, it outshines the yellow “lambent light” in the cavern of consciousness. Echoing *Three Guineas*’ metaphor of a rabbit caught in headlights, George goes from actively grubbing and grouting to passively “gaping” and “gazing,” stunned into submission by his grandfather’s display (9).⁶⁵

That evening, Bart admits to himself that “he had destroyed the little boy’s world” by shattering George’s “complete” knowledge of the terrace where the pageant will be staged (137). In the aftermath of his attack, Bart pauses to take in the view of the countryside along with his newspaper: “the breeze blew the great sheet out; and over the edge he surveyed the landscape—flowing fields, heath and woods. Framed, they became a picture. Had he been a painter, he would have fixed his easel here, where the country, barred by trees, looked like a picture. Then the breeze fell” (9-10). Woolf presages what Jean Baudrillard calls the “precession of simulacra” (1). That is, Bart begins with an arbitrary sense of what a landscape ought to look like—one produced by a rational discourse of artistic conventions—actively frames a stretch of land, and sets up his imaginary easel without acknowledging that he has imposed a contingent vision of what a picture looks like. For my purposes, two points follow.

⁶⁵ Woolf introduces the metaphor of a rabbit in a headlight to describe the fear that official markers of distinction and masculinity produce (*TG* 135). She returns to this freedom-stifling fear several times in the remainder of *Three Guineas* (151; 154; 166). In what I cannot help but read as a symbol similar to my reading of Stein’s rejection of nineteenth-century “toys,” a moment before George’s focused vision, Caro “thrust her fist out over the coverlet and the furry bear was jerked overboard”—a gleam of hope for the younger generation (8).

First, Bart's "game" with George and the newspaper itself (each with patriarchal, economic, and militaristic overtones) combine with the terrace's great trees to gild the edges of Bart's painterly frame. Woolf reinforces the individual/collective play momentarily, when Isa sees the nurses and children through her bedroom window; later in the narration, but earlier in time, just before Bart enters the scene:

She tapped on the window with her embossed hairbrush. They were too far off to hear. The drone of the trees was in their ears; the chirp of birds; other incidents of garden life, inaudible, invisible to her in the bedroom, absorbed them. Isolated on a green island, hedged about with snowdrops, laid with a counterpane of puckered silk, the innocent island floated under her window. Only George lagged behind. (10-11)

Isa immediately acknowledges the prerational immediacy of the natural world. Her view is framed both by her window and by the complex tangle of threads that pull her between Haines and Giles, revealed by the self-portrait in her mirror.⁶⁶ Her description of the children on a "green . . . innocent island" evokes the position of England bounded by the Channel. Woolf's depiction of Bart as a monstrous male terrifying a toddler had already identified the dictator at home, and the greater "innocence" of the green island Isa sees can only be maintained while he remains outside of the frame. Isa herself ventriloquizes Woolf's critique of Bart in the next scene, where "the master was not dead; only dreaming; drowsily, seeing as in a glass, its lustre spotted, himself, a young man helmeted."⁶⁷ We learn that Isa "had persisted in stretching his thread of life so fine, so far," like the nurses and Mrs. Manresa, through feminine attention. By bearing George and Caro, she "continued him" (13). In mentally defending George against

⁶⁶ The threads of love and hate in this scene (and, in a way, the pull of the looking-glass) have their counterparts in Lucy's cross, "gleaming gold on her breast," and Bart's noose (7; 9).

⁶⁷ I cannot take the issue up here, but given Woolf's detailed engagement with St. Paul in *Three Guineas*, surely some play on putting away childish things and seeing through a glass darkly seeps into this passage. So too the "shadow of the rock" recalls *The Waste Land*, joining several early references to Eliot (13): Mrs. Haines' nightingale (3); Lucy's setting up "perhaps in Kensington, perhaps at Kew" and the Prufrockian description, "when winter wept its damp upon the panes, and choked the gutters with dead leaves" (6); and Isa—not Lucy—sitting in front of her mirror like Cleopatra on a burnished throne (10).

cowardice, she equates Bart, “the old brute,” with his dog, even as she establishes her struggle with the Angel in the House, revealing that she loathes “the domestic, the possessive; the maternal” (14).

Second, by juxtaposing George’s holistic vision with Lucy, Bart, and Isa’s differing “views,” each with their respective frames, Woolf sets up the novel’s larger play with mediated and unmediated understanding. One polarity is the unmediated access to the natural world that George briefly glimpses. The other polarity is looking at a “view” with sight mediated by rational conventions, like how Lucy will admit to being careless with the lenses through which she sees the world. In my reading, mediated vision is analogous to seeing shadows on the wall of the cave. Woolf shows us what it means to see a “view” in the coffee scene after lunch, whose links to the Allegory I will trace after a brief summary. As Isa brings her deck chair outside, she wonders aloud “to what dark antre [cave] of the unvisited earth” they are headed. Giles brings chairs outside “and placed them in a semi-circle, so that the view might be shared, and the shelter of the old wall. For by some lucky chance a wall had been built continuing the house, it might be with the intention of adding another wing, on the raised ground in the sun. But funds were lacking; the plan was abandoned, and the wall remained, nothing but a wall” (36). The puppets sit along a superfluous wall, which was built in a vain attempt to benefit from the light of the sun. They are grouped together with a shared view, of which Woolf quotes a fictional nineteenth-century guidebook to cite the sights: “The Guide Book still told the truth.” If the “view” has a claim to “truth,” then it is a self-contained and solipsistic truth, punning on a singular point-of-view and set of beliefs: “They looked at the view; they looked at what they knew, to see if what they knew might perhaps be different today. Most days it was the same” (37).

As the party reflects on pictures and poetry, Bart raises and questions the very possibility George's holistic consciousness: "Thoughts without words . . . Can that be?" (38). In a brief shift of narrative perspective, we first learn of the newcomer Miss La Trobe. She had lauded the terrace as "very place for a play," looking on the trees "standing bare in the clear light of January" (40). Woolf evokes Promethean fire as another source of light, reemphasizing Giles' anger at their inaction: "This afternoon he wasn't Giles Oliver come to see the villagers act their annual pageant; manacled to a rock he was, and forced passively to behold indescribable horror" (41-42). The afternoon lengthens, the "audience" cannot be moved to help set up for the pageant, and Woolf describes her puppets as prisoners:

They stared at the view, as if something might happen in one of those fields to relieve them of the intolerable burden of sitting silent, doing nothing, in company. Their minds and bodies were too close, yet not close enough. We aren't free, each one of them felt separately, to feel or think separately, nor yet to fall asleep. We're too close; but not close enough. So they fidgeted. (45)

They fidget against the impasse of the threads that pull and entrap them, as when "all was sun now," "Isabella felt prisoned" (45-46). Bart "gave up the game" to sleep (47). In contrast to Giles, who longs to be engaged in action, Lucy and Dodge "surveyed the view aloofly, and with detachment," that is, disinterestedly (46). The "senseless, hideous, stupefying" repetition is only broken when Lucy, like a marionette master, offers Dodge a tour of the house and "He rose with a jerk, like a toy suddenly pulled straight like a string" (47).

Woolf imprisons her puppets under a wall. Although they share a view, it is not at all established that they see the same things, or in turn, that they do not see the same things differently.⁶⁸ All they see is what they already know, shadows on the wall of the cave that echo

⁶⁸ Earlier, Lucy and Bart's competing perspectives reveal a logical absurdity: "what she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't" (18). Later, "Fish had faith, she *reasoned*. They trust us because we've never caught 'em. But her brother

“truths” laid out for them, mediated as by a guide book. Only after pageant ends will Woolf make the distinction explicit, when the exhausted La Trobe judges the performance harshly:

It was here that she had suffered triumph, humiliation, ecstasy, despair—for nothing. Her heels had ground a hole in the grass.

It was growing dark. Since there were no clouds to trouble the sky, the blue was bluer, the green greener. There was no longer a view—no Folly, no spire of Bolney Minster. It was land merely, no land in particular. She put down her case and stood looking at the land. Then something rose to the surface. (142)

Her heels make new caves, digging into the terrace like George grubbing and grouting, while the despair that tempers her triumph mimics his ruined moment of vision. Instead of a mediated view of touristic Englishness, the “land merely, no land in particular” rhymes with Domesday book thread on what exists in and on the island. Without the mediation of a guidebook view, the purer vibrant colors complete the experience.⁶⁹ Woolf’s emphasis on the land echoes John Middleton Murray and T. S. Eliot, among other contemporaries, to highlight industrial civilization’s damage to the natural rhythms of life.⁷⁰ To be clear, her adamant rejection of narrow nationalism distinguishes her valuing of “land merely” from the Nazi ideology of *Blut und Boden*.

The next play, which “lay behind the play she had just written,” is what rises to the surface, out of the cave of La Trobe’s newly-attuned consciousness (44). The reprieve from a

would reply: ‘That’s greed.’ ‘Their beauty!’ she protested. ‘Sex,’ he would say. ‘Who makes sex susceptible to beauty?’ she would argue. He shrugged who? Why?” (139; my emphasis).

⁶⁹ The Figgis and Domesday books join other “guides” in the novel: Lucy’s Outline of History; Bart’s Encyclopedia, Lemprière, and “country gentleman’s library” (18; 80); and the “Horn book,” a children’s primer on manners (98). When Lucy shows Dodge the shelf of “poets from whom we descend by way of the mind,” she echoes her early-morning reflection on the “barking monsters . . . from whom presumably . . . we descend,” presaging Bart as a monstrous male and introducing a Darwinian counterpart to the Platonic ascent and return to the cave (47-48; 7).

⁷⁰ Ellis reads *Four Quartets* through *The Idea of a Christian Society* to find an early sort of ecocriticism (he does not use the term). Eliot was of the moment, as “To call for a return to the land, or a reattachment to the soil is conspicuous in the period leading up to World War II” (39).

view enables aesthetic creation.⁷¹ In my view, La Trobe and Woolf have similar goals (sharing some, like peace and harmony, with Plato), despite employing divergent means, as artists, to reach them. La Trobe's engaged aesthetics and megaphonic tactics contradict Woolf's understanding of autonomy. As an "outcast," La Trobe plays the role of Plato's Guardian, returned to the cave with her pageant as an educational tool for the good of the community.⁷² Her megaphone admits that despite her "*simulating indignation*" she has been freed and taken her ascent: "*I too have had some, what's called, education*" (127). When Plato uses the puppet-theater simile in the Allegory, he describes the "screen in front of puppeteers [*thaumatopoiōis*] above which they show their puppets [*thaumata*]" (*Republic* VII.514a-b). *Thaumatopoiōis* is literally "wonder-working; a conjuror, juggler," while *thaumatos* is "whatever one regards with wonder" (Liddell and Scott). Benjamin Jowett defends the simile by referencing the marionette-metaphor in the *Laws*, suggesting that *thaumatopoiōis* should indicate the "master of the show," rather than "the actual exhibitor or puller of the strings" (315). La Trobe combines these senses. Again, she is "not merely a twitcher of individual strings" but "one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world" (105). Within the cauldron of the cave, she is a puppeteer whose floating voice echoes as she carries those "artifacts" whose shadows are cast on the wall.⁷³

⁷¹ The common understanding is that La Trobe's next work will become *Between the Acts*. Her relationship to Woolf thus recalls my argument about Stephen's labyrinthine rite of passage, which enables him to become the ludic modernist writer of *Ulysses*.

⁷² Socrates presses the enlightened into service, to "compel the best natures . . . to make the ascent and see the good" and then "compel them to guard and care for the others" (VII.519c; 520a). Similarly, La Trobe is both singular and compelled: "She was an outcast. Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind. Yet she had scribbled in the margin of her manuscript: 'I am the slave of my audience'" (*BA* 143).

⁷³ Again, the "artifacts," or "statues" are "of people and other animals, made of stone, wood, and every material," just as La Trobe's props are "Cardboard crowns, swords made of silver paper, turbans that were sixpenny dish cloths" (*Republic* VII.514c; *BA* 43).

Woolf distances herself by describing La Trobe as an archetype of the avant-garde. We meet her “pacing to and fro between the leaning birch trees” with “the look of a commander pacing his deck.” Her art is “engaged” like that of a “leaning tower” poet: “Out came the sun; and, shading her eyes in the attitude proper to an Admiral on his quarter-deck, she decided to risk the engagement out of doors” (43). Called “Bossy,” she recalls the Dictator of *Three Guineas*, insofar as she dictates directions to her cast and her moral to the audience through a gramophone (44). La Trobe knows how the play of light will affect her message, shading her eyes to adjust her sight to that of her audience. She manipulates the vision of her actors, those whom Socrates calls “the uneducated who have no experience of truth,” outraging social as well as dramatic conventions: “Expenses had to be kept down . . . Thus conventions were outraged. Swathed in conventions, they couldn’t see, as she could, that a dish cloth wound round a head in the open looked much richer than real silk” (*Republic* VII.519b; *BA* 45). Like Woolf, she exploits the disparity between reality and appearance as an artist’s prerogative toward richer truth, rather than a roadblock on the ascent to the ideal. Bart (of all people) notes her descent, her return to the cave: “What she wanted . . . was darkness in the mud; a whisky and soda at the pub; and coarse words descending like maggots through the waters” (138). As an avant-garde commander and Guardian, she embodies the twin extremes of Giles, the man of action, and Dodge, the disinterested aesthete. Woolf thus collapses the polarity, which Plato ascribes to the uneducated and the educated, between proper action and the “intolerable burden of sitting silent” (*BA* 45).⁷⁴

The pageant reinforces this play with the captive audience viewing shadows. “Chuff, chuff, chuff went the machine,” early on, “Could they talk? Could they move? No, for the play was going on. Yet the stage was empty; only the cows moved in the meadows; only the tick of

⁷⁴ For Plato, the uneducated “would fail because they don’t have a single goal at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim; the latter [the educated] would fail because they’d refuse to act” (*Republic* VII.519c).

the gramophone needle was heard. The tick, tick, tick seemed to hold them together, tranced. Nothing whatsoever appeared on the stage” (57). Woolf is wary of the megaphone as the consummately modern method of binding community. The cows initiate the increasingly insistent presence of the natural world. Although I earlier noted that the dance “round the majestic figure of the Elizabethan age” symbolizes blind circling around the mulberry tree of Queen and Empire (indeed, such is the orbit projected by the Socratic prescriptions of the pageant genre), Woolf begins to muddle rational and prerational distinctions (64). She describes the dance as a “mellay; a medley; and entrancing spectacle (to William) of dappled light and shade on half clothed, fantastically coloured, leaping, jerking, swinging legs and arms. He clapped till his palms stung” (64-65). “Mellay” and “medley” share the nearly-obsolete definition, “A cloth made of wools dyed in different shades or colours and mixed before being spun,” which combine with the priest’s benediction (beginning “*From the distaff of life’s tangled skein, unloose her hands*”) to bolster the connection between a puppet’s threads and the spinning of fate (OED; BA 64). In current usage, the distinction recalls Joyce’s *Labyrinthspiel*, with the imposition of rational order—a “medley”—onto a disordered “melee.” The dappled light plays like shadows leaping on the cave’s wall. Dodge’s clapping and Giles as the “surly hero squirm[ing] on his seat” are further figurations of the puppet-prisoners as children, Woolf’s ironic rejoinder to Socrates’ command: “Do not . . . keep children to their studies [*paidas*] by compulsion, but by play [*paizontas*]” (*Republic* VII.536e; Shorey trans.).

The “indigenous” old lady reacts with similar glee. She “resembled an uncouth, nocturnal animal, now nearly extinct.” Laughing “like a startled jay,” she is not unlike one of the prehistoric “barking monsters” that Lucy imagined that morning (65; 7). If something about her recalls the prerationality of what has long existed on the island, it has been subdued by the

rational social order, since her “marriage with the local peer had obliterated in his trashy title a name that had been a name when there were brambles and briars where the Church now stood” (65). She laughs at the song, “*A-maying, a-maying*, they bawled. *In and out and round about, a-maying, a-maying*,” which takes over the audience—but only up to a point: “It didn’t matter what the words were; or who sang what. Round and round they whirled, intoxicated by the music. Then, at a sign from Miss La Trobe behind the tree, the dance stopped. A procession formed” (65). Out of prerational, Dionysian revelry, rational, Apollinian order demands a hierarchal procession of royalty and gentry. In spite of her commands, La Trobe’s orders come from above: “Here was her downfall; here was the Interval. Writing this skimble-skamble stuff in her cottage, she had agreed to cut the play here; a slave to her audience—to Mrs. Sands’ grumble—about tea; about dinner—she had gashed the scene here. Just as she had brewed emotion, she spilt it” (65-66). As with Isa’s poetry, teatime propriety deals deep wounds to art. Here, at least, La Trobe is bound by multiple conventions. Woolf dramatizes the processes of rational discourse containing and constraining emotion: pageantry circumscribing art. That La Trobe “stubbed her toe against a root” is Woolf’s version of a vaudeville gag, prerational nature asserting itself quietly in the face of La Trobe’s cursing rage.

Although the gramophone’s “*Dispersed are we*,” is a moan and a lament, it releases the audience from the pageant’s bonds not into freedom, but into tea (66). Mrs. Sands’ unquestioned propriety in “giving precedence, of course, to one of the gentry” suggests that this “duty to society” is merely a means to uphold the existing order of things (71). The teeming animal life in the barn might as well describe the prisoners in the Allegory or the puppets at coffee after lunch: “All these eyes, expanding and narrowing, some adapted to light, others to darkness, looked from different angles and edges.” The blue-bottle mistaking the “cake” for a “yellow rock” suggests

the illusory nature of what is real (69).⁷⁵ Plato's central concern is for the danger of mistaking illusion for truth, the artificial for the natural, a confusion that La Trobe exploits for her own ends. Between scenes in the Restoration act, Bart is disappointed that Sir Spaniel could so cynically "bind" himself to Flavinda under Reason's watch (91-92). Against the aristocratic cunning depicted onstage, the gramophone "gently stated certain facts which everybody knows to be perfectly true," describing a pure and innocent pastoral life, which "the view repeated in its own way . . . The sun was sinking; the colours were merging; and the view was saying how after toil men rest from their labours; how coolness comes; reason prevails." The cows themselves step forward, "saying the same thing to perfection" (92). The cows will play a dual role in the remainder of the pageant, becoming crucial actors within La Trobe's Dada-inflected aesthetics. For Woolf, they are a prerational foil for not only those rational discourses that La Trobe criticizes, but also the genre itself. Here, Woolf emphasizes the ease with which the audience confuses the naturalness of the cows with the artificiality of the narratives in play and of the play—so many "views" and shadows on the wall: "Folded in this triple melody, the audience sat gazing; and beheld gently and approvingly without interrogation, for it seemed inevitable" (92).

It is precisely this purportedly inevitable and unquestioned acceptance of shadows as truth that La Trobe will challenge in her role as Guardian, although Woolf emphasizes a contradiction in her methods in order to more clearly separate herself as author of *Between the Acts* from La Trobe as its pageanteer. As the interlude in the Restoration act ends, the contingency of the outdoor setting cuts that three-ply melody short when, in the wind, "and in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible." "Illusion had failed," laments La Trobe, "'This is death.'" At this point, at least, La Trobe is more interested in the power of

⁷⁵ The polarity is reversed later when Isa "felt Dodge's eye upon her as her lips moved. Always some cold eye crawled over the surface like a winter blue-bottle! She flicked him off" (120).

illusion, denied to her by chance. The cows bring the performance back to life with an invocation of prerational desire and community: “From cow after cow came the same yearning bellow. The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment.” The redemptive primeval voice is made ambiguous when the cows’ lowing is mirrored by the audience lowering their heads to read their programs (96). The pageant audience is a passive herd. Although La Trobe plans to toy with failed illusion between the Victorian and Present Day acts, here she cannot abide the aleatory freedom of “becoming.”

When La Trobe does intend to embrace chance, the audience is again captive, “They were all caught and caged; prisoners; watching a spectacle. Nothing happened” (120). La Trobe introduces “ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows, etc.”, in preparation for her final critique of seeing a view. But even here she notes “‘Reality too strong’ . . . every second they were slipping the noose. Her little game had gone wrong.” She wishes that she had not tried the experiment: “If only she’d a backcloth to hang between the trees—to shut out cows, swallows, present time! But she had nothing” (122). The rain shower intervenes and “Nature had once more taken her part.” The pageant proceeds to the present day, its “flattering tribute to ourselves” starting with the backcloth that La Trobe wanted: “That was a ladder. And that (a cloth roughly painted) was a wall.” In the notes of the newspaper reporter, Mr. Page: “Miss La Trobe conveyed to the audience Civilization (the wall) in ruins; rebuilt (witness man with hod) by human effort.” The audience applauds at the view in self-regard, primed by “what the *Times* and *Telegraph* both said in their leaders that very morning” (123). The reporter and his paper are, again, the author and book of Isa’s generation. What they said is repeated by the audience’s choric voice. To the tune of La Trobe’s nursery rhyme, they see real swallows dancing “Round and round” the wall of their civilization, framed by the terrace trees. They interpret this view as a paean to modern

progress, couched as a politician's speech on the wonders of capitalist consumption and the autonomy that it purports to bring: "Homes will be built. Each flat with its refrigerator, in the crannied wall. Each of us a free man; plates washed by machinery; not an aeroplane to vex us; all liberated; made whole . . ." (124).

Against this rationally-sanctioned view, La Trobe springs her trap: "The tune changed; snapped; broke; jagged. Fox-trot, was it? Jazz?" The narration itself becomes syncopated, "Very up to date," and the choric voice recognizes the rejection of the newspaper's Socratic prescriptions: "What is her game? To disrupt? . . . O the irreverence of the generation which is only momentarily—thanks be—'the young.' The young, who can't make, but only break; shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole" (124). La Trobe shivers the audience's view into splinters more literally, revealing the mirrors onstage to reflect the audience as "a mellay; a medley": "Out they leapt, jerked, skipped" (64; 125). Her disruption is momentarily complete, when even "the reticence of nature was undone, and the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved" (125). La Trobe fleetingly introduces prerational immediacy into the rational pageant, forcing each individual to see herself reflected as a monstrous male. Chance prevails again, however, when the mirrors become too heavy and are suddenly stilled. The prisoners resist the Guardian's attempt to redirect their vision: "All shifted, preened, minced; hands were raised, legs shifted. Even Bart, even Lucy, turned away. All evaded or shaded themselves—save Mrs. Manresa who, facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass" (126). As if coming out of the cave for the first time, the audience is, in Socrates' formulation, "dazzled by the increased brilliance" of La Trobe's mirrors (*Republic* VII.518a). They try to shade their eyes from the light of her "truth," to escape the echoing sounds of the pageant and keep their own narrow "views" intact.

The gramophone openly asserts that the mirrors are meant to show the prisoners the bonds of convention: “before they had come to any common conclusion, a voice asserted itself. Whose voice it was no one knew. It came from the bushes—a megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking affirmation.” As I have intimated, La Trobe’s use of the megaphone marks the distance between her and Woolf as artists, yet one of its affirmations reiterates Allegory’s presence in the novel. “*Don’t hide among rags. Or let our cloth protect us,*” the voice declares (127). This is an overt exhortation against the ornaments of the monstrous male, bound up with the Angel in the House’s knitting, read as a puppet-master’s threads. The choric voice recognizes as much after the Restoration act, when the pageant makes the audience feel “a little not quite here or there. As if the play had jerked the ball out of the cup;”—life as child’s play—“as if what I call myself was still floating unattached, and didn’t settle. Not quite themselves, they felt. Or was it simply that they felt clothes conscious?” (102). La Trobe’s goal is to make her audience “clothes conscious,” to feel the gravity of the orbits into which they are held. In light of the Allegory, the rags and cloth whose protection the audience might seek are also “civilization” itself in the form of the backdrop that La Trobe wanted to quell the prerational as illusion failed a second time, and which becomes the wall of “cloth roughly painted” that the newspaper interprets as an unmitigated triumph (accompanied by a ladder for easy ascents and descents, no less) (122-123). At the end of the pageant, the wall of cloth is the wall of the cave upon which shadows are cast, so many arbitrary “views” of what “*we call, perhaps miscall, civilization*” (127). It is also the screen-wall that hides the puppeteers, while Woolf’s reimagines the prisoners as the shadow-casting puppet-artifacts themselves.⁷⁶ Even the megaphone is held to chance, its moralizing cut

⁷⁶ The word that Grube translates as “artifacts” [*skeue*] is close to that for their “shadows” [*skia*], both of which echo *skeuazo*: “prepared by art” (*Republic* 514b; Liddell and Scott). That *skeue* also means “equipment, attire, apparel, dress” reinforces Woolf’s play on clothing and her flat characters as representative of rational logics or “shadows.”

short: “A hitch occurred here. The records had been mixed. . . . Jimmy, who had charge of the music, threw them aside and fitted the right one—was it Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Mozart or nobody famous, but merely a traditional tune? Anyhow, thank heaven, it was somebody speaking after the anonymous bray of the infernal megaphone” (128). Any unity that the pageant does finally engender comes not from moralizing insistence—forced, shadowy prescriptions on the pageant’s wall—but from the Dionysian play of a nameless tune, harnessing what Nietzsche calls the “*primary and universal*” power of an anonymous and possibly ancient folk song, the “musical mirror of the world” (*Birth* 53; emphasis in original).⁷⁷

For my purposes, something more than chance interrupts the megaphone: namely, Virginia Woolf herself, impishly playing the god in La Trobe’s machine. Like its antecedents in classical outdoor drama, La Trobe’s pageant has a *deus ex machina* at its denouement, or rather, an *auctrix ex machina*. When an anonymous voice later asks, “Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord” (essentially the same question), it inadvertently reinforces Woolf’s aesthetic and political wariness of the “infernal megaphone” (136; 128).⁷⁸ The problem for La Trobe is that a “hitch” occurs—the noun being a kind of “noose or knot,” and the verb “to move (anything) as with a jerk,” like a marionette (OED; *BA* 47; 65; 125). Woolf thus asserts her own status as a puppet-master over her novel, binding and pulling the master of the show, clapping her hand over the braying megaphonic mouth in order to let the prerational folk music unite the distracted (128). Following through on this conceit, the *auctrix ex machina* also appears both times that “illusion fails.” The first, when the cows speak in “the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment,” La Trobe actually exclaims, “Thank Heaven!” as the narrator

⁷⁷ See Stewart for Woolf’s knowledge of Nietzsche.

⁷⁸ Woolf describes it as a “gramophone” and a “machine” equally, using each word 23 times.

does at the hitch (96; 128). The second time, as the audience was “slipping the noose,” Woolf unleashes—silently, without prophetic thunder—the “sudden and universal” rain that pours “like all the people in the world weeping” (122-23). It, too, allows the prerational to be heard, here as the “voice that was no one’s voice . . . that wept for human pain unending,” weeping the nursery rhyme that brings the novel back around to *Three Guineas*. “No one had seen the cloud coming,” unlike the war, which cuts through the “thread” of Streatfield’s discourse as the barbarous music of modernity: “Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. *That was the music*” (122; 132; 131). Like George facing the monstrous male that morning, “The audience gaped; the audience gazed” (131). The airplanes and megaphone become the macrocosmic equivalent of Bart’s engine-like “roar and . . . hot breath,” his booming “hollow voice” (9). Streatfield’s appeal ends awkwardly when La Trobe demurs her curtain call and the pageant closes in properly Socratic fashion, but not without a pun on Woolf as the god—or devil—in La Trobe’s machine: “A needle scraped a disc; chuff, chuff, chuff; then having found the rut, there was a roll and a flutter which portended *God* . . . (they all rose to their feet) *Save the King*” (132). That ellipsis is a pregnant pause that bears heavy irony.

The word of Streatfield’s that the planes “cut in two” is “opportunity” (131). That the pageant genre censors art for social, religious, and political ends is most apparent here, in the disparity between the closing paean to God and Empire and La Trobe’s longer critique and megaphonic moralizing against this status quo. And it is here that Woolf diagnoses La Trobe’s lost opportunity. If La Trobe is the master of the pageant within the cave, Woolf is the master without. Any pageant must rely on the re-presentation of discourses, broadly understood in the sense of repeating an established view, the same play of shadows on and echoes off the wall of a cave. In her attempt to turn the Socratic prescriptions on their head and show her captive

audience their bonds, La Trobe uses mirrors to reflect reality, to “snap us as we are,” as the choric voice has it (125). Woolf introduces the tactic to turn her “*thaumatopoiōis*,” the master of the show, into a “*thaumaston . . . sophistēn*,” a wonderful sophist; that is, the “craftsman” [*demiourgos*] who later in the *Republic* “is able to make, not only all kinds of furniture, but all plants that grow from the earth, all animals (including himself), the earth itself, the heavens, the gods, all the things in the heavens and in Hades beneath the earth,” all with the simple aid of a mirror (X.596c-d). For Plato, such a craftsman only reproduces images or shadows thrice removed from ideal truth, like the poets. What Socrates offers as a final indictment of poetry is actually an ironic revelation of the pageant’s rational discourse as play: “we’re fairly well agreed that an imitator has no worthwhile knowledge of the things he imitates, that imitation is a kind of game and not something to be taken seriously” (*Republic* X.602b).

By no means am I implying that Woolf wants to banish La Trobe from the island for offering mere shadows of truth in place of truth itself. Rather, Woolf suggests that La Trobe’s failure of vision is more complex than she realizes. It is not only that, for example, Giles and Cobbet do not “see” her implicit political critique in the defamiliarizing Conradian sense: “She saw Giles Oliver with his back to the audience. Also Cobbet of Cobbs Corner. She hadn’t made them see. It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual, her vision escaped her” (68). La Trobe cannot see the limitations of her “engaged” art. Bart diagnoses the right disease from the wrong symptoms when he asks, of Mrs. Manresa, “Did she really believe that we were disinterested?” (120). La Trobe certainly invests her interest in better ends than would the pageant that Colonel Mayhew wants to see, but in grasping so desperately for social utility, her craftsmanship denies her aesthetics the autonomy that Woolf long extolled. As Woolf put it in her 1937 essay and radio broadcast titled “Craftsmanship,” words, because “they shuffle, they

change,” are predisposed toward uselessness: “If we insist on forcing them against their nature to be useful, we see to our cost how they mislead us, how they fool us” (*E* VI:92).⁷⁹ For as much as Woolf might appreciate La Trobe’s views, she shies away from the pageanteer’s vantage. Her contempt for narrow linguistic utility suffuses the rich allusiveness, the referential slippage and shuffling, the reverberation of scraps, orts, and fragments of culture echoing in the words between the acts of the pageant and in the words of *Between the Acts*. Distancing herself from La Trobe, Woolf can have her megaphonic cake and let the blue-bottles eat it too.

In its way, La Trobe’s pageant is the theatrical correlative to the “shilling shockers” in the library at Pointz Hall. In the terms of *Three Guineas*, La Trobe is an “outsider” who takes her avant-garde engagement to the public in the cave. Woolf is the ludic modernist who subtly creates private beauty, “not by repeating your words and following your methods,” as she writes to her correspondent, “but by finding new words and creating new methods” (*TG* 170). One could say that there is no such thing as a “modernist” pageant, outside of staging one within a ludic modernist novel. The voice Woolf wants us to hear will not come from a loudspeaker, even one that is “anonymous” (*BA* 127). Rather, the novel attunes us to the primeval voice that Woolf, by playing “god,” presents as the voice of nature, as what exists on the island. Since there is no Platonically ideal truth that is not already a “view,” Woolf wants us to see and hear what is outside of the cave altogether, reconciling the prerational with the shadows that have constituted our view of civilization for so long. Ludic modernism, at its core, consists in playing prerational games on reason’s playground: here, Woolf uses Plato’s means to prerational ends.

To conclude with the final scene, in the microcosmic parlor, within the cave of Pointz Hall, where the puppets are gathered under the “reading lamp” of enlightenment: “There in that

⁷⁹ Her concern is, in fact, quite Platonic. She later figures the mind as a “deep, dark and only fitfully illuminated cavern” (*E* VI: 96).

hollow of the sun-baked field, were congregated the grasshopper, the ant, and the beetle, rolling pebbles of sun-baked earth through the glistening stubble. In that rosy corner of the sun-baked field Bartholomew, Giles and Lucy polished and nibbled and broke off crumbs” (147). The narrative voice conflates the puppets with insects, as it will shortly do with animals, inanimate trees, and children.⁸⁰ “Shadow had obliterated the garden,” and with the light of the sun no longer beckoning, the mouth of the cave seems further away, higher up: “The great square of the open window showed only sky now. It was drained of light, severe, stone cold. Shadows fell” (147-48). Giles “crumpled the newspaper and turned out the light,” thereby removing two layers of mediation separating him from Isa, just as she drops her sewing so that they might remove their literal and metaphorical clothing. Thus closer together, they can “fight as the dog fox fights with the vixen” (148). They do so “in the fields of night,” outside of the cave and without the familiar safety of its mediating roles: “The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among the rocks” (149). The curtain rises only when Giles and Isa are imagined on a landscape free from the scars of civilization—land merely—free to speak as they are, without echo. Folded into the allusive register of these closing lines is Sir Thomas Browne’s reflection—much admired by Woolf—on how fragments of the past prove our underlying humanity as much as they insinuate the paucity of our knowledge of the future: “A dialogue between two infants in the womb concerning the state of this world, might handsomely illustrate our ignorance of the next, whereof methinks we yet discourse in Platoes denne, and are but embryo Philosophers” (539). Woolf’s foxes are out of their den. Their fecundity is primed, their position precarious. Unlike

⁸⁰ Bart is “leafless, spectral” before being likened to his dog: “As a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered” (148). Lucy is “like a child who will be told to go to bed,” while her “letter from Scarborough” is symmetrical with “the scars made by the Britons” et al. at the outset (148; 3-4).

the pageant and the newspaper, Woolf cannot promise homes and refrigerators, but she can reveal the myriad bonds that constrain individual autonomy in the present, such that the future might unfold under the light of the sun. Neither promise, nor fully prophecy, her ludic modernism speaks in a voice that is not a monologue of reason alone, but a dialogue with the prerational. Like Plato's, Woolf's dialogue is not without tension: as she surely suspected, the surest way to stop one's ears against "the voice that was no one's voice," to stay dry of the rain weeping tears for human pain and dry of the "*unloosened ocean*" alike, is to seek the shelter of a cave (123; 136).

Conclusion

Woolf's dialogue with Plato is latent in her famous description of "moments of being," which was drafted alongside *Between the Acts*. She describes the "shock" she receives in these moments as "a revelation of some order; it is a token of some *real* thing behind *appearances*" ("Sketch" 72, my emphasis). But unlike the young George looking at his flower, "as one gets older one has a greater power through reason to provide an explanation," which "blunts the sledge-hammer force of the blow" ("Sketch" 72). There is a movement between unconscious daily life as so many moments of "non-being" like "nondescript cotton wool," to the shock itself, then to the rational reflection on what the shock reveals ("Sketch" 70). From her intimation of a hidden reality behind superficial appearances, Woolf summarizes a longstanding "philosophy" entirely consistent with her attempts, in fiction, to bring some light into her readers' caves:

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. ("Sketch" 72)

“We are the music” is a brief defense of what, in my Conclusion, I call “collective autonomy.” It is a rational reflection on the prerational ground bass of life. We stop our ears to that music at our peril; or rather—and this is no small thing, because it is not a Siren’s song—at the peril of art.

Woolf’s ludic modernism suggests that we risk becoming automata in the moment we disregard the contingency of the discursive logics upon which we depend; when we see their guiding light as fixed, immutable, and natural, rather than a tool of our own invention and at our command. This is not a radical denunciation of enlightenment, but a recognition of its power—an homage evident in the fact of borrowing Plato’s means to qualify his ends. The socio-political vision that, like many critics, I have traced from *Three Guineas*, through the essays, to *Between the Acts* is not, historically speaking, revolutionary. It is not a call to throw up barricades in the streets, but to tear them down in the mind. It is not a call to bind, imprison, or constrain individual autonomy, but to free all individuals into the autonomy that has only ever been exercised by a few. It is not a call to silence the egoist’s “I,” but for a momentary pause to better hear the choral “we.” A progressive and pacifist rejoinder to the Dictators Woolf heard from abroad and saw at home, it recognizes the private brother trapped and overshadowed by the monstrous male. It is a call to end individual indifference, in favor of individual responsibility for the ends of action. It is a hopeful, insistent desire that civilization might be changed with civility, and thus, finally, it is just a vision: a fiction projected far away, as if hanging on the horizon—“moving, diminishing, but still there”—in the sky of the mind (*BA* 144).

Conclusion

Unless both thought and the passions are fully
engaged the energies of play recede.

-Isobel Armstrong (*Radical Aesthetic* 59)

Collective Autonomy; or, The Dumb Yearning for Common Ground

As I indicated in the Introduction, a brief coda to the Woolf chapter will help to gild the frame of this dissertation. Leaving the cave was not a new theme for Woolf. In the “1917” section of *The Years*, Eleanor Pargiter takes to the basement during an air-raid. “When shall we be free?” she wonders, “When shall we live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave?” (281). She is considering Nicholas’ ruminations (the first of several) on how their society binds “The soul—the whole being” into “one hard little, tight little—knot.” He laments, “Each is his own little cubicle; each with his own cross or holy books; each with his fire, his wife . . .” Maggie interrupts him to underscore Woolf’s continuity of symbolism, “Darning socks,” she adds (*Years* 280). *Three Guineas* echoes the scene in its correlative discussion of the professions: “What then remains of a human being who has lost sight, and sound, and sense of proportion? Only a cripple in a cave” (*TG* 88). If the end of *Between the Acts* offers slight hope that Woolf’s characters and contemporaries might make the ascent, it is hope deferred, because the novel, to return to the formulation from *A Room*, uses writing “as an art,” refusing some professed and professing Streatfield a final moral interpretation in favor of disinterested ambiguity (79).

When Woolf does use her writing as a “method of self-expression” in “The Leaning Tower”—as she admits in the *Diary*, “I’m interested”—she outlines a theory of aesthetics that combines ludic modernism’s playful autonomy with an egalitarian vision (*A Room* 79-80; *D* V:13 Apr. 1940). While it is not uncommon to read *Between the Acts* through the lens of the late essays, I follow suit here because of the proximity between her account, the new aestheticism,

and my own sense of where “The Modernist Playground” lies within the field of modernist studies. “The Leaning Tower” opens with a genealogy of post-Enlightenment English fiction, which developed as it did because of the class divisions structuring British society like so many hedges separating fields. Since the Channel assured the island’s safety during the Napoleonic wars (with the help, Woolf neglects to mention, of Admiral Nelson), a practical “immunity from war” set in among the upper and middle classes: “War then we can say, speaking roughly did not affect either the writer or his vision of human life in the nineteenth century” (*E* VI:261-62). “But owing to that peace, to that prosperity,” she continues,

each group was tethered, stationary—a herd grazing within its own hedges. And the nineteenth-century writer did not seek to change those divisions; he accepted them. He accepted them so completely that he became unconscious of them. Does that serve to explain why it is that the nineteenth-century writers are able to create so many characters who are not types but individuals? Is it because he did not see the hedges that divide classes; he saw only the human beings that live within those hedges? (*E* VI:263)

The claim that her forebears recognized individuals “within,” not “across,” hedges is a crucial distinction.¹ For Woolf, this unconsciousness explains why “each of those writers only dealt with a very small section of human life”—Thackeray, the upper middle-class; Dickens, the lower and middle. It was also, however, a prerequisite of art. The writer takes in his surroundings, “seeing all he can, feeling all he can, taking in the book of his mind innumerable notes . . . his under-mind works at top speed while his upper mind drowns. Then, after a pause the veil lifts; and there is the thing—the thing he wants to write about—simplified, composed” (*E* VI:263). Such is the necessity and power of Wordsworth’s “emotion recollected in tranquility” (*E* VI:263-64).

Woolf describes the process by which the novel became autonomous. The disinterested “unconsciousness” that she posits does not extend to Miss La Trobe’s pageant, which exercises a

¹ To be sure, that charge has been leveled against Woolf herself—a fact she gleefully exploits in the posthumously-published “Middlebrow” (*E* VI:479-83).

“courtly” function (what Esty calls a “binding” function), and which puts its commitment to shivering into splinters the rational order ahead of its artistry (Esty 59). Even so, the gramophone’s valedictory affirmation attempts to move beyond the content of this individual work by emphasizing the social function of art, qua art: “*Dispersed are we; who have come together. But, the gramophone asserted, let us retain whatever made that harmony*” (133). Although the pageant fails aesthetically because of its interestedness, its attention to the community offers both a warning and a promise.

The leaning tower poets of the 1930s bear out the warning. They saw the terror of the Great War and heard the voices of dictators on the radio. Throughout the twentieth century “all the old hedges were being rooted up; all the old towers were being thrown to the ground,” and so they had no tranquility in which to recollect (“LT” *E* VI:267). They were forced to realize they were “aristocrats; the unconscious inheritors of a great tradition,” but one that was “founded upon injustice and tyranny” (*E* VI:267; 269). “Trapped by their education, pinned down by their capital,” Woolf continues, “they remained on top of their leaning tower, and their state of mind as we see it reflected in their poems and plays and novels is full of discord and bitterness, full of confusion and compromise” (*E* VI:269). Compromises riddle the “didactic, the loud speaker strain that dominates their poetry.” They want to “destroy bourgeois society,” but have no replacement: “the poet in the thirties was forced to be a politician . . . a dweller in two worlds, one dying, the other struggling to be born” (*E* VI:271-73).² From this discord comes a common desire, “the desire to be whole; to be human. ‘All that I would like to be is human’—that cry rings through their books—the longing to be closer to their kind, to write the common speech of

² By recalling the snake and toad in *Between the Acts*, this last phrase links the leaning tower poets to Giles, underlining the impotence of their respective “action”: “There couched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. . . . It was birth the wrong way round” (69).

their kind, to share the emotions of their kind, no longer to be isolated and exalted in solitary state upon their tower, but to be down on the ground with the mass of human kind" (*E* VI:273).

The leaning tower poets, in other words, cry out for a prerational connection to their world, for freedom from all that mediates their common humanity. Conscious of class hedges and feeling put out to pasture, they are the reverse of the nineteenth-century writers: "The inner mind was paralysed because the surface mind was always hard at work" (*E* VI:273). Woolf puts the axis of autonomy and engagement at seemingly paradoxical odds with that of the rational and prerational. Like their predecessors, the 1930s poets' aesthetics were shaped by historical contingency. But where the nineteenth century allowed unconscious tranquility, in the twentieth, the rational "surface mind" demands engagement. If autonomy arises in unconsciousness, then the experience of the leaning tower poets suggests that aesthetic freedom may also depend upon freedom from the constraints of rational-play discourses. While *Angel in the House* censors the body, stoking the rational fear of patriarchal retribution and rousing the writer from her "artist's state of unconsciousness," the leaning tower poets' engagement derives from the rational recognition that their tower is made of mulberry trees, so to speak ("Professions" *E* VI:483). From such great heights, they could neither mow down hedgerows, nor mute the frantic protest of conscious reason enough to shape their material disinterestedly. Woolf updates Wordsworth to outline a theory of ludic modernism: aesthetic autonomy depends upon the movement between unconscious emotion and conscious recollection, between prerational and rational play.

Let me pause here to reiterate that, by virtue of bringing the ludic to light, the new aestheticism's insistence on the propositionality of autonomy already begins to solve the dilemma that Woolf describes for the leaning tower poets. The ludic modernism I have described, however, goes further than autonomy as rational *as-if* play to acknowledge the

consequences and the alternatives of the prerational, particularly in the play of immediate experience. Both *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts* are wary of blind, monomaniacal rationality, but neither forgives the unconscious (nor, for that matter, conscious) indifference to rationality's material effects, as captured by the split aspect of the puppet's paradoxically free imprisonment. "The Leaning Tower" goes on to grapple with the riddle Woolf reads in the previous 150 years of literary history: the disinterested art that creates whole and compelling individuals forgets the community, while self-flagellating leaning-tower egotism renounces the individual to redeem the communal. This is a false binary. Woolf credits the leaning tower poets for their honesty, at least. Because they openly confronted how green their pastures were,

the writers of the next generation may inherit from them a whole state of mind, a mind no longer *crippled*, evasive, divided. They may inherit that unconsciousness which as we guessed—it is only a guess—at the beginning of this paper is necessary if writers are to get beneath the surface, and to write something that people remember when they are alone. For that great gift of unconsciousness the next generation will have to thank the creative and honest egotism of the leaning-tower group. (*E* VI:274; my emphasis)

Out of their egotism might arise unconscious autonomy. Their inheritors might be freed to leave the cave, no longer "crippled," to keep Woolf's uncomfortable terminology.

Two developments undergird the promise Woolf sees for a postwar world "without classes or towers" (*E* VI:274). First, she cites the widespread feeling, and many politicians' promises—for whatever those are worth—that "we are not fighting this war for conquest; but to bring about a new order in Europe." In this new order, "we are all to have equal opportunities, equal chances of developing whatever gifts we may possess." Note that for Woolf, equal opportunity depends upon the rejection of *agon*-istic play as competition and conquest, whether rational or prerational. Woolf's second reason for hope is the income tax, "already doing in its own way what the politicians are hoping to do in theirs": supporting new public libraries and robust public education for new generations of common readers (*E* VI:275; 276). The bridge

between the dying world and the one struggling to be born will be built in the village school—where the young mix with the living—not the old public school, where they mix with the dead (*E* VI:276). Such mingling is ultimately the only way to “preserve and create.” It necessitates common readers trespassing on once-forbidden grounds: “we shall trample many flowers and bruise much ancient grass. But let us bear in mind a piece of advice that an eminent Victorian who was also an eminent pedestrian [Leslie Stephen] once gave to walkers: ‘Whenever you see a board up with “Trespassers will be prosecuted,” trespass at once”’ (*E* VI:277). If, in light of the intervening history, a free and classless society based upon the eager support of public intellectual culture seems naïve, it only highlights the height of the hedges and the depth of the ruts around the old mulberry trees, the fortifications of the sons of educated men.

Tearing down the old hedges, Woolf surmises, will affect what writers see and how they write. As literature “is always ending, and beginning again . . . the novel of a classless and towerless world should be a better novel than the old novel.” Novelists will have more—and more interesting—people to describe, “real people, not people cramped and squashed into featureless masses by hedges.” Thus freed, the novelist and poet alike might “shift from his shoulders the burden of didacticism, of propaganda” (*E* VI:275). Put differently, they might find new ways of mixing autonomy and engagement, the individual and the collective, the living and the dead, all on newly-common ground. Where Woolf alluded to Sir Thomas Browne to temper her tentative projection into Isa and Giles’ next act, his past writing offers a glimpse this future art. To Woolf, Browne is an idiosyncratic egoist who could yet channel “sublime speculations of the human imagination,” transcending the self-regarding, false universality of bourgeois

autonomy (“Elizabethan” *E* IV:59).³ Whereas Proust, like his nineteenth-century forbears, “makes us more aware of ourselves as individuals,” in Browne’s *Urne-Buriall*

it is all a question not of you and me, or him and her, but of human fate and death, of the immensity of the past, of the strangeness which surrounds us on every side. Here, as in no other English prose except the Bible the reader is not left to read alone in his armchair but is made one of a congregation. But here, too, there is a difference; for while the Bible has a gospel to impart, who can be quite sure of what Sir Thomas Browne himself believed? The last chapters of *Urn Burial* beat up on wings of extraordinary sweep and power, yet towards what goal? (“Sir Thomas Browne” *E* III:369)

Here we have an egoist without an agenda, preaching to a congregation without a cause, out of an imagination that knows neither the bonds of dogma, nor the pull of convention. Woolf herself, like Stein, Joyce, and Eliot, was such an egoist, and she lauds Browne for exercising a similar “power of bringing the remote and incongruous astonishingly together. . . . A piece of an old boat is cheek by jowl with the funeral pyre of Patroclus” (“Sir Thomas Browne” *E* III:370). This could also fairly describe most of the ludic modernist works I have discussed.

Between the Acts explores the “trespassing” central to Woolf’s idealistic hopes for postwar art with further subtlety. After the Elizabethan act, Mrs. Parker inveighs against Albert’s inclusion in the pageant, “‘But surely,’ said Mrs. Parker, and told Giles how creepy the idiot—‘We have one in our village’—had made her feel. ‘Surely, Mr. Oliver, we’re more civilized?’” Giles’ incredulous response plants him firmly within his hedge, “‘*We?*’ said Giles. ‘*We?*’” Giles’ sense of his isolated individuality, inherited from his Victorian forbears, reveals him as Woolf’s cipher for a reductive understanding of personal autonomy. Moments before, in the midst of the Elizabethan act, he may have seen the precariousness of his position. As Giles remembers a snippet of Cowper, ending “I . . . I . . . I,” he glares again at Lucy, whose attention to the pageant

³ She writes, “Locked up in *Urn Burial* is a quality of imagination which distinguishes it completely from its companions [on her bookshelf]—as chance has it—*The Old Wives’ Tale* and *A Man of Property*” (“Sir Thomas Browne” *E* III:370). It certainly is not chance, but quiet polemic that distinguishes Browne from Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, respectively.

alerts him to Albert: “There was no need to dress him up. There he came, acting his part to perfection. He came ambling across the grass, mopping and mowing.” (59). He “skipped along the front row of the audience,” singing (60):

*I know where the tit nests, he began
In the hedgerow. I know, I know—
What don't I know?
All your secrets, ladies,
And yours too, gentlemen . . . (59-60)*

Albert's “mopping and mowing” is most directly meant as a mocking grimace. But he comes at the audience in the image of trespassing that resonates from the ivory tower of *A Room* to the common ground of “The Leaning Tower,” ambling across the grass. His mopping and mowing threatens to raze down hedgerows and wipe clean civilization's slate.

The common simple is onto the gentles: to Giles, for one, it is a threat, but the social vision I have traced in the novel, with the guidance of the essays, suggests that it is also a promising opportunity. *Between the Acts* wants to make whole what La Trobe splinters. Like the congregation brought together by Browne's sublime imagination, the novel imagines a social role for art that would allow individuals to face their own social roles as “monstrous males” with rational clarity. It posits the need keep free a place where all members society might meet on open, public ground—land merely, “no longer a view”—before dispersing again (*BA* 142). Demanding that individuals interrogate the ends of the logics that pull them leads neither to the negation of the self, nor does it abandon individual agency to the Fates, nor is it a constraint on freedom. It is a call to recognize that the individual's interest—at the self-interested level of individual wholeness and human identity—lies in her mutual obligations to the community and in the playful harmony between rational enlightenment and prerational experience. Qualifying

Peter Bürger, the “sublation of art” into the “praxis of life” is accomplished through ludic modernism, not the avant-garde, reinstating the community within contingent autonomy (49).

Whether Albert’s mopping and mowing constitutes a threat or a promise likely depends upon the pastures in which a reader already grazes—and I will return, by way of finally concluding, to the perspectival relativism of how one perceives the commoner rightly trying to reclaim common ground. Woolf, wisely, anticipates the skepticism of the threatened. Whereas I read La Trobe’s willingness to propagandize as a foil to Woolf herself, that distinction does not encapsulate her entire character. Woolf not only damns La Trobe as a moralist, but pities her as a figure for what the artist will become if the war does not “break the ring” of her society’s organizing logics. In the terms of “The Leaning Tower,” they may fail to cross the “dangerous gulf” between the worlds of the living and the dead, “in which, possibly, literature may crash and come to grief.” As a result of the “criminal injustice” of England’s disparities of education and opportunity, wealth and leisure, Woolf declares, “one is tempted to say England deserves to have no literature. She deserves to have nothing but detective stories, patriotic songs and leading articles for generals, admirals, and business men to read themselves to sleep with when they are tired of winning battles and making money” (“LT” *E* VI:276). Bürger would follow Adorno to call those injustices “suppression,” and the very different social function of art that they enforce, the “culture industry” (Bürger 40; 50).⁴ And yet, the lament is that literature might come to “grief,” from the Old French *grever*, to grieve, literally to burden; the burdening of literature being precisely the point of Socratic censorship, imposed to propagate and palliate the status quo

⁴ *Between the Acts* adds pageants and shilling shockers to the list of acceptably soporific genres. Despite having sprung herself from the Angel’s sartorial prison—“She had given up dealing with her figure and thus gained freedom”—the nouveau riche Mrs. Manresa heralds the culture industry, teaching “the village women *not* how to pickle and preserve; but how to weave frivolous baskets out of coloured straw. Pleasure’s what they want” (30; emphasis in original).

(OED). La Trobe is Woolf's pessimistic projection into a future society that is less egalitarian and more reductively individualistic; a society that blindly puts efficiency, competition, and consumption before preservation, equality, and sustainability; a society that condemns artists to be handmaidens of God and Empire in their new guises as Mammon and Market. If society continues to cede its direction to the sons of educated men, Woolf insists, it will be at the price of art being forced to multiply their interest.

With its emphasis on unconscious emotion and conscious recollection, "The Leaning Tower" implies that autonomy is only freedom when it admits of not only rational *as-if* play, but also of the tempering immediacy of the prerational. No surprise, then, that in *Between the Acts*, it is pointedly the cows who "annihilated the gap; bridged the distance"—not yet between the worlds of the living and the dead, the old world and the new, but among individuals: folding aesthetic emotion into collective autonomy. Their "dumb yearning" is a communal answer to one individual's distress, and they speak in a "primeval voice" without exclusion, conquest, or competition (96). If Woolf's contemporaries are to bridge the gap, they will have to answer the yearning of their community in kind (if not in kine); to hear the voices of those who, like Albert, are dumb, "Without the power of making their voice effectively heard; without any voice in the management of affairs" (OED). Citing Hannah Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Christine Froula argues that Woolf seeks "a dialogic community, to which real differences, as Arendt says, are so much less dangerous than indifference; a community of spectators who enact a public 'form of being together' where 'no one rules and no one obeys,' where people seek to 'persuade each other'" (314).⁵ Indifference is the ransom the puppet holds

⁵ Froula ascribes this power directly to La Trobe, finding it in the "aural mirror" of the music that concludes the pageant. I argued, however, that that music, with its invocation of the prerational, is more properly ascribed to Woolf as *auctrix ex machina*.

out for its automatism. One cannot be persuaded by voices one cannot hear in the depths of a cave. Woolf does not name this future form of “being together,” but it must also be a means of “becoming together,” of readmitting what is censored, exiled, and scapegoated by solipsistic rationality, and of negotiating and renegotiating newer, looser, bonds. This is the new aestheticism’s emphasis on ensuring that reason is “self-legislating and future-oriented” (Joughin and Malpas 9). Ludic modernism recognizes prerational play as the agent of renegotiation, calling for a collective understanding of autonomy that insists upon situating individual artworks within their historical contexts—allowing for their capacities for social engagement—and upon situating individuals within the communities through which they are defined.

To insiders who cry that to remove the hedges would be to bet the farm, Woolf counters that mowing them down will not only bring freedom to roam, but will be the only way to ensure aesthetic freedom. While the cows exemplify this vision until the curtain rises on the next act, there is one human character who hears them and speaks their language; who thinks “very little of anybody, simples or gentry”; the only member of the audience who looks “fluid and natural” (20; 53). Introduced in the barn, “Leaning, silent, sardonic, against the door,” it is the cowman, who looks “like a withered willow, bent over a stream, all its leaves shed, and in his eyes the whimsical flow of the waters”: perhaps a portrait of Woolf herself, tears ready to flow for the world about to be born—in joy or in sorrow it was too soon to say (20; 136). If it is the cowman who might herd readers together on common ground, Woolf bestowed a fitting name: Bond.

Gambit or Endgame?

This dissertation has defined ludic modernism as a distinct strain of modernist practice, whose prevalence demonstrates its value as a strategy of reading. The bifurcated understanding

of play that I have borrowed and adapted from Spariosu clarifies fundamental concerns of the authors under discussion (concerns shared by authors across modernism, no matter how it is defined), including the interplay of reason and the irrational, thought and emotion, conscious action and unconscious motivation, representation and performativity, immutable truths and relativist contingency. Many of these binaries have been approached in other ways, such as by setting modernism against the avant-garde and/or postmodernism, even as Spariosu's schema has roughly compatible counterparts, from Nietzsche's distinction between the Apollinian and the Dionysian, to Victor Turner's liminal and liminoid cultural forms, to Lyotard's Kantian and Pagan practices of play. And again, there are a number of concepts running throughout the multidisciplinary corpus of play theory that can be glimpsed in the portrait of modernist play that I have drawn here, each of which can be encapsulated by the meta-theoretical capaciousness of Spariosu's distinctions.

Because it derives from *longue durée* intellectual history, Spariosu's work is particularly suited to embedding ludic modernism within the larger developments of which modernist artworks are a part. Without denying modernism's self-conscious status as a radical break with the past, turning to the ludic illustrates Adorno's contention, "Things that are modern do not just sally forth in advance of their time. They also recall things forgotten; they control anachronistic reserves which have been left behind and which have not yet been exhausted by the rationality of eternal sameness. When set beside the 'up-to-date' the advanced is always also the older" ("Vienna" 216). The emphasis on the simultaneity of prerational and rational play demonstrates the concern for linking the past to the present to the future so central to each of my readings. While it can seem that the prerational might be the preferred or more prevalent play mentality, it must be remembered that ludic modernists were living in, responding to, and influencing a social

context almost wholly organized by rational play—hence part of the reason that Huizinga, writing in the 1930s, could not distinguish the prerational as sharply as Spariosu.⁶ My archive represents a historical moment of transition, flux, change, and active reconsideration of categories of thought. The important point is that ludic modernists assumed a prerational mentality as a counterweight to—and not a wholesale replacement of—rational-play discourses. Recourse to the prerational challenges the silent, buried contingencies of reason.

Thinking in summative terms about ludic modernism has something of Miss La Trobe's mirror-trick about it: reading these authors anew through the ludic highlights how each viewer brings a view with her; how one is accustomed to seeing a certain way, inflected by idiosyncratic experience and contextual ideologies alike; how at the very moment one glimpses a competing perspective—perhaps, even, truly shifting one's habituated sight—the mirrors are stilled and one settles back into using the lens of the ludic not unlike Mrs. Manresa, “who, facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass” (*BA* 126). Just like one's reaction to the common simple mopping and mowing toward the gentry, articulating the consequences of ludic modernism may largely reflect what one is predisposed to see. I situated this project amid the new formalism and new aestheticism as a way to frame to its literary formalism. The overwhelming emphasis of all of the critics in the new aestheticism is the return to Kant and the reclaiming of autonomy from the clutches of ideology critique. Granting a hefty hypothetical, if *any* critics subsequently take up ludic modernism, no doubt many who are similarly predisposed will find that it can help to rescue autonomy.

⁶ Spariosu argues that since “modern science was, and still largely remains, the offshoot of the Age of Reason,” this is still the case today within scientific discourses (*DR* 166). The end of the twentieth century otherwise saw a prerational play mentality much more evident in Western society, at large, than at its outset (e.g. the identification of postmodernism with prerational play).

And yet, it is not the appeal to Kant, per se, that interests me, but the fact that the new aestheticism brings *as-if* play to the fore. If anything, ludic modernism would be suspicious of a wholesale return to Kant without an infusion of Nietzsche; or likewise, to Plato without a leavening of Heraclitus. As is apparent from my reading of “collective autonomy,” I have a different view of ludic modernism, one that perseverates on the specter of individual autonomy—taken reductively, I admit, as the individual’s isolation from everything else—sneaking back in to defend the solipsism of a narrow elite at the expense of everyone and everything else. Isobel Armstrong captures this reduction nicely, by way of deconstructing Terry Eagleton’s critique of the ideology of the aesthetic. She writes,

The ruling order, Eagleton says, *needs* Kant’s epistemology: it needs a persuasive account of freedom which masks the manoeuvres of the ideology of private capital. The self-identical law of the one, producing the autotelic and abstract free play of the aesthetic as an end in itself, is in dialectical relationship with a regressive, atavistically narcissistic individualist subject which must “coopt reality” to its own purposes (*Ideology* 86). This individualism is surreptitiously slipped under the protection of the disinterested activity of the aesthetic subject. (I. Armstrong 32; emphasis in original)

Eagleton, Armstrong continues, “constantly situates Kant in comic dilemmas which Kant has already systematically allowed for,” going on to highlight (as I noted in the Introduction), that like much ideology critique, he “ignores the *propositionality* of reason” (32; 33; emphasis in original). Her appeal turns back to play.

Perhaps my perseveration is merely personal paranoia, as indeed, the collaborative, *methetic*, and performative qualities of prerational play immediately refute the reduction of autonomy to “isolation.” Play, like the aesthetic surplus identified by the new aestheticism, is “*irreducible* within modernity . . . and thus has appeared in a range of different guises always as a ‘surplus’ to the organising drive of instrumental reason” (Joughin and Malpas 8; my emphasis). Although Eagleton may be unfair, his reduction nevertheless describes the longstanding rational-

play discourse of the individual in *practice*, in its effects upon society. In the realm of lived experience, appeals to this “reductive” freedom only serve to reinforce and propagate the ideology of private capital. Like Huizinga, writing too close to the prerational turn of ludic modernism, narrow individualism and self-interest are simply the air we breathe. Unlike Huizinga, our air is polluted (literally and metaphorically), against the clean and invigorating prerational that he could not quite see. As Armstrong herself is aware, reclaiming Kant on the basis of *as-if* play remains at the ethereal level of propositional logic, while here I would return to Andrew Bowie’s concern that the promises of propositional logic are borne out in social practice (“What comes after art?” 76). Ludic modernism’s concurrent recognition of a prerational counterpart readmits immediate experience, other forms of knowing and different epistemologies that can begin to account for the material effects of propositional reason.

Put differently, we have circled back around to Woolf’s attention to the ends toward which reason is put; to Joyce’s demand that we recognize the way and the destination together, both where we are led and how; to Eliot’s attempts to escape reductive individualism for the benefit of all; and, what is common to each author here, an underlying drive toward “education,” most directly acknowledged in my account of Stein’s toys. Ludic modernist “education” is manifest in bringing forward prerational play and balancing it against the rational. In Armstrong’s terms, it is “the transformation of categories . . . a change in the structure of the thought itself” (41). In Lyotard’s terms, it is “paralogy,” introducing new language games and revising the rules of existing ones (*Postmodern* 61). In the terms of the new aestheticism, it is discarding mystifications, reorienting reason toward the future (Joughin and Malpas 9).

To be sure, what Eliot calls the “historical sense”—“a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence”—is most directly enabled by education, particularly the non-

instrumentalized kind that Bowie, Woolf, and I, want to see made available to all, not just the sons and daughters of educated men (“Tradition” 38). Where Woolf anticipated the skepticism of those threatened by Albert, let me cite Adorno to anticipate skepticism of my desire to give everyone ludic modernist toys: “The elitist isolation of advanced art is less its doing than society’s; the unconscious standards of the masses are the same as those necessary to the preservation of the relations in which the masses are integrated”—this is Eagleton’s point; however reductive in theory, it holds in practice (*AT* 254). “This breeds resentment,” Adorno continues, “the resentment of the masses toward what is denied them by the education that is reserved for the privileged; and—ever since Strindberg and Schoenberg—resentment of the aesthetically progressive toward the masses” (*AT* 254). Our collective refusal, in practice, to cultivate the kind of public education from which the aesthetically progressive might flower can only be attributed to resentment toward the masses; but I see no such resentment in the aesthetically and socially progressive practices of ludic modernism.

“Everybody plays,” Armstrong insists (59). If broad, it is a place to start. By participating in the eminently egalitarian, collective autonomy that Beech and Roberts saw in early Romanticism, with ““forms of expression directly understandable without convention and without previous knowledge of tradition,”” ludic modernism throws open the gates to its playground (39; quoting Rosen and Zerner 18). Stein’s inaccessibility gives way once we start playing in earnest with her toys, gaining new perspectives on what is “useful” by giving up the rational-play directive toward utilitarian clarity (not unlike children repurposing and reimagining “adult” items). Compared with the manic aesthetic experimentation throughout *Ulysses*, Joyce’s trail of breadcrumbs is almost banal. But for a few of the crumbs, nearly the whole pattern can be descried simply by noting how many references to “bread” appear in the course of one day in

Dublin—no Latin, no knowledge of John Henry Newman, no Butcher and Lang, and no Linati schema are necessary. Eliot's dense tangles of allusion in *The Waste Land* are, at base, invitations for readers to take part in the communal culture that shaped him as an individual, that we might know its benefits and its shortcomings as intimately as himself. Woolf wants us to know the intricacies and omissions of English history in the way that we feel the Earth respond to a sudden burst of rain: a semi-conscious slowing of the pulse and nearly imperceptible elongation of the breath. In response to the new aestheticism's redefinition of "timeless" or "universal" values, I ventured the proposition that so long as a work of art is fun to play with, it will have enduring value. Refusing resentment, revising categories of thought, restoring what is best about humanity to all of humanity: the ludic is a strategy for ensuring a long game.

My title, "The Modernist Playground" acknowledges autonomy as play, despite having been formulated before my exposure to the new aestheticism. It likewise accords with Spariosu's contention that autonomy is a playground.⁷ To conclude, however, I also mean "The Modernist Playground" as just that: a kind of secularly consecrated space, free and open to all, supported by all; where you want to spend your time, and which rewards that desire; where you come as you are, not as you are forced to be; where when you arrived and whence you came matters less than the fact of your presence; where anything you need to know, someone will tell you, without derision or dissemblance; where you talk to your neighbors and laugh with their friends; where news and gossip, even slander and insinuation, are folded quietly into the mere play of

⁷ The passage reads, in full: "one can argue that literary aestheticism itself is only a strategy in the ceaseless agon that literature carries on with other stretches of discourse, and therefore is only a necessary moment in the history of cultural play. Without being relatively independent, literature could never fulfill its differential cultural function: its effectiveness depends upon its being able to create a free, self-enclosed space or *neutral* play ground, where certain models for or alternatives to reality can be proposed, tested, adopted, and rejected at will. By insisting upon this freedom requirement, literary aestheticism actually guarantees the proper functioning of the discursive power mechanism as a whole" (DR 27). Spariosu's later work attempts to move beyond social configurations organized around power at all. While I admire his arguments for the "irenic" potential of play in *The Wreath of Wild Olive*, I must save them for a future project.

conversation; where imagination is cherished for what it is and not for what it can be made to do; where children come most fully into who they are and into who they will become; and where adults feel the fleeting respite of freedom. Less by design than by communal consent—never by designation—it is a safe space. The breeze carries music and laughter (our music, our laughter). Yes, there are prohibitions, enforced by accord and rarely by force: no bullying, no buying, no selling, no solicitation, no advertising, and no commerce—only exchange. No wonder everyone is happy there. If the new modernist studies has made it increasingly possible, even unremarkable, to write of modernism—once so serious, so dour, so reactionary—as “ludic,” perhaps it is possible to envision an egalitarian future in which everyone can meet, at will, to play on the modernist playground. Perhaps.

Figures



Figure 1

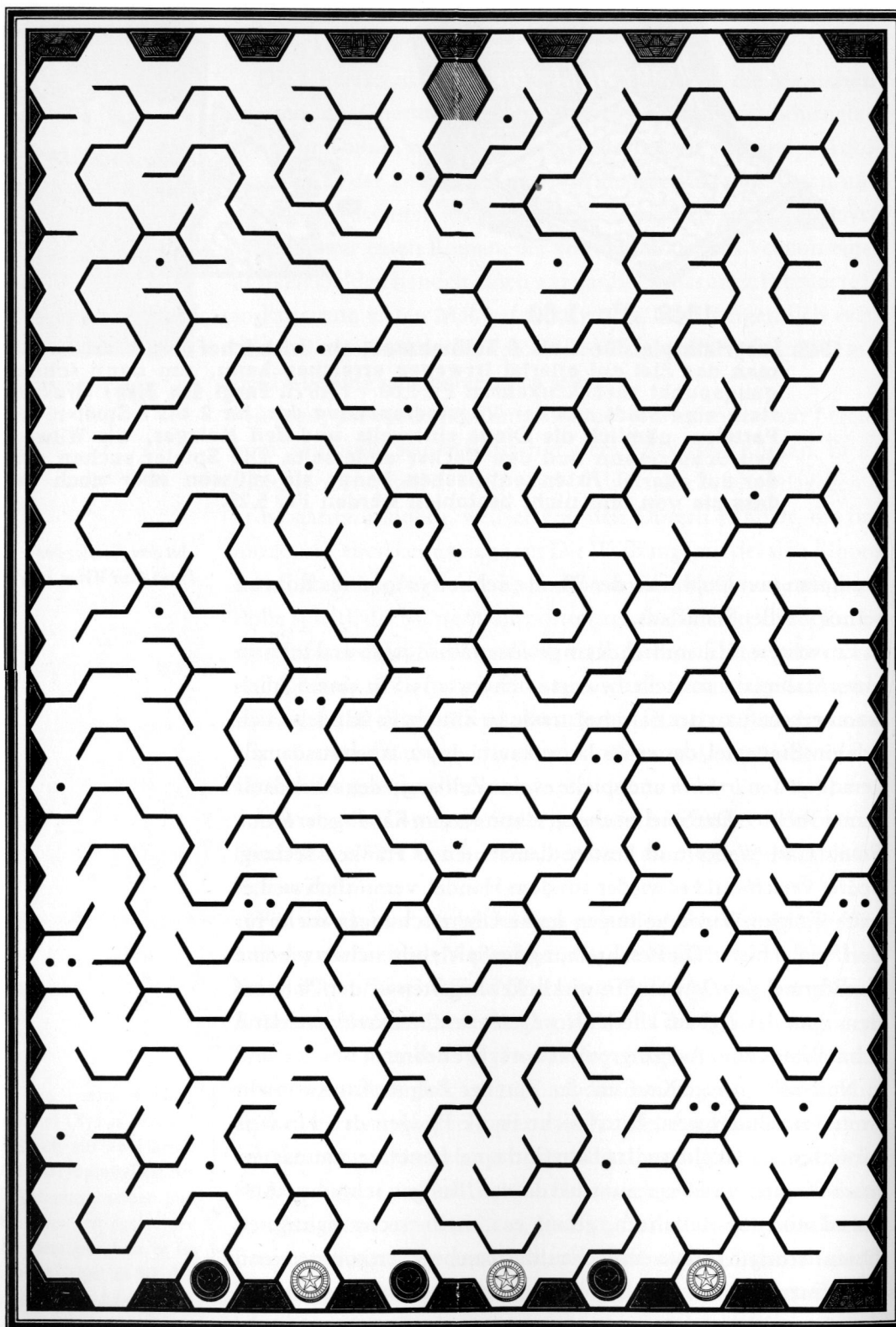
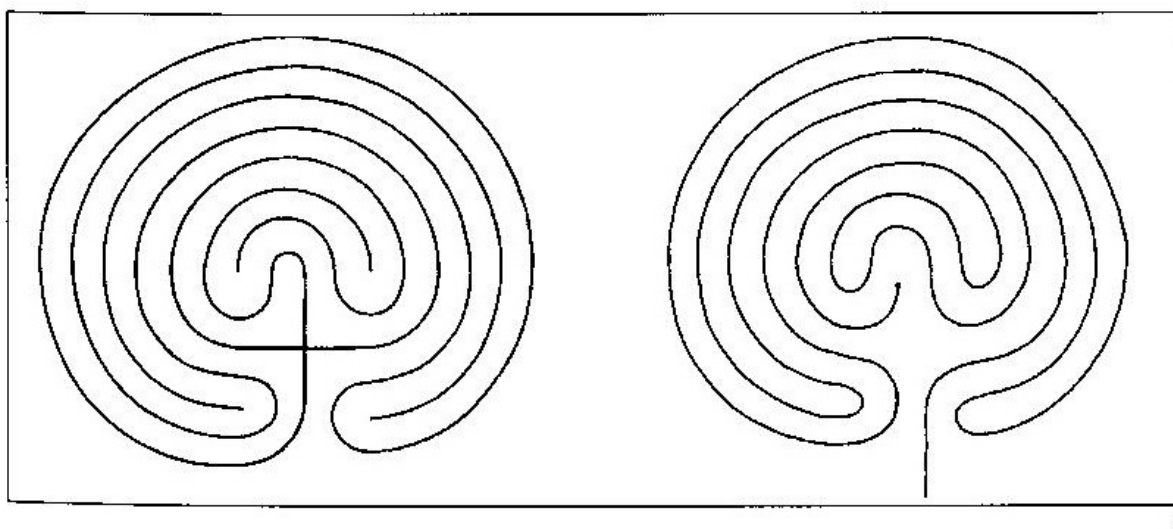


Figure 2 (Faerber and Luchsinger 84)



1 Labyrinth and the “thread of Ariadne”

Left: A Cretan-type labyrinth with seven circuits.

Right: The “thread of Ariadne,” the labyrinth’s path.

Figure 3 (Kern 33)

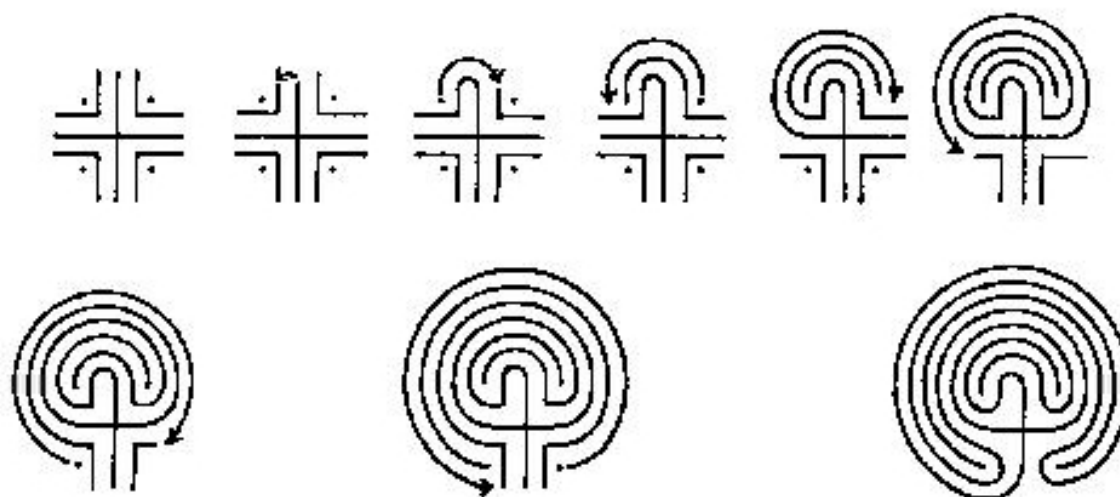


Figure 4 (Kern 34)



Figure 5 (Miller 19)

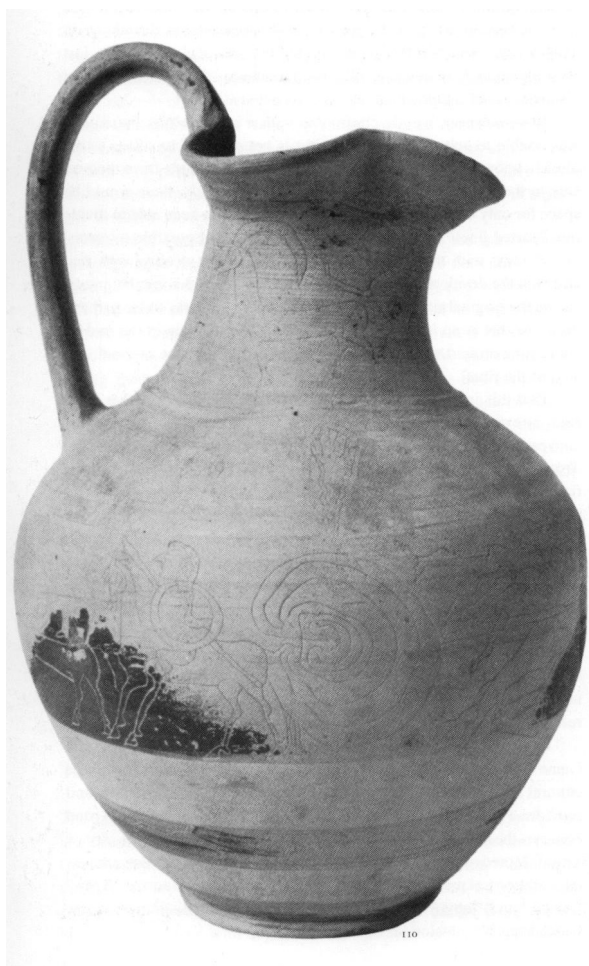


Figure 6a (Kern 80)

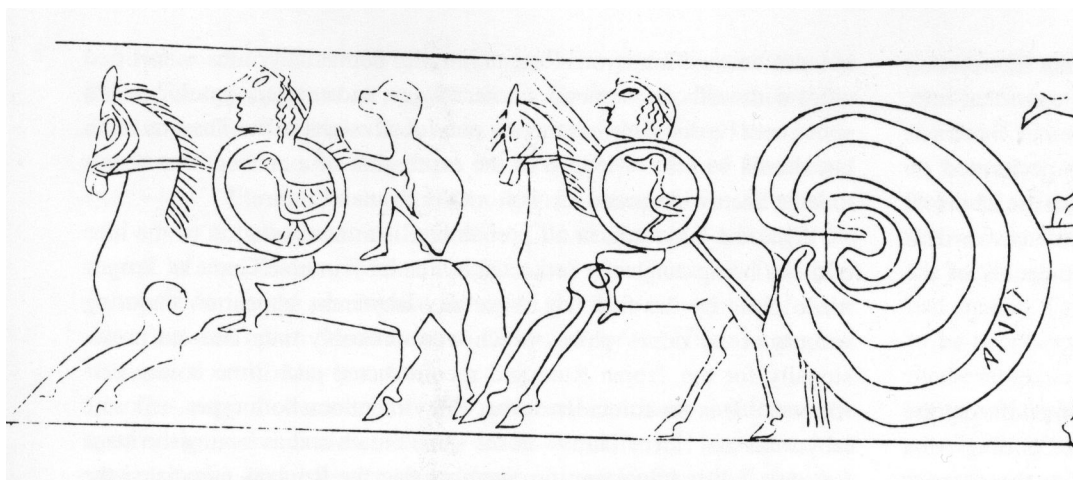


Figure 6b (Kern 81)

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