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Materiality and the Masculine Middlebrow: Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy

by

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Abstract

H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy are often grouped together as typical 'middlebrow' or 'Edwardian' authors, but little critical attention has been given to the connections between their works. This dissertation argues that Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy share a fascination with the material surroundings of their characters that grows out of popular evolutionary theory. English middlebrow culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries grew out of expanded educational opportunities for the middle and lower classes. By writing evolutionary concepts into their fiction, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy participate in the middlebrow project of providing readers with tools to informally further their education as adults.

Drawing on the critical work of Elizabeth Grosz, I argue that understanding Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's work requires an understanding of the material world that sees it as an active determinant of the lives of its inhabitants in evolutionary terms. As a result, this dissertation intervenes in contemporary material-culture criticism, which remains indebted to Marxist models of commodity culture and cannot accommodate the broad material environments present in these three authors' fiction.

This project analyzes texts produced by Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy between 1895 and 1928, including Bennett's 'Five Towns' fiction (*Clayhanger, Anna of the Five Towns, The Old Wives' Tale*), Galsworthy's 'Forsyte' novels (*The Forsyte Saga, A Modern Comedy, The End of the Chapter*) and Wells' mid-career 'Condition of England' novels (*Tono-Bungay, A New Machiavelli*). Individual

chapters explore how Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy use material culture to articulate gendered struggles about literary merit at the turn of the century, how the suburb and the provincial town function as ideal middlebrow environments, the three authors' responses to the material devastation of the First World War, and the political consequences of their emphasis on environmental influences.

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Introduction

The names H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy have come

to function as a short-hand reference for the respectable mainstream of early-

twentieth-century English writing, to the point where critics complain that the

frequent invocation of their names as typical Edwardian, middlebrow authors

limits our shared understanding of the period. Carola Kaplan and Anne Simpson

criticize scholars for adopting the modernists' arbitrary limitation of Edwardian

writing to "a composite Bennett-Galsworthy-Wells caricature" (viii), treating

"Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells […] as if they alone constituted all Edwardian

literature" (x) and ignoring "the works of other authors of the period, especially

women" (x). David Trotter makes a similar argument in *The English Novel in*

History: 1895-1920, complaining that critics oversimplify early-twentieth-century

English literature by practicing "a rigid demarcation between highbrow (James,

Conrad, Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf), middlebrow (Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy,

Forster) and lowbrow (names too numerous and repellent to mention)" (*The*

English Novel in History 1). Yet despite the widespread understanding of these

three authors as constituting a coherent group, there is next to no critical work on

exactly how they relate to each other[1]. The primary goal of this dissertation is to

articulate what these three authors have in common, and establish why they

constitute a key sub-group in the middlebrow literary landscape. Ultimately, I

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[1] The one notable exception to this research gap is William Bellamy's 1971 monograph *The novels of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy: 1890-1910*. While this work does document broad thematic similarities between the three authors, it is deeply flawed as a result of its anachronistic application of psychoanalytic theory. Given that there is little evidence that any of these three authors were well-versed in psychoanalytic concepts, Bellamy's presentation of them as therapists psychoanalyzing a fragmented modern world lacks historical accuracy and distorts the primary material.

argue that Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy participate in the middlebrow project of promoting informal education. In particular, these authors share a strong interest in popularizing evolutionary theory, which leads them to explore the power of environmental influences in shaping both individual lives and broader communities.

By examining how these three authors' representations of the material world engage with popular scientific concepts, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing critical examination of exactly which features define middlebrow writing in particular historical contexts. "The middlebrow" is a flexible term, and critics have claimed a wide range of authors for the unofficial canon of middlebrow writing, from Netta Syrett and Elizabeth von Arnim to E. M. Forster and Joseph Conrad. While the initial wave of middlebrow criticism focused primarily on women writers, following Nicola Humble's argument that middlebrow literature was "largely written and consumed by women" (2), recent criticism also explores the masculine middlebrow. I view Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy as a particular sub-set of the masculine middlebrow, enjoying a public status that was not afforded to many women middlebrow writers. As I discuss in chapter two, they were careful to distance themselves from their female contemporaries by insisting on the masculinity of their style and approach. The names Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy came to function as a shorthand for middlebrow writing in early-twentieth-century England not because the works of these authors are typical of middlebrow writing, but because these authors' gender, investment in popular science, and public status as political commentators made them some of the most

privileged and reputable middlebrow voices in the eyes of their first readers and early critics.

Yet Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's position of privilege in the middlebrow canon does not spare them from the disparagement that middlebrow writers have historically attracted. The question of who counts as middlebrow almost always depends on the relative prestige of a given author compared to his or her canonical highbrow contemporaries. From the early-twentieth-century 'Battle of the Brows' onwards, the label of middlebrow has always been a contested and variable term that designates an attitude towards the relative merit of high and popular culture more than any specific stylistic or thematic content. While this dissertation acknowledges the contested status of middlebrow writing and the combative relationships that middlebrow authors often had with their highbrow contemporaries, it also seeks to provide a more concrete definition of middlebrow culture in early-twentieth-century England that explains the middlebrow in positive terms, rather than through its difference from the neighbouring 'high' and 'low' brows. Although the specific forms taken by middlebrow writing vary by era and location, it is possible to identify the particular historical context which defines it at a given time and place. Through this historicist work, critics are better able to explain why middlebrow writing matters to a given group—what its key concerns are, which stylistic features it uses to distinguish itself from other 'brows', and how it appeals to its audience.

The particular historical context which produced the first wave of English middlebrow writing is the expansion of educational opportunities ushered in by

the Education Act of 1870. As Nigel Cross and Teresa Mangum document[2], this

Act provided much broader access to primary education for the middle and

working classes, as well as improving the general standard of education by

standardizing school requirements and replacing poorly-run voluntary schools

with publically-funded alternatives. By the turn of the century, the first generation

of the beneficiaries of the Education Act had learned to enjoy reading and wished

to continue learning without necessarily continuing their education. Publishers

and authors mobilized to satisfy their demands with a steady stream of accessible

texts. The typical middlebrow reader as represented by critics is an autodidact of

greater or lesser extent, from the readers of popular science texts to the

participants in the Q&A column in *Tit-Bits*. Critics Joan Rubin and Janice Radway

have identified popular outlines and book-of-the-month clubs, respectively, as key

structures for expressing the middlebrow desire for casual education[3]. The focus

of this informal education was largely on practical, systematic modes of

describing and understanding the world. As Frank Swinnerton, the great

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[2] See Cross' *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (1985) and Mangum's *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (1998). Mangum focuses on the importance of education for enabling the emergence of 'New Women', while also noting that there was a less widespread, but parallel call for the emergence of "the New Man" (204). The self-educated clerks and class-aspirant intellectuals who appear in masculine middlebrow fiction can be read as counterparts to the New Woman, since both grow out of educational reform. However, there was significant tension between men and women who benefitted from expanded educational opportunities, and men were by no means uniformly supportive of women's education, even as they pursued their own. For more on the role of gender in early-twentieth-century middlebrow writing, see chapter two.

[3] See Rubin, Joan. *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992. Print. and Radway, Janice. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Print.

chronicler of early-twentieth-century literary culture, writes, it was a time when "geologists, biologists, and anthropologists had come closer to men's bosoms than more abstract philosophers, such as Bacon, Hobbes, Hume, or Bentham had ever done" (21-22). The middlebrow reading audience at the turn of the twentieth century was deeply invested in reading as a path to self-improvement through informal, continuing education in a way that was new to England's middle class.

The Education Act significantly altered the marketplace for books in England. A new subset of writers emerged to serve the audience created by the Act. Middlebrow authors walked a careful line, providing the moderate intellectual challenge desired by their readers without alienating their core audience through excessive formal experimentation. Swinnerton describes Wells and Bennett as "instinctive educationalists, tellers, explainers, helpers" who nonetheless "thought themselves ordinary men, addressing other ordinary men" (189). Swinnerton characterises the kind of education provided by them as accessible and modest, in contrast to education provided by university: "Wells explained the entire progress of mankind, not always to the satisfaction of dons, in *The Outline of History*; Bennett, more modestly still, advised his fellow-creatures on the formation of literary taste and the proper use of leisure" (189). Middlebrow authors informed, and middlebrow readers learned, but this exchange of knowledge was always presented in such a way as to allow its relatively easy integration into daily life. Wells used his popular history, for example, not to provoke or challenge his readers but to formalize the knowledge-seeking already being undertaken piecemeal by his intended audience. In the preface to his

Outline, he writes that "Multitudes of people, all the intelligent people in the world, indeed—who were not already being specially instructed—were seeking more or less consciously to 'get the hang' of world affairs as a whole" (*Outline* 2) after the First World War. These non-specialist casual learners "were, in fact, improvising 'Outlines of History' in their minds for their own use" (*Outline* 2). This passage from Wells exemplifies middlebrow celebrations of broadly accessible informal education.

Middlebrow authors were not merely producers of popular literature; frequently, they were also educators. In particular, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy helped to popularize key concepts from evolutionary theory. Middlebrow literature emerged at the same time as popularizations of competing theories about the process of evolution reached the mainstream. Early middlebrow authors who were born in the 1850s and 1860s often had first-hand experiences of the shock dealt by evolutionary theory to Victorian social institutions. By the time they reached the peak of their careers, authors like Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy could comment explicitly on the issues of heredity and environmental influence that had so unsettled them as young people. Their investment in the ideas of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer found expression in their writing through integrated conceptions of materiality in which individuals are seen as components of large-scale material systems, and in which agency is distributed throughout the non-human, as well as the human, world. After Darwin, physical environments were no longer understood as the raw material for human activity. They were invested with a strange new power to select for traits, sustain or destroy species, and shape

the form and behaviour of the organisms which inhabit them. Especially for writers like Wells, whose interest in science led to a rejection of religion, the understanding of physical environments and other large-scale material systems became a pressing concern. If a writer seriously believes that a species' surroundings actively selects for certain traits, then to understand the human species he or she must investigate its surroundings—in the case of middlebrow writers, the infrastructure, architecture, and geological structures which, taken together, make up the English nation.

Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's shared interest in evolutionary theory led them to emphasize environmental influence in their writing. The resulting prominence of material description in their work was criticized by emerging modernist writers. As psychology exerted greater and greater influence on early-twentieth-century fiction, the complexity of characters' interior lives became one of the central concerns of novels. Writers who emphasized the external relationships between individuals and their material surroundings started to appear old-fashioned, and emerging writers skewered their style as superficial. The most influential attack on Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's material focus came in 1924, when Virginia Woolf published a short piece on the state of character in literature titled *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* as a rebuttal of Bennett's complaint that writers of Woolf's generation were incapable of creating realistic characters. In it, Woolf complains that Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy have "laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things" (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 18) to the detriment of their ability to create memorable individual characters. Woolf argues

that this obsession with material things is old-fashioned and creatively lazy, accusing Bennett of "trying to make us imagine for him [...] trying to hypnotise us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there" (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 16). This classifies them as 'Edwardians' in Woolf's eyes, while E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Lytton Strachey, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot comprise the emerging 'Georgians' (4).

D. H. Lawrence makes a similar argument about Galsworthy, writing in *Scrutinies* that Galsworthy's characters are only concerned with money, status, and the accumulation of material goods, and are therefore not full human beings. Lawrence argues that modern readers find Galsworthy's characters inferior to more psychologically complex characters because they have "lost caste as human beings, and […] sunk to the level of the social being" (55) due to their material attachments. In contrast to the unselfconscious immersion in the universe that Lawrence values, Galsworthy's characters understand themselves through their specific relations both to other people and to the 'objective reality' that surrounds them. The psychic split that produces the 'social being' happens

> "[w]hen he becomes too much aware of objective reality, and of his own isolation in the face of a universe of objective reality, [such that] the core of his identity splits, his nucleus collapses, his innocence or his *naïveté* perishes, and he becomes only a subjective-objective reality, a divided thing hinged together but not strictly individual" (Lawrence 56).

The destructiveness that Lawrence sees in an awareness of objective reality presupposes that consciousness can be purely subjective. Lawrence's modernist

distaste for system and structure leads him to reject Galsworthy's 'social beings' as inferior to true 'individuals' without acknowledging the powerful role that social and material networks play in constituting the subject for Galsworthy, and for middlebrow authors more broadly.

Yet for all their public conflict, the differences between middlebrows and modernists are not as severe as Bennett, Woolf, and Lawrence would have us believe. Woolf and Bennett view each other as belonging to different 'generations', yet they were born only fifteen years apart. All the authors involved in the 'Battle of the Brows' were concerned with exploring how people build and maintain connections with each other under the pressures of modernity, and many of them engaged with popular scientific discourses. Modernists often explore material networks, and contextualize individual lives in terms of evolutionary processes. Woolf, like Wells, connects her characters to large-scale evolutionary processes. At the opening of Woolf's *Between the Acts* Lucy Swithin is interrupted in her reading of an 'Outline of History' (presumably Wells'), and is instantly transported from the world of "elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters" (*Between the Acts* 4) to the present day. E. M. Forster provides another example of the continuities between modernist and middlebrow style. Forster is a borderline figure: Woolf identifies him as 'Georgian' (that is, modernist), but Trotter calls him 'middlebrow'. His oft-cited exhortation from *Howards End* to "Only connect! [And] live in fragments no longer" (168) confirms that questions of connection and integration were central to both modernist and middlebrow texts.

In many cases, the difference between modernists and middlebrows is a matter of emphasis and expression rather than a radical conceptual divide. The difference between the two groups is partially conditioned by the more immediate engagement of modernism with the First World War. While Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy all engage with the War in their own ways, they were already well-established writers by the time fighting broke out. Emerging modernists such as the 'men of 1914' (Joyce, Lewis, Pound, and Eliot) were more likely to have their style and outlook profoundly altered by the War, since their careers were relatively young. While modernism is still concerned with material and social networks, it is more likely to consider these networks against a backdrop of trauma and fragmentation. The trauma of the war made the stability of large-scale networks seem fragile and highly contingent. As a result, high modernism tends to begin with either the individual thing or the individual consciousness, building connections by working selectively outward from the individual rather than presupposing a stable system in which the individual element takes part. Generally speaking, this means that modernist writing maintains the primacy of the individual over the systems that he or she inhabits. Middlebrow writers, especially those of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's generation, are more likely to begin with the larger picture, and examine individual lives only as expressions of larger systems. Many of Wells' Edwardian protagonists are typical clerks and apprentices, meant to embody changing educational and social trends. Bennett considers the Potteries district where he sets many of his novels and short stories to be "England in little, lost in the midst of England" (*Old Wives' Tale* 37). In

these narratives, the point is not to understand the interior life of a character for its own sake. Rather, the goal is to better understand the material and social circumstances which produced that individual. Both modernists and middlebrows grapple with the problem of integrating individual experiences into larger historical realities. The difference is that for many modernists, explorations of larger realities support our understanding of individual experiences, while for many middlebrows, individual experiences testify to the nature of larger realities. Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy assume that the full integration of part and whole is always possible, and work to demonstrate how individual people participate in the life of the nation and the human race, how small areas typify larger material environments, and how contemporary events fit into the larger flow of history.

This dissertation aims to contextualize Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's middlebrow writing in terms of the groundswell of self-education and informal learning which it both profited from and encouraged. By historicizing these three authors as participants in the dissemination of popular scientific information which was one of the pillars of middlebrow culture at the time, we can see how several key features of their writing draw heavily on evolutionary theory. This helps us understand the conceptual complexity of their work. Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy use middlebrow writing as a means to work through problems which arise from the popularization of evolutionary theory: the relationship between individual lives and the grand struggle for survival; the vulnerability of individuals to environmental influences; and the question of how individuals can effect change in a world of seemingly arbitrary change.

Critical Frame

As well as contributing to scholarship on Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, this dissertation intervenes in critical and methodological discussions about materiality and material culture. Material culture critics and 'thing theorists' have investigated the political and social potency of physical objects over the past fifteen years, powerfully arguing that the physical objects which appear in fictional texts must be taken more seriously than traditional readings have allowed[4]. Critics like Elaine Freedgood and Bill Brown focus primarily on the things themselves, asking how their histories of production, circulation, consumption, and collection might shed new light on the texts in which they appear. While this dominant strand of thing theory has produced compelling scholarship, it is not suited for analyzing Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. These authors deal with much larger material networks in order to explore the influences exerted by various lived environments on their inhabitants. The housing developments, industrial regions, and natural environments which take such central positions in their novels are too large and unwieldy to fit into interpretive models intended by Freedgood and Brown for the analysis of checked curtains, pieces of broken glass, and collectors' hoards.

Both Freedgood and Brown use the figure of metonymy to structure their analysis of material culture. Instead of reading things metaphorically as bearers of meaning about the people who own them, Freedgood argues that we should read

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[4] The most oft-cited example of a critical framework which dismisses material things is Roland Barthes' argument in "The Reality Effect" that most physical description in realist novels is "insignificant notation" provided only to produce the "referential illusion" (147-8) of the physical world's presence.

things metonymically, as nodes in circuits of production and consumption. Metonymic connections, she argues, have the potential to be endlessly vagrant and open ended, and "may be attended by an equally subversive ability to recuperate historical links that are anything but random" (*Ideas in Things* 16). For example, rather than reading the mahogany furniture purchased by Jane Eyre metaphorically as standing in for Jane's good taste, she performs a metonymic reading that exposes the role of mahogany in a real history of slavery and deforestation in the Caribbean and anchors a postcolonial critique of the text. While Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy see the material objects as much more than metaphoric representatives of human traits, their insistence on integrating parts into coherent wholes makes the 'vagrant and open ended' model proposed by Freedgood a poor fit. Instead of metonymy, I argue that the most apt figure for exploring their work is synecdoche. Synecdoche focuses on the part, but only insofar as it can stand in for the whole. It is a more constrained figure than metonymy—there is only one whole to which the part can belong—and it relies on the physical belonging of the part to the whole rather than the more abstract relationships between signifier and signified present in metaphor. In the following chapters, I will work through several examples of this synecdochic model, revealing how Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy consistently subordinate part to whole.

This insistence on strong part-to-whole relationships poses a challenge to thing theory as implemented by Freedgood and Brown. In order to accommodate the broad material systems present in Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy (and, I

would argue, middlebrow writing in general) my research builds on understandings of materiality coming out of science studies, particularly the work of Elizabeth Grosz. Rather than adopting the subject/object split ushered in by the Enlightenment, Grosz positions herself within an alternative intellectual lineage "in which the thing is not conceived as other, or binary double, of the subject" but rather "as […] the resource for the subject's being and enduring" (124). She argues that by following "Darwin and his understanding of the thing" (124), we can better understand "the dynamism of the active world of natural selection" (124) which entails a fundamental human vulnerability to the influences of the material world. For thinkers in the Darwinian tradition, Grosz argues, material entities should not be understood as inert 'objects' which stand in opposition to the thinking, acting 'subject', but as components of a highly influential environment which actively shapes the lives of those who dwell in it. While Grosz includes Deleuze and Guattari in her Darwinian intellectual lineage, my historicist commitment to my authors' work keeps me from following Grosz' lead and adopting a Deleuzean or even eco-critical approach. While Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy would not find all of the terminology I use immediately accessible, they would, I think, acknowledge the account I give of their basic understanding of the material world as accurate. While they view individuals as vulnerable to environmental influences, human beings remain at the center of their work, and at the top of a hierarchy of being. They do not participate in the radical de-centering of humanity that many practitioners of eco-criticism undertake. They retain a loosely defined, 'common sense' definition of 'nature' as distinct from 'culture'.

However, they also understand thanks to Huxley that the artificial environments created by humans are only temporarily carved out of the surrounding 'state of nature' and are liable to immediately revert to an uncultivated form if they are not constantly and laboriously maintained.

My use of the term 'environment' should be read in the context of Huxleyan evolutionary theory rather than of eco-criticism. By environment, I mean a setting or surrounding which has the ability to encourage or discourage the development of certain characteristics and/or behaviours expressed by its inhabitants. By distinguishing between 'built' and 'natural' environments, it is not my intention to draw a stark distinction between the city and the wilderness. Neither Huxley himself nor my authors make such a distinction—the 'state of art' is always in the process of being reclaimed by the surrounding 'state of nature', and border zones between the two abound. Rather, the term 'built environment' is my equivalent of the Huxleyan 'state of art', and 'natural environment' the equivalent of 'state of nature'. I use the terms to distinguish between those spaces in which 'survival of the fittest' drives natural selection ('natural environment') and those which encourage the development of traits selected largely or completely by humans who plan and/or maintain the space ('built environment'). Unlike traditional Western conceptions of 'nature', this usage does not starkly contrast nature and culture. Rather, it acknowledges that both natural and built environments influence their inhabitants, and differentiates between the two according to the mechanism of said influence: either natural selection or artificial 'ethical' selection.

My focus on materiality in Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy serves a double purpose. Most importantly, it furthers scholarship on middlebrow writing by revealing the strong influence on that writing of evolutionary theory and other popular scientific narratives promising understanding of the material world. Material-culture criticism is an appropriate methodology for this project because my chosen authors all engage directly with the influence that material surroundings have on their inhabitants. The second purpose of my application of material-culture criticism and thing theory to middlebrow literature is to challenge prominent models of these approaches which cannot fully account for the ways Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy present the material world. The primary material I examine both requires a materially-focused methodology and poses challenges which enrich and expand material-culture approaches to literature.

Chapter Breakdown

My first chapter establishes the presence of evolutionary theory in the work of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, and examines the consequences this presence has for narratives about individual lives. When an author understands individual lives as miniscule components of the 'life of the race', and contextualizes human action not in terms of individual lifespans but in terms of the evolutionary timescale, it becomes very difficult to conform to the narrative structures of bildungsromans and family sagas. All three authors wrestle with the shift in scale which results from the adoption of an evolutionary perspective, and ultimately find meaning for individual lives by integrating them into broader

networks of region, nation, and ultimately species. The high degree of integration between part and whole apparent in the work of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy distinguishes them from their highbrow contemporaries and represents a particularly middlebrow approach.

Expanding on my initial observations about the way particular conceptions of materiality constitute a distinguishing feature of middlebrow writing, in my second chapter I explore how Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy assign pejorative forms of petty, short-sighted materialism to their female peers. They attribute a superficial and limited interest in consumer goods and frivolous decoration to both highbrow women writers, and their female middlebrow peers. Middlebrow writing has generally been understood as a 'feminine' style, with women making up the majority of middlebrow writers and readers[5]. As a result, male middlebrow writers like Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy consciously work to establish their own approaches as masculine for the sake of cultural prestige.

These authors' alignment of the middlebrow with masculinity unsettles Andreas Huyssen's influential argument that high culture is generally perceived as masculine, and mass culture as feminine. The gender associations of different 'brows' are far from being this clear cut. In addition to exploring my author's representations of women, I explore women's representation of male middlebrow writers from the perspective of the highbrow proto-modernist Dorothy Richardson, and the decisively middlebrow Elizabeth von Arnim. Both of these women reject the positive equation of high culture and masculinity and the

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[5] See Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (2001).

pejorative association of mass culture and femininity. Richardson claims that women's experiences require experimental and difficult language to fully express the uniqueness of their individual experiences. She directly attacks Wells' style, and his assumptions that middlebrow novel writing is the appropriate task of women writers. Von Arnim, on the other hand, maintains the association between the middlebrow and the feminine, but inverts the value assigned to both, presenting middlebrow writing and domestic feminine narratives as politically potent and valuable texts and dismissing 'masculine' narrative styles as overly simplistic.

My third chapter returns to the middlebrow exploration of evolutionary theory, examining Wells and Bennett's representations of suburban and provincial development through the lens of Thomas Huxley's concept of 'ethical evolution'. In his highly influential *Evolution and Ethics*, Huxley argues that humans are capable of creating "artificial conditions" which prevent the "free play of struggle for survival" (78) and encourage the development of ethically desirable traits. Wells and Bennett consider what this principle would look like when applied to middle-class neighbourhoods and developments, looking at the ways in which built environments enable and/or disable the development of educated, intellectually curious middlebrow people. Both dramatize the "the tremendous altercation with nature" (*Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells* 36) entailed in attempts to create what Huxley calls a "state of Art" (67): a manmade environment where natural selection has been suspended. Wells and Bennett see immense potential in 'states of Art' as environments which could encourage the development of

middlebrow culture. While Wells predicts the rise of "practical people, [...] engineering and medical and scientific people" (*Anticipations* 125) out of the suburbs, Bennett presents minor changes in the living conditions of Edwin Clayhanger, eponymous protagonist of *Clayhanger* (1910), as important practical supports for Edwin's project of intellectual self-improvement—especially the procurement of private study space.

Chapter four examines the impact of World War One on Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's understanding of the material world. While critics like Vincent Sherry and Frank Field view the war as the end of these authors' cultural relevance, it is clear from both their increasing sales numbers and the frequency with which they were asked to comment publically on the conflict that this was a time of great influence and popularity for Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. It was also a time of great creativity and innovation for them, as each author struggled to reconcile his previous sense of the world with the new realities of war. As I argue above, these authors insist on coherent part-to-whole relationships, taking a systematic and integrated view of the material networks which support human life. The widespread sense of dislocation and fragmentation which proceeded from the mass destruction of the War, then, poses an especially difficult challenge to them. Bennett falls back on the language of evolution and biology to re-cast the war as one minor element of the struggle for survival, and to insist upon the tenacity of life in the face of destruction. Galsworthy lays the blame for the cynicism and ironic detachment which follow the conflict squarely at the feet of the Modernists, and presents material stewardship of 'the Land' as an antidote to

the trauma of war. Wells, in a move which shocked his readers, briefly embraces religious faith during the war as a means of re-asserting the unity and coherence of the world. Wells invests the material world with divinity, describing a "finite God" of "railway junctions and clinics and factories and evening schools" and even "such muddy and bloody wars as this war" (*Soul of a Bishop 275*). All three authors retain their material focus and their belief in the ultimate integration of part and whole, yet they cannot do this without struggle. The various means which they employ to integrate the mass destruction of the war into their understanding of the world attest to what Lynn Hapgood calls the "formal adaptability and flexibility of realist techniques" ("Transforming the Victorian" 22) of early-twentieth-century realism, as well as the continued creative growth and relevance of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy.

My final chapter returns to questions of individual agency in a post-Darwinian world raised in chapter one. Because all three authors believe that material environments are highly influential, they build their political beliefs and plans for social change around material concerns. Understanding one's environment becomes an important pre-requisite for full political engagement in the eyes of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. By extension, using that understanding to effectively function in or even permanently alter a given lived environment becomes the only path to meaningful political action in their works. In practical terms, this materially-engaged political action takes the forms of Fabian socialism, urban planning, slum clearance, industrial reform, cultivating local food, and educating others about their surroundings. By insisting on the

shared material foundation of these authors' disparate political beliefs, this chapter argues that Bennett and Galsworthy have complex, internally consistent models of political action in their texts which deserve further examination. Wells is broadly understood as a popular political thinker. My aim in comparing his politics to those of Galsworthy and Bennett is to bring critical attention to their widely overlooked political agendas.

Chapter One: Environment and Agency in Middlebrow Fiction.

Characterised as "Betwixt and Between" ("Middlebrow" 118) by Virginia Woolf, middlebrow literature has often been defined by its avoidance of aesthetic and thematic extremes. In the early twentieth century, the label of 'middlebrow' was a diagnosis of exclusion, given to a work that is not experimental enough to be highbrow, nor salacious enough to be lowbrow. Yet while positive definitions of middlebrow writing have been notoriously difficult to pin down, there is a general consensus among contemporary critics of the middlebrow that they provide an imaginative space for the newly-educated middle classes to explore contemporary social and scientific thought. H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy's collective interest in evolutionary theory is part of the broader middlebrow investment in the popularization of knowledge and the integration of informal education into the leisure practices of the middle classes at the turn of the century.

Teresa Mangum traces the development of middlebrow culture to the 1870 Education Act, which mandated free primary education in England and set initial standards for the quality of schools. By guaranteeing standardized primary education, the Education Act spared the middle and working classes from dependence on poorly regulated voluntary schools and allayed some of the need for young people to leave school at very young ages in order to contribute to family. Mangum argues that the improvement of primary education resulted in a more serious scholarly attitude towards English literature. Since it was assumed that the beneficiaries of the Education act "who came from the upper reaches of

the working classes as well as the from the middle classes" (Mangum 19) would

desire to build on their initial education by studying at university, but "would not

wish to study Greek, Latin, philosophy, or mathematics" (19), the first degree

programs in English literature were proposed. Just as degree programs were

developed for the increasingly well-educated middle and working classes, new

segments of the publishing market emerged to serve their interests and informally

extend their education. In both fiction and non-fiction, middlebrow writers tackle

the woman question, the role of science in society, the 'Condition of England', and

the consequences of war. Oftentimes, these issues are articulated in terms of their

impact on typical middlebrow men and women. Middlebrow protagonists are

clerks and shopkeepers, students and wives; and its authors are frequently drawn

from the same classes. The typical middlebrow person in England was upwardly

mobile and better educated than his or her parents. An influential early definition

of 'the middlebrow' in *Punch* mocks this class-aspirant attitude, claiming that the

middlebrow consists of "people who are hoping that some day they will get used

to the stuff they ought to like" ("Charivaria" 673).

Middlebrow readers were what George Gissing pejoratively called the

"quarter-educated; that is to say, the great new generation that is being turned out

by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are

incapable of sustained attention [who] want something to occupy them in trains

and on 'buses and trams" (Gissing 447). Woolf's narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway* makes

a similarly disparaging comment, describing Septimus Smith as "one of those

half-educated, self-educated men whose education is all learnt from books

borrowed from public libraries, read in the evening after a day's work, on the advice of well-known authors consulted by letter" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 112). The scorn expressed towards middlebrow reader by even a writer like Gissing, who had gained his own education through scholarships and spent most of his life in poverty, is typical of a widespread anxiety about how the newly-educated middling classes would put that education to use. These negative characterizations of middlebrow autodidacts confirm the central position that self-education has in early-twentieth-century middlebrow culture.

As middlebrow writers and readers became middlebrow teachers and learners, one of the key topics under discussion was evolutionary theory. Evolutionary theory provides ideal content for middlebrow writing because in its very logical structures, it mirrors the emphasis on integration and systemic balance required of middlebrow writing by its social position. The investment of many middlebrow authors in evolutionary theory shapes both their writing, and their reputations. By presenting characters as material beings whose lives are strongly determined by their environment and biological limitations, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy produce works that fully integrate the logic of evolution into their narratives. While their popularity can be partially attributed to their exploration of the consequences of evolution for the average individual at a time when evolutionary theory was a key topic in middlebrow self-education, much of the negative response to their work by emerging modernists can be attributed to the same source. Two prominent formal characteristics of their work–the strong emphasis placed on setting, and the treatment of characters as 'types' or 'samples'

of larger groups rather than autonomous individuals—can both be traced to a commitment to evolutionary logic. The tendency of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy to dwell on material description and de-emphasize individual agency is a strategy for integrating the broad tenets of evolutionary theory into established narrative forms.

With the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, the environment assumed a far more active role in the European conception of the world. Suddenly, the environment was not simply a pile of raw material to be fashioned according to human whims, but an active and important participant in the transformation of the human race through the process of natural selection. Elizabeth Grosz argues powerfully that Darwin begins a new line of thought about the material world that diverges from instrumental Newtonian views of the object by presenting the object not as the opposite of the subject, but "as its condition and the resource for the subject's being and enduring" (Grosz 124). Darwin's theory animates the seemingly inert material world, requiring readers to acknowledge their dependence on, and vulnerability to, their environment; to acknowledge that "[l]ife is the growing accommodation of matter, the adaptation of the needs of life to the exigencies of matter" (Grosz 125). Slowly, the literary world experimented with how to narrate this process of 'growing accommodation' that stood in such stark contrast to the stories of heroism and willpower that dominated the earlier Victorian imagination.

Although by the late nineteenth century various Darwinian tropes had been thoroughly assimilated into literary expression, as traced by Gillian Beer in

Darwin's Plots, the *fin-de-siècle* English literary scene was only beginning to regularly produce works that self-consciously incorporated Darwinian logic into the actions and nature of its characters, and explicitly acknowledged environmental and hereditary factors as determinants in their lives. Grant Allen's attempts to popularize evolutionary theory could still scandalize, and the vision of human evolution provided by Wells' *Time Machine* could still horrify, in the waning years of the nineteenth century. While this is partially because evolutionary theory still posed a threat to established religious powers, it is also because the animation of the environment required by natural selection is difficult to narrate. The attribution of agency to the environment that necessarily follows from Darwin's theory of natural selection causes problems for authors by disrupting narrative traditions that rely on internal, psychological or moral transformations that occur largely independent of environmental forces. It is difficult to imagine a *bildungsroman* that denies its protagonist agency in favour of tracking the effects of contextual pressures and inherited traits upon his or her development. Yet this is exactly what Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy attempt, in Edwardian novels like *Tono-Bungay (1909)*, *The Old Wives' Tale (1908)*, and *The Forsyte Saga (1906-21)*.

At the heart of the middlebrow fascination with evolutionary theory is a paradoxical drive to narrate and value individual lives within a conceptual system that denies their relative importance in the face of the newly expanded geological time scale. Evolution, especially Darwin's conception of evolution as driven by chance variations, is a glacially slow process. As a result, in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries, belief in evolution was frequently allied with quietist and non-radical political movements. According to Raymond Williams, there arose "a popular contrast between evolution and revolution, and the rhyme helped. You could not bring about change in society by intervention, let alone by violent intervention. 'We believe,' many thousands of people then started to say, 'in evolution, not revolution'" (94-95). The widespread adoption of evolution—a theory that allows for only incremental change—as a concept to be embraced by middlebrow writers—a group of upwardly-mobile autodidacts—initially appears to be self-defeating. How could Bennett find an audience for his self-help guides, how could Wells promote universal education, how could Galsworthy argue for humane improvements to city slums if change is incremental and arbitrary?

A partial solution lies in the works of theorists whose versions of evolutionary theory allow for change at a brisker pace than Darwin's theory of natural selection: namely, those of Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer. Although the two had their differences over the course of a long and sometimes troubled friendship, their models of evolution each have a mechanism for more intentional change than can be achieved by natural selection among chance variations alone. For Huxley, 'ethical evolution' is an active human process working to produce a "state of Art" in active opposition to the "state of Nature" (67), by which individuals and societies re-shape their surroundings in order to select more 'civilized' traits than those favoured by uncultivated environments. Spencer had less faith in the ability of humanity to change its environment, but did provide a wide range of mechanisms that caused humanity to undergo change. In addition to

the slow process of natural selection, the human race could also be altered more directly by "various antagonistic energies—those of geologic origin, those of climate, of wild animals, of other human races with whom there is enmity or competition" (Spencer 220). Spencer long maintained a belief in the discredited Lamarckian concept of the inheritance of acquired characteristics—that is, in the alteration of human beings by their habits and actions (as determined by their immediate environment), and the transmission of that alteration to their children. While both Huxley and Spencer sought a future world in which humanity would reach a greater state of harmony with its surroundings, for Huxley the way to achieve this goal was through the intentional alteration of the environment, while for Spencer it was through the semi-conscious, semi-habitual alteration of humanity to better suit that environment.

Wells' allegiance to Huxley's theories has been well-documented. He studied Elementary Biology under Huxley, and described him in his *Experiment in Autobiography* as "the acutest observer, the ablest generalizer, the great teacher, [and] the most lucid and valiant of controversialists" (159). His view of Spencer is less glowing. Granted, by the 1890s many of Spencer's ideas, especially the Lamarckian concept of the inheritance of acquired characteristics which he maintained throughout his career, had been discredited and fallen into disfavour. Still, reading Spencer was a mandatory exercise for young people who wished to appear well-informed. Swinnerton lists him alongside Huxley, E. B. Tylor, Samuel Butler, and J. G. Frazer as men whose works were being read by all of his "advanced" contemporaries at the *fin-de-siècle* (Swinnerton 21). Wells also

confirms Spencer's currency, while dismissing his lasting importance. Wells'

intense commitment to socialism and other forms of deliberate planning placed

him in direct opposition to Spencer's anti-government liberalism, which in Wells'

view "came near raising public shiftlessness to the dignity of a national

philosophy" (*Englishman Looks* 69). However, he includes the reading of Spencer

in his description of the educational development of 'advanced' and politically

active characters, including Dick Remington, the politician protagonist of *The*

New Machiavelli. According to Dick's account of his informal education, while

the evolutionary theories that occupied "the current of living and contemporary

ideas in which my mind was presently swimming" were powerful in that they

replaced "my mother's attentive, meticulous but occasionally extremely irascible

Providence" with "the Struggle for Existence and the survival not of the Best—

that was nonsense, but of the fittest to survive" (*Machiavelli 89)*. Remington

nevertheless claims to have "disliked Herbert Spencer all my life until I read his

autobiography, and then I laughed a little and loved him" (89). For Wells,

familiarity with Spencer is a sign of a well-informed and intellectually curious

person; but to extend credence to Spencer's political conclusions is a sign of

mental weakness and, frequently, a defective personality. Later in *The New*

Machiavelli he takes a thinly-veiled swipe at Sidney and Beatrice Webb by

accusing their fictional stand-ins, the Baileys, of taking Spencer for "their great

prototype" (295), resulting in a self-assured but intellectually lazy form of

activism that produces "entirely self-satisfied" (295) people who are "Realists—

Cocksurists—in matter of fact; sentimentalists in behaviour" (295) who admit of no doubt or difficulty.

Bennett similarly writes an encounter with Spencer into the self-education of his characters, but in contrast to Wells he maintains a profound respect for the man's writing, both in his fiction and in his journals. Indeed, Bennett's reaction to Spencer's *First Principles* is effusive in the extreme. In a journal entry he remarks that *First Principles,* "by filling [him] up with the sense of causation everywhere, has altered [his] whole view of life, and undoubtedly greatly improved" (*The Journal of Arnold Bennett* 392). The book is so influential to Bennett that he claims "[y]ou can see *First Principles* in nearly every line [he] write[s]" (392). It is not surprising, then, that Bennett places Spencer's works in the hands of his characters. In *Sacred and Profane Love*, Carlotta, a young woman seeking escape from her constricting domestic environment, stealthily reads Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*, dumbfounded that "anything so honest, and so courageous, and so simple, and so convincing had ever been written" (13). Bennett's interest in Spencer accords well with his interest in the effect of an environment on its inhabitants, in contrast to Wells' fixation on the progressive re-shaping of environments by inhabitants.

The intensity of Wells and Bennett's reactions to the work of Spencer and Huxley proves the currency of both theorists at the turn of the century. While Galsworthy, in a manner typical of his subdued temperament, does not come out as explicitly for or against either theorist, his writing is suffused with their ideas. Heredity, environmental influence, and the conflict between primitive instinct and

civilized restraint all appear repeatedly in Galsworthy's novels. Wells and Bennett's specific engagement with Spencer and Huxley is significant because the work of these theorists can be seen to allow for more rapid change through human activity within an evolutionary framework. While their theories ameliorate the loss of human agency felt in the wake of Darwin, however, they do not do away with the problem of the greatly increased scale in space and time which dwarfs human history, nor do they fully discount the new power attributed to the material world to reshape humanity. The dilemma faced by middlebrow authors of how to narrate individual lives against the background of evolutionary change persists.

This dilemma is also present in the writing of Darwin himself. As Beer notes, while evolutionary theory relies on specific instances of biological change for proof, "[i]t cannot be experimentally demonstrated sufficiently in any present moment" (Beer 6). As a result, the individual example is both necessary and insufficient proof of large-scale patterns. The tension between Darwin's "delight in the individual example and his sense of it as minute and transient when viewed within the extent of evolutionary time […] creates the difficult combination of urgency and massiveness in his ideas and his style" (Beer 37). This 'difficult combination of urgency and massiveness' is an extremely apt description of the fiction of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. Bennett presents the small, mediocre lives of his characters as phenomena worth exploration in their own right, but also uses them to represent typical lives lived in the Potteries District, a region that is "England in little, lost in the midst of England" (*Old Wives' Tale* 37). Wells and Galsworthy make similar appeals for the typicality of their characters, and the

generalizability of their experiences. The increasing Edwardian tendency to capitalize on what Lynne Hapgood calls the "formal adaptability and flexibility of realist techniques" ("Transforming the Victorian" 22) allows all three authors to move between part and whole in a way that satisfies the exigencies of the evolutionary theory underwriting their work. An examination of the non-fiction of all three authors shows that they theorized the nature of part-to-whole relationships, and struggled with how to integrate the temporal and physical horizons opened up by evolutionary theorists into their writing

'Urgency and Massiveness': Relating Part to Whole.

Bennett provides several sober accounts of the ways in which the inhabitants of his fictionalized Pottery District have been shaped by their surroundings, but treats evolutionary theory much more lightly in his 'pocket philosophies'. In *The Human Machine*, a volume aimed at teaching self-improvement through self-discipline and the formation of beneficial habits, he argues that the issue of environmental determinism is a "fascinating and futile" (78) question. He suggests that the "working compromise from which the finest results of living can be obtained" is to "*regard ourselves as free agents, and the personalities surrounding us as the puppets of determinism*" (78). By viewing ourselves as 'free agents', according to Bennett, we increase the likelihood of following through on the self-improvement schemes that he offers as the path to a happy life. Likewise, imaginatively stripping others of that same agency is meant to increase happiness. If we recognize that the other people who make up "the

living environment out of which [we] have to manufacture [our] happiness" are "inevitable in the scheme of evolution" (56) it is no longer reasonable to be upset over their perceived shortcomings. Bennett argues that because such shortcomings are the inevitable product of heredity and environment, one cannot blame others for their flaws, nor should one forgive them, since "I do not have to forgive bad weather; nor, if I found myself in an earthquake, should I have to blame the earthquake" (48). The analogy between human beings and natural disasters is humorous, yet disturbing. It provides clear openings for the two greatest dangers of so-called social Darwinism: the uneven application of determinism to different groups of people so that some are stripped of agency, and the *laissez-faire* justification of selfishness.

Yet alongside this argument for radical acceptance of the status quo as the inevitable product of evolution, Bennett simultaneously argues passionately for personal and societal change. He rejects superstition and religion as being "unscientific, primitive, and conducive to unashamed *laissez-aller*" (*Human Machine* 68), and claims that "[j]ust as 'patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel,' so fatalism is the last refuge of a shirker" (82). If the reader acknowledges the theory of evolution, Bennett reasons, then the reader has accepted change as the only true constant, and cannot consider him or herself to be "the only absolutely unchangeable thing in a universe of change" (83). He scolds readers who despair of the possibility of change, saying "If you consider that human nature is still the same [as it was in the past], you should instantly go out and make a bonfire of the works of Spencer, Darwin, and Wallace" (81).

Having appealed to the process of evolution to support acceptance of what already is, Bennett turns to that same theory to support belief in the possibility of change.

The tension between these contradictory and rough applications of evolutionary theory to the topic of social change is more than a simple instance of cognitive dissonance. It is easy to forget the humour in these passages, and to read Bennett as bloviating and self-contradictory. Socially crippled by a severe stutter, Bennett takes his pocket philosophies as opportunities to indulge in exactly the kind of confident, aggressive jocularity that he could not pull off in person. There is a performance taking place in *The Human Machine*, in which Bennett appears to take great pleasure in adopting the cajoling, scolding role of the public taskmaster. Comic exaggerations and joking tone aside, however, Bennett does articulate an important problem for middlebrow authors seeking to integrate evolutionary logic into their work: while evolution liberates middlebrow readers by revealing that seemingly insurmountable structural and institutional (especially religious) obstacles to the progress and mobility they desire are in fact subject to constant change, it can only promise that change in a glacially slow form.

All of Bennett's zeal and energy cannot quite remove the sting of anticlimax from passages where he admits the slow pace of evolutionary change: "Human nature *does* change. Nothing can be more unscientific, more hopelessly medieval, than to imagine that it does not. It changes like everything else. You can't see it change. True! But then you can't see grass growing—not unless you arise very early" (*Human Machine* 80). This invisibly slow change is, for Bennett, the result of "continual infinitesimal efforts, *upon themselves*, of individual men,

like you and me" (81). To expect 'continual effort' from his readers with only the promise of barely measurable change over the course of their lifetimes is a tall order. The massive expansion of the timescale produced by evolutionary theory and the development of geological knowledge require just such an awkward position of those who would apply their findings to the daily life of the middlebrow reader. The cumulative change produced by minute alterations of human habit requires many thousands of generations to take visible form, just as Wells has to travel over eight-hundred-thousand years into the future in order to provide a suitably shocking vision of the consequences of dysgenic reproductive choices in *The Time Machine*.

While his experiments with representing humanity on an evolutionary time scale take thrilling forms in his science fiction as well as his series of cavemen stories, in his non-fiction Wells takes an even bleaker view than Bennett of the importance of individual effort. In *The Conquest of Time* (1942) he argues that individuality is a delusion, writing that the "apparent detachment of the individual" in higher life forms masks the fact that biologically speaking, "individuality is little more than a transitory bodily independence" (14) from the mass of raw material that makes up the world. According to Wells, while the perception of individuality has proved useful in evolutionary terms, individuality is not significant on grander scales of time and space. In *First and Last Things* (1908) (an earlier form of *Conquest of Time* which was re-written to remove inaccurate predictions of technological advancements) Wells writes that "our individualities, our nations and states and races are but bubbles and clusters of

foam upon the great stream of the blood of the species, incidental experiments in the growing knowledge and consciousness of the race" (69). Wells is much more interested in large-scale patterns of living than he is in the individual. Pull back far enough, and no individual accomplishment stands out from the flow of history. In his immensely successful popular history text *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (1919), Wells intentionally de-emphasized individual 'great men' such as Napoleon in favour of a sweeping view of human history that begins with an account of the "The Great Expansion of Men's Ideas of Space and Time" (15), emphasizing the relative insignificance of the modern earth and its human inhabitants on a cosmological scale before moving through pre-historic and ancient societies, only to arrive at the history of the Common Era in the twenty-eighth of thirty-nine chapters.

This bleak view of the ability of a person or small group of people to meaningfully alter history runs strongly counter to his calls elsewhere for a self-selected group of enlightened men and women to assert benevolent power over the masses, such as the so-called 'Samurai' he calls for in *Anticipations*. However, while Wells devotes entire novels to the *failure* of individuals to overcome their mediocrity, he is completely unable to describe how one might *succeed* at the same task. While Wells calls for the organic rising-up of creative, intelligent individuals to take charge of society and re-make it, he is never able, as Vincent Brome observes, to explain "precisely *how*":

> The unprecedented sort of people are expected to materialize—despite the resistance of the active-dull—by an inevitable permeation of the social

process, until a new race is born before even its own members are fully
aware of the change; but this is no explanation at all. […] Summon up
your visions, oh ye writers, and garland the world in beautiful words, for
by words alone shall the way be opened, it [*Anticipations*] seemed to say.
But the way remained obstinately closed. (88)

While Wells yearned for Utopia in the abstract, his Edwardian novels show that he
also had a deep understanding of the intractability of existing barriers to change.
His obvious affection for the small and struggling individual often spills over into
frustration at that individual's limitations. As John Carey notes, "If the salvation
of the world is what matters, then these scattered, unfulfilled lives—like Mr.
Lewisham's—really are waste. But to the individual they are not waste, but life.
Wells shuttled inconclusively between these two perceptions, and they came to
dominate his creative thought" (149). The dismissal of the individual as 'waste' or
insignificant 'froth' in his non-fiction is counterbalanced by the evident joy Wells
takes in individual idiosyncrasies in his fiction. Throughout his career, Wells
oscillates wildly between rapturous excitement at the idea that things could be
otherwise than they are, and intense frustration that opportunities for meaningful
change are very rarely followed. Evolutionary theory may have shown Wells the
very real ubiquity of change and the possibility of a radically different world, but
it failed to show him the path to reach that utopia. Like Bennett, Wells
passionately called for change in his fellow creatures, and like Bennett, he knew
the incredibly slow and winding path that change would take.

While Galsworthy does not discuss evolutionary theory as explicitly as Wells and Bennett do he does use evolutionary language and represent evolutionary processes throughout his fiction. In addition, he provides a conceptual model of the relationship between part and whole in several letters and articles that is strongly consonant with the ambivalent treatment of the individual example in evolutionary theory as described by Beer. Galsworthy describes life as the movement between two principles: "the Principle of Unity and the Principle of Variety" (*Glimpses* 234). "All living things," he writes, "(ourselves included) are expressions of the Principle of Variety working themselves out in the shadow, as it were, of the Principle of Unity" (234). Galsworthy directly equates the 'Principle of Variety' with individuality. The Principle of Unity describes the material totality of existence out of which individual creatures are produced, and to which they return. Galsworthy uses "cardinals, Sonora doves, or chipmunks" as examples of beings "*un*consciously expressing out the Principle of Variety (Individuality) […] and making a beautiful job of it" (235). Variety must be held in balance with Unity in this scheme, however, so that when the songbird dies, it "will drop off its perch into the Principle of Unity" (235)—that is, return bodily into the unified mass of which all things make themselves.

Although Galsworthy's account uses quasi-religious language, and appears to imply a shared spiritual existence, this is not a religious model of existence. In fact, he speculates that the Christian trinity is a metaphor for the actually-existing principles he discusses: "Unity—the Father; Variety or Individuality—the Son; the mysterious reconcilement or meeting-point between the two—the Holy

Ghost" (*Glimpses* 234). For Galsworthy, there is no God "save the universe itself, that has been and will be for ever [...] a vast Artist expressing himself throughout eternity" (281). Personifying the universe as an artist, Galsworthy attributes agency to it, not in the form of providence, but in the tendency of physical systems to move towards balance and harmony, a tendency he speaks of in terms of "Creative Instinct" (281) and "desire" (236).

According to Galsworthy, the work performed by the universe-as-artist is the same as the work performed by actually existing artists. As in life there are two principles, that of 'Unity' and that of 'Variety', in art there are two processes: "A large loose yet constructive speculation concerned with idea, and therefore with destiny if you like; and an immediate springing emotional vision shaping out incident and character minute by minute" (*Glimpses* 307). In these terms, the work of narrative coincides exactly with what Galsworthy sees as the 'work of the universe': bringing individual elements into harmony with the larger context in which they exist. The "manner of work" of the universe writ large, "as in our own works of art—is so to relate part to part, and part to whole, as to make an individual thing to live" (250). In this formulation, an 'individual thing' can only 'live' through a series of relationships and connections. Returning to Grosz' formulation of material context as "the resource for the subject's being and enduring" (Grosz 124), we can see that the network of relationships that Galsworthy describes allows the individual thing to 'live' quite literally, making the maintenance of that network a very high-stakes endeavour. Just as the literal organism can only live through successful interaction with its environment, each

character can only be 'made to live' narratively through the establishment of a web of connections Galsworthy's quest to narrate the social and material connections which enable individual existence is part of a broad early-twentieth-century pre-occupation with establishing meaning and continuity in the face of modernity. This is not exclusively a middlebrow project. The complex network of relationships in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and the elaborate explorations of London's physical environment in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* are only a few examples of highbrow narratives which focus on the webs of connection which underpin individual lives. Yet in Galsworthy, and in middlebrow writing more generally, the emphasis is primarily on the whole—the Principle of Unity—rather than on those individual organisms which express it through the Principle of Variety. The life of the individual thing is the goal of this process of building relationships, but it is logically and temporally secondary. The relationship of part to part and part to whole is a necessary precondition for the life of the individual. The individual then can be read as symptomatic of the web of relationships that literally sustain him and make him narratively legible.

Galsworthy's 'Principle of Unity' gathers all individual expressions of 'Variety' together into a single order of creative existence. Each expression of diversity cannot help being integrated into the greater whole. In this way, Galsworthy echoes Spencer's argument that diversity and integration are actually mutually reinforcing, since the more specialised parts of a system are, the more interdependent they become within the system as a whole. As Spencer argues, "Integration of each whole has been described as taking place simultaneously with

integration of each of the parts into which the whole divides itself" (*First Principles* 301). By binding 'Unity' and 'Variety' together into a single process of vital expression, Galsworthy creates a conception of wholeness that values internal heterogeneity, allowing continued narrative emphasis to be placed on the individual instance in addition to the larger system. This is how he solves the problem of that 'difficult combination of urgency and massiveness' that Beer notes in Darwin's writing.

All three authors are united in viewing individuals as elements in large-scale material systems, from Wells' biological vision of the human race as interdependent material entities, to Bennett's examination of how industry, history, and geology all contribute to the quality of life in the Potteries District, to Galsworthy's exploration of one family's intense relationship with their material possessions in *The Forsyte Saga*. This wide view allows each author to use the individual characters in his respective work as means of representing and understanding these larger systems. As Beer argues, having a sense of overarching conceptual unity allows writers to make more numerous connections between individual elements:

> Once a *single order* is proposed—whether it be that of God the Designer, community of descent, or 'a single physical basis of life'—analogy can stabilise. It can take its place as an instrument of perception which allows latent but actual corollaries to become visible. It permits cross-cuts through time and space and askance our habitual categories. (79)

Because of their materialism, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy are able to draw connections not only between individual elements in a material system, but between each element and the system itself, since all things share a common physical foundation. While Beer examines Darwin's use of analogy to stabilize part-to-part comparisons, the authors I am discussing are more interested in part-to-whole relationships. Because each part is physically encompassed by the whole that it represents, the figure of synecdoche most aptly expresses the narrative structure of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy.

My analysis of part-to-whole relationships in the narrative logic of these three authors converges with Regenia Gagnier's work on similar structures in her recent monograph *Decadence and Globalization: on the Relationship of Part to Whole 1859-1920* (2010). Gagnier argues that many strands of radical thought at the *fin-de-siècle* shared "a particular problem in conceptualizing the relation of parts to wholes, especially the individual to larger social units" (1). The high degree of integration between part and whole visible in the works of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy provides a strong point of contrast to the "disintegration of the whole" due to the heightened "individuation of the parts" (2) which Gagnier traces in Decadent and *avant garde* literature. The middlebrow authors I analyze fit, more or less, into Gagnier's category of "new liberals", who "[emphasize] the functional interdependence of part and whole [and resist] the conception of evolution as fundamentally competitive, in favor of what Michael Freeden has called progressive social thought's co-operative-altruistic version of Darwinism" (18). Gagnier's work confirms that part-to-whole relationships are a

common concern in literature at the turn of the century, and suggests that Wells,

Bennett, and Galsworthy's exploration of these relationships is indebted not only

to Darwin's legacy, but to Victorian cultural and intellectual trends more broadly.

The historicist groundwork laid by Beer and Gagnier supports my methodological

intervention in material-culture criticism, by supporting the importance of the

part-to-whole relationships which current critical models are not equipped to

handle.

Synecdoche and Metonymy in Material Criticism.

The figure of synecdoche must be added to the existing vocabulary of

material criticism in order to accommodate the systematic integration of part into

whole visible in the writing of these, and many other, middlebrow authors. While

the established language of metonymy is sufficient to trace several links in a

material network, it cannot do justice to the systematizing impulse inherent in the

work of many middlebrow Edwardians. Bill Brown and Elaine Freedgood use the

language of metonymy in direct contrast to that of metaphor. Freedgood argues

that we have been trained to read the material world metaphorically as no more

than a medium for communicating psychological and social information about the

people who inhabit it. In the place of metaphorical readings which subordinate the

material world and privilege interiority, Freedgood advocates metonymic readings

wherein the connections between objects and their histories of production and

consumption are traced beyond the boundaries of a single text. By researching the

histories of objects like the checked curtains in *Mary Barton* or the mahogany

furniture in *Jane Eyre*, Freedgood produces criticism in which "the object is investigated in terms of its own properties and history" (*Ideas in Things* 12) and only then reintegrated into the fictional world and "refigured alongside and athwart the novel's manifest or dominant narrative—the one that concerns its subjects" (12). Freedgood uses metonymic reading to unsettle our interpretive habits and allow for a richer understanding of the material world. Her overarching argument is that the production, circulation, and consumption of material goods always happen within a web of metonymic connections that inform meaning. Using the figure of metonymy, Freedgood aims to describe Victorian "thing culture" (8), a paradigm which, she argues, was a "more extravagant form of object relations than ours" (8) and allowed for more numerous connections between things than later interpretive systems. She points to the overdetermined and interpretively constrained items of clothing in *Middlemarch* as an early instance of the more limited mode of reading the material world that followed Victorian thing culture.

However, as Brown's work reminds us, the early twentieth century had its own ways of resisting interpretive constraint. The object world of modernism is often presented without restrictive commentary, leaving a range of interpretations open to the reader. Imagist poetry, for example, heavily features underdetermined material content. Where Victorian thing culture resisted narrative overdetermination by allowing for unexpected connections between material objects, modernist thing culture often produces indeterminacy by presenting things in unexpected ways using stylistically challenging language. In his analysis

of Virginia Woolf's short story "Object Lessons", Brown describes the shards of glass collected by the protagonist as "unconsummated metonyms"("The Secret Life of Things" 22) which refuse integration into larger systems. Meaningful in and of themselves thanks to the value placed on them by an individual consciousness, the shards do not connect to larger systems—their "metonymic function has been arrested" (22)—because they exist within a form of materialism "where parts are related not to wholes but to other parts" (22). Connection is still a central narrative concern here, but there is no 'single order', in Beer's terms, to stabilize meaning. Many modernist texts present part-to-part relationships as significant in and of themselves, and resist integrating them into overarching structures of meaning. In its most challenging narratives, high modernism emphasizes the exceptional and the excluded—valorizing characters who challenge existing hierarchies, proving the instability or impossibility of wholeness.

Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy exist between these two systems of conceptualizing the material world. Neither the Victorian nor the modernist accounts of thing culture available in current criticism allow for the breadth of systematic integration present in their writing. What is needed is a way of theorizing part-to-whole connections without resorting to abstraction or allegory—a synecdochic reading of materiality. In the figure of synecdoche, although a part stands in for the whole, it neither fully encapsulates that whole nor does it stand apart from the structure whose totality it illustrates. The part selected to represent the whole remains one of several heterogeneous elements making up

the larger structure. Through the figure of synecdoche, larger structures can be expressed through individual instances without relying on a metaphorical leap to connect the two.

In Wells' 1915 satire *Boon*, for example, he argues that the collective mind of the human race has a literal, material existence. To understand it, one must view it through individual minds (in my terms, view it synecdochically), but only by resisting metaphor can one respect its actual systemic existence. In one passage, Boon rapturously describes the 'Mind of the Race':

> something more extensive than individual wills and individual processes
>
> of reasoning in mankind, a body of thought, a trend of ideas and purposes,
>
> a thing made up of the synthesis of all the individual instances, something
>
> more than their algebraic sum, losing the old as they fall out, taking up the
>
> young, a common Mind expressing the species—" (*Boon* 45-46)

When he is interrupted by a friend's objection that such a 'common Mind' only exists figuratively, Boon responds that he cannot "see where […] 'figuratively' comes in" (46), arguing that "[t]he mind of the race is as real to me as the mind of Dodd or my own. Because Dodd is completely made up of Dodd's right leg plus Dodd's left leg, plus Dodd's right arm plus Dodd's left arm plus Dodd's head and Dodd's trunk, it doesn't follow that Dodd is a mere figurative expression. . . . " (46). Here and elsewhere, Wells attempts to discuss large agglomerations of human activity without appealing to a disembodied or transcendent humanity or spirit. Once again, variety is integrated into unified systems (the common Mind and the body) through an appeal to a shared material foundation.

The desire to link part to whole that grows out of evolutionary theory leads these authors to focus on narratives of connection and relation rather than fragmentation and isolation. The narrative of evolution is one of change, but also one of balance. Any variation that cannot be successfully reintegrated into the life of the species is eliminated. Importantly, this form of balance must be achieved by groups of organisms within a specific environment. The adaptive or maladaptive nature of each modification can only be understood in its social and material context. Within the synecdochic structure of the narratives of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, each individual is presented as a representative element of his or her broader material context. In what follows, I will examine a representative instance of this structure in each author: the dependence of Galsworthy's Forsyte family on their environment, the failure of Wells' Edwardian protagonists to permanently escape their immediate context, and the entanglement of Bennett's Edwin Clayhanger in the built and natural environments of the Five Towns.

Forsytes and their Habitats.

In the novels and 'interludes' collected into *The Forsyte Saga*, Galsworthy provides both a scathing critique of vulgar materialism and an articulate account of the kind of richer materialism later described by thing theorists. On the one hand, he criticizes the drive to accumulate and control material possessions that he labels the 'possessive instinct' as a source of both domestic and imperial violence. On the other, he presents characters as inextricably connected to their surroundings and strongly influenced by their material surroundings. Like

Bennett, Galsworthy creates characters who are unthinkable save in terms of their environment, and who are constantly both re-shaping the world around them and being shaped by it in turn. Like Wells, Galsworthy recognizes that human inventions often function as part of the environment to which its member organisms must adapt, rather than means for overcoming environmental influences. In the introduction to *The Forsyte Saga*, he writes that "Men are, in fact, quite unable to control their own inventions; they at best develop adaptability to the new conditions those inventions create" ("Preface" viii). The contrast between the obsessive control that Galsworthy's characters exert over the material world in the small scale, and the lack of control they are ultimately shown to have over the large-scale environmental and biological forces that shape their lives is the source of the saga's biting satire. It is also a key instance of synecdochic material relations in Galsworthy. Individual Forsytes can only be understood through their relationship to a larger whole—in this case, the physical nation of England.

The Forsytes are presented as a typical upper-middle-class English family. By examining them, Galsworthy suggests that he is able to trace the influence of material goods and built environments on the English population in general. Forsytes, one character claims, make up "half [of] England, and the better half, too, the safe half, […] the half that counts" (*The Man of Property* 202); they are "the middlemen, the commercials, the pillars of society, the cornerstone of convention" (202). To be a Forsyte is not necessarily to belong to the family, but to hold certain characteristics In his preface to *The Forsyte Saga*, Galsworthy

claims universality for the Forsyte type, writing that he has written the trilogy to honor "the Forsytean tenacity that is in all of us" ("Preface" ix). The Forsytes constitute both a character type and a "species" (*The Man of Property* 202), and that species is particularly susceptible to material influences, since it is defined in part by a fixation on accumulating property. Forsytes act as canaries in the coal mine, reacting more quickly and intensely to their surroundings than the average person. Galsworthy presents them as specimens which prove the influence of environments on their inhabitants, establishing a part-to-whole relationship between individuals and the broader nation they inhabit. If Forsytes are typical, and Forsytes are intricately enmeshed in their surroundings, Galsworthy suggests, the typical nature of human existence is to be similarly dependent on one's environment.

Galsworthy's exploration of part-to-whole relationships is strongly influenced by evolutionary theory. From the very beginning of *The Man of Property*, the first book of *The Forsyte Saga,* the narrator describes the Forsytes using evolutionary language. In 1886, when the novel opens, the family has already reached the peak of its prosperity. The family tree, which began as "a paragon of tenacity, insulation, and success, amidst the deaths of a hundred other plants less fibrous, sappy, and persistent" is now "flourishing with bland, full foliage, in an almost repugnant prosperity, at the summit of its efflorescence" (*The Man of Property* 11). The family's dilemma is a common one in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction: having been raised in relative security, the younger generation have not lived through struggles of the kind that made their

ancestors successful. Like many degenerate characters at the turn of the century, the Forsytes have been weakened by their own success. Their possessive instinct was initially a trait that helped them in the struggle for survival, when family patriarch Jolyon "Superior Dossett" Forsyte made the transition from home-builder and tradesman to home-owner. By the end of the century, this same trait has become a hindrance, causing both poor economic judgment (various members hoard house property and certain stocks to a degree that destroys their financial flexibility) and poor personal judgment. Soames, the eponymous 'Man of Property', extends his possessive instinct to his wife Irene, raping her to assert his ownership of her rather than let her leave him.

While the possessive instinct is a permanent feature of Forsyte nature in the novels, it too is subject to the process of evolution. Like the people who display it, the possessive instinct "follow[s] the laws of progression even in the Forsyte family which had believed it fixed forever" (*In Chancery* 371). True to the dictates of evolutionary theory, this 'progression' is driven by environmental forces. The possessive instinct cannot "be dissociated from environment any more than the quality of potato from the soil" (371). Over the course of the fifty years covered by the *Forsyte Chronicles*, Galsworthy examines the activity of the possessive instinct in a number of different contexts: underwriting both nationalist protectionism and empire, acting as the destruction of some marriages and the saviour of others, and prompting a wide range of artistic and cultural responses. The instinct is both a relatively permanent feature of human nature and a highly changeable force that conforms to the constraints of its surroundings.

Like the instincts by which they are driven, Forsyte family members cannot be understood outside of the environment that helps shape them. They only make sense in context: "they are never seen, or if seen would not be recognised, without habitats, composed of circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives" (*The Man of Property* 91). The inclusion of 'wives' in this list of the objects that make up the Forsytes' habitats is strongly ironic, given Galsworthy's repeated criticisms of the objectification of women. The mix of human and inhuman elements in the remainder of the list, though, is significant given his statement about the need for man to adapt to his own inventions. Built environments and human companions are as much a part of the external world to which one must adapt as the soil and the climate. It is only through a series of external relations that the Forsytes can exist.

In this passage, Galsworthy applies his own edict about the goal of creative work—to "relate part to part, and part to whole, as to make an individual thing to live" (*Glimpses* 250). By providing the Forsytes with a habitat, he grants them 'life' both as biological and as social creatures. The statement that Forsytes as a type would 'not be recognised' without their habitats suggests that environment plays a key role in social meaning making. Even if an individual could be examined in isolation from his or her environment, a possibility that Galsworthy appears to discount, he or she would not be legible to others in this form. To be a Forsyte is not simply to exist, but to exist *in context* in a way that is socially recognisable. The passage just quoted concludes that "Without a habitat a Forsyte is inconceivable—he would be like a novel without a plot, which is well-

known to be an anomaly" (*The Man of Property* 91). This is only one of several criticisms of experimental and modernist fiction made by Galsworthy's narrator over the course of his work on the Forsytes. The comparison is telling: a Forsyte without a habitat is like a novel without a plot, not a novel without, say, a setting. By directly contrasting 'habitat' to 'plot', the narrator attributes unexpected agency and activity to the Forsytes' material surroundings. Habitat appears as generative of narrative and central to the meaning of that narrative, rather than as the necessary set dressing of realist writing.

The quasi-biological language of 'habitats' suggests once again that the Forsytes are a group of specimens gathered for examination. "All Forsytes," the narrator claims, "as is generally admitted, have shells, like that extremely useful little animal which is made into Turkish delight" (*The Man of Property* 91). The humour of this passage lies in the reduction of the self-important Forsyte clan to the level of 'extremely useful little' food animals. The implication is that they are simply following instinct by building up their miniature empires, holdings, and estates, rather than demonstrating the intelligence, skill, and tenacity to which they themselves attribute their material comforts. Along with this diminution of agency is a diminution of the Forsytes themselves, who now appear alongside 'little animals' as the general subject of quasi-scientific enquiry. An implied cluster of dominant observers has come to a general consensus about the behaviour of the Forsytes, and a surprisingly simple consensus about them at that: "All Forsytes, as is generally admitted, have shells" (91). Given the perplexity that the accumulation and decoration of these 'shells' causes in the Forsytes

themselves, the implication that their insular and earnest habit of accumulation can be easily interpreted and dismissed by detached observers suggests that members of the clan are dealing with life on the wrong magnitude of scale.

The solution to the blinkered vulgar materialism of the Forsytes, however, is not to transcend the material in favour of the realm of aesthetics, or spirituality, or any number of concepts which have been traditionally contrasted with the material. Although critical of vulgar materialism and petty greed in his early Forsyte novels, Galsworthy remains a fundamentally materialist thinker, fixated on the physical foundations of England as a "definite community" (*The White Monkey* 19) both in its land, and in the physical health and lineage of its inhabitants. As one progresses beyond the initial three novels collected as *The Forsyte Saga* into the subsequent six Forsyte novels that make up *A Modern Comedy* and *The End of the Chapter*, the importance of land and lineage becomes increasingly apparent. Characters pursue various plans to improve the physical status of the nation and its citizens, from emigration schemes meant to transform slum dwellers into paragons of muscular Christianity basking in the Australian sun (*The White Monkey* 71), to proposals to increase the domestic production of 'The Three Ps'—"potatoes, poultry, and pork"(*Over the River* 609)—as a means of diminishing Britain's trade deficit. While Galsworthy is skeptical about the practicability of these schemes—and has none of the utopian tendencies of Wells—he does value the attitude of material stewardship that they represent.

By the time Galsworthy writes *The White Monkey* (the fourth Forsyte novel, both written and set in 1924), investment in the material world becomes a

necessary precondition for any meaningful system of ethics or ethical action, both on the individual and national scale. For anything to matter, *things* have to matter, especially in the wake of a war that has left the younger generation feeling that "England's dished, [...] Europe's dished, Heaven's dished, and so is Hell [and that there is] [n]o future in anything but the air" (*White Monkey* 60-61). Whereas in the earlier novels a conservative sense of property was a liability, in the later novels it becomes a necessary corrective to modern (and at times explicitly modernist) abstraction. This demonstrates how radically context-dependent are Galsworthy's ethics. It is the adaptivity or maladaptivity of a given set of values in a specific cultural moment that leads Galsworthy to confirm or reject them. In this way, he does not merely comment on the changes caused by adaptation, but participates in them himself. His presentation of ethical behaviour adapts to his changing context just as his characters do to theirs.

Bennett's Five Towns.

Bennett also explores the influence of context on characters. Chief among Bennett's settings is his lightly fictionalized version of the potteries district of Northern England, which appears in his fiction as the Five Towns. For Bennett, the region stands synecdochically for the country as a whole: "It is England in little, lost in the midst of England, unsung by searchers after the extreme; perhaps occasionally somewhat sore at this neglect, but how proud in the instinctive cognizance of its representative features and traits!" (*Old Wives' Tale* 37). Bennett returns to this "representative" setting repeatedly over the course of his career, in

novels and short stories including *Anna of the Five Towns*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, the Clayhanger family trilogy, *Tales of the Five Towns* and *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns*. The Five Towns have a complex history which is physically incorporated into the region. While their distinctive industrial landscape has been shaped by human hands for human ends, the location and success of the pottery industry have been determined by the geological facts of the area. The close proximity of clay and coal established the area as a key manufacturing site early in the Pottery District's history. Over time, the infrastructure and social organizations that grow out of this geological accident come to form an influential and well-established environment of their own, one which exerts as strong a force in the lives of the inhabitants of the region as the natural environment that initially enabled their formation.

Yet Bennett's focus on setting draws fire from Woolf in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. Perhaps the most cutting criticism she offers in the essay is her claim that Bennett "is trying to make us imagine for him; he is trying to hypnotise us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there" (16). Here, emphasis on external details is presented as a crutch, taking the place of characterization. The standard counter-argument mounted against Woolf's indictment of his over-use of external details is to admit that Bennett does rely on such details, but that they constitute a complex social code that provides a rich archive of expressions of class distinction in the early twentieth century. This defense does not go far enough—it reads material details only as vehicles for communicating information about characters, rather than as active forces in

shaping the lives of those characters. In both Woolf's criticism and many defenses of it, material items perform only for the "weak metonymic function" (*The Ideas in Things* 2) of "suggest[ing] or reinforce[ing] something we already know about the subjects who use them" (2). The conversation about Bennett's use of physical details is reduced to a debate about whether they constitute an effective or ineffective record of social codes made manifest. In both cases, the material world has no significance beyond that which is attributed to it by human actors.

However, given Bennett's admiration of Spencer and deployment of evolutionary theory in his pocket philosophies, it is more fruitful to instead regard character and setting as mutually dependent. Setting does not replace character; it shapes character. Bennett critic Robert Squillace recognizes this interdependence, writing, "External details in Bennett's finest novels do not directly reveal the inner workings of a particular character; they create different perspectival contexts in which that character produces very different impressions. Character and context react upon each other to such an extent that one is indefinable save in terms of the other" (Squillace 25). This key interplay between character and context is overlooked by many of Bennett's defenders. Squillace breaks through the limitations of the existing discussion about Bennett's settings, recognizing the active role played by various elements of the environment in Bennett's work. While Squillace is mostly concerned with the perspectival consequences of context, it is also possible to read Bennett's settings as determining a character's personality and lived experience in addition to providing new points of view from which to see pre-existing traits.

In *Clayhanger* (1910), Bennett introduces protagonist Edwin Clayhanger by situating him in terms of both built and natural environment. As Edwin walks along a canal, Bennett explains the reactionary provincial politics which delayed both the building of the canal, and the building of a railroad that runs "through unpopulated country five miles off instead of through the Five Towns" (*Clayhanger* 2) ensuring that as a result the area is now "characterised by a perhaps excessive provincialism" (2). Somewhat defensively, the narrator assures the reader of the importance of detailing the material conditions in which Edwin is raised, commenting that "These interesting details have everything to do with the history of Edwin Clayhanger, as they have everything to do with the history of each of the two hundred thousand souls in the Five Towns" (2). Just as the local residents re-shape the landscape by building canals and railway lines, that newly altered landscape shapes future generations in turn by supporting certain kinds of industry, or reinforcing certain attitudes towards travel. The technology which produces these built environments does not constitute a means of conquering the material world, but simply a means of producing new material conditions to which humans must adapt.

The range of built environments possible in the Five Towns is strongly determined by natural environmental characteristics. Having broadly sketched the manmade elements of the Five Towns, the narrator turns to its geological traits. Edwin, however, is "perfectly ignorant [of geology] though he lived in a district whose whole livelihood depended on the scientific use of geological knowledge, and though the existence of Oldcastle itself was due to a freak of the earth's crust

which geologists called a 'fault'" (*Clayhanger* 12). Although Edwin excels at geography, none of his knowledge is applicable to his own context: He was aware of the rivers of Asia in their order […] [b]ut he had never been instructed for five minutes in the geography of his native county […] He could have drawn a map of the Orinoco, but he could not have found the Trent in a day's march; he did not even know where his drinking-water came from" (12-13). Edwin remains blissfully unaware of the myriad ways in which these physical facts have shaped both his own life and the larger historical life of the region and the country: "That geographical considerations are the cause of all history had never been hinted to him, nor that history bears immediately upon modern life and bore on his own life" (13). Geography and geology provide the raw materials out of which life in the Five Towns has slowly been built over many generations. Although Edwin is not aware of his material surroundings, the narrator insists upon the importance of these contextual elements to his life. Edwin is not, then, participating in the kind of deliberate alteration of his environment called for by Huxley's ethical evolution, but rather in a Spencerian development of habit in response to environment.

On the domestic scale, external material facts are as powerfully able to determine the lives of human subjects as they are on the regional scale. It is not, as Woolf would have it, that houses stand in for their owners, but that they directly shape the temperaments and experiences of those owners. House plans are important not only because of the social information they impart about their owners (the square, rather than rectangular, hall in the Clayhangers' second, more

luxurious and modern residence, for example, is evidence of their newfound

prosperity) but also because of the cumulative effect of the minute daily

adjustments made by inhabitants to their surroundings. The location of the kitchen

at the bottom of a flight of narrow stairs will discourage new help from staying

long, effecting the family's social status and domestic peace. The availability of

private space, or lack thereof, for growing children depresses rebellious

behaviour, or causes it to flare up dramatically. While the second Clayhanger

home is designed to promote privacy and comfort, the discomforts of the family's

initial home, in which the protagonist Edwin grows up, have a lasting effect on the

character of all family members. At times, Bennett argues explicitly for the

importance of the physical arrangement of the home, as when the narrator

comments that "The position of Mr. Clayhanger's easy-chair—a detail apparently

trifling—was in reality a strongly influencing factor in the family life"

(*Clayhanger* 49). The position of the chair "could not be altered" (49) thanks to

the inconvenient placement of the small room's sole window, meaning that for

Edwin's entire childhood it formed a barrier between the children and the fire. As

a result, "when the fire languished and Mr. Clayhanger neglected it, the children

had […] to ask permission to step over his legs" (49). The seemingly minor detail

of the placement of the easy-chair as a result of poor architectural planning

contributes over a matter of years to the timidity of the Clayhanger children, and

the dominance of their bullying father: the location of the easy-chair "meant that

the father's presence obsessed the room" (49), and "When the children reflected

upon the history of their childhood they saw one important aspect of it as a long

series of detached hours spent in the sitting-room, in a state of desire to do

something that could not be done without disturbing father, and in a state of

indecision whether or not to disturb him" (49-50).

Edwin adapts to his immediate environment by becoming deferential and

indecisive, character traits that will trouble him through the rest of his life. While

the easy-chair cannot be blamed for the entirety of Edwin's neuroses, it

nevertheless contributes to them in a meaningful way. For Bennett, as for Spencer,

habits make up the bulk of a person's life, and material surroundings strongly

determine habits. Had Darius Clayhanger been a less mercurial man, or Edwin

less naturally retiring, the story might have been different. But the story might

also have been different had the builders of the Clayhanger home planned a larger

living-room, or a more adequate window. While the Clayhanger family is

described by the narrator as largely unconscious of the influence of their

surroundings, Edwin clumsily grasps the importance of home design, if not the

broader environment, through his childish infatuation with architecture. Although

his dreams of becoming an architect himself are thwarted, he has an opportunity

to exercise his amateur enthusiasm when his father has a new house built for the

family. Edwin surreptitiously includes bookshelves in his bedroom, resulting in a

tense confrontation when his father notices them. While Edwin marvels that his

father can conjure "such a display of ill-temper about a few feet of deal plank"

(*Clayhanger* 222) he is clearly, if inarticulately, aware of the significance of the

bookshelves. They are his attempt to shape his environment in order to cultivate

new habits—private study, silent contemplation—that were disallowed by his old

home. The bookshelves do not only metaphorically represent Edwin's increasing independence from his father, they actively aid in its creation.

Edwin, a typical middlebrow protagonist in a region Bennett identifies as 'England in little', stands in synecdochically for English people in general, demonstrating their shared vulnerability to environmental influences. On both the micro and the macro scales, then, the environment in which a character lives functions as an active force in shaping his or her life. Both built environments and facts of geology and geography present challenges to human subjects, who must adapt to their material contexts. By repeatedly returning to the Five Towns over the course of his career, Bennett is able to flesh out the region, demonstrating to readers the relative power and longevity of stable material elements in the region's make-up compared to the individual choices of its inhabitants. In contrast to Bennett's development of a single region as the primary environment for his characters, Wells frequently uses narratives of travel and extra-ordinary locations in his fiction. As I will demonstrate, however, his characters remain strongly determined by material forces despite their ability to temporarily escape their immediate settings using technological innovations such as balloons, gliders, and other vehicles.

'Vulgar Little Creatures': Wells' Edwardian Protagonists

Wells is clearly cognisant of the strong roles played by heredity and environment in non-fictional pieces like *First and Last Things* and his *Outline of History*. However, critics have repeatedly overlooked the degree to which his

fiction also demonstrates shift of agency from self to surroundings that follows Darwin. In his Edwardian fiction, particularly in his comic novels, Wells undercuts the agency of his protagonists in two key ways: by presenting them as mere 'types' or 'specimens' of larger groups, and by attributing their growth and change to flukes of circumstance rather than any intentional action. The importance of external forces and spaces in novels such as *Tono-Bungay* establishes Wells as a materialist thinker, in contradiction to a critical tradition that argues that Wells treats the object world contemptuously, as an irrelevant hindrance to desired social progress. Like Galsworthy's Forsytes, Wells' protagonists are presented as specimens which prove the universal influence of environmental factors. In narratives of what he calls 'disentanglement', Wells has his protagonists literally travel great distances through their surroundings, noting along their journeys the ways in which their lives are integrated into broader material wholes. It is only by understanding the whole, these narratives suggest, that we can understand the part; only by exploring the physical limits of a lived environment that we can understand its individual inhabitants.

Wells' understanding of the importance of environment in forming human character leads him to experiment with imagined worlds in which a different environment produces different social dynamics. If, as Huxley argues, controlling the environment can change the speed and direction of evolution, then presenting radically new or utopian environments can be an important way of shedding light on the effects of our current surroundings. Wells presented new environments to show his readers that the world could be built differently, and that such a

difference could have wide-reaching effects. Ironically, the utopian tales that reflect the importance of the environment to Wells have been repeatedly interpreted as proof of his indifference to already-existing environments. David Trotter, discussing a particularly well-worn wash stand from *In the Days of the Comet*, argues that domestic objects in Wells only exist to be disparaged and ultimately destroyed: "The details matter only allegorically [as] 'manifestations' of 'old world disorder'" (*The English Novel in History* 87). Homes, rooms, and their attendant things serve only a rhetorical purpose in this reading, providing a counter-example to utopia in order to convince the reader of the need for "a new set of walls, bright, clean, perfectly engineered" (88). Woolf provides a similar criticism in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, arguing that Wells, "in his passion to make [Mrs. Brown] what she ought to be, would not waste a thought upon her as she is" (13). Instead of concerning himself with the real Mrs. Brown,

> Mr. Wells would instantly project upon the windowpane a vision of a better, breezier, jollier, happier, more adventurous and gallant world, where these musty railway carriages and fusty old women do not exist; where miraculous barges bring tropical fruit to Camberwell by eight o'clock in the morning; where there are public nurseries, fountains, and libraries, dining-rooms, drawing-rooms, and marriages; where every citizen is generous and candid, manly and magnificent, and rather like Mr. Wells himself. But nobody is in the least like Mrs. Brown. There are no Mrs. Browns in Utopia. (13)

Granted, Wells' utopian visions often rely on the convenient destruction of existing structures to clear the path for the new, and at times he seems naively unaware of the material and practical barriers to such sweeping changes. In the context of his larger output, however, this apparent naiveté appears as wish-fulfillment in the face of overwhelming obstacles rather than simple ignorance. Wells had an intimate and detailed sense of the power of material surroundings to resist the best of human intentions, as can be clearly seen in his Edwardian social comedies.

In novels such as *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900)*, Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* (1905)*, Tono-Bungay* (1909), and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910)*,* the matter of everyday life is treated both more reverentially and more fondly than it is in Wells' utopian tales. Wells shows a clear understanding of the importance of physical things to the working poor, both in their practical ability to shape habits and character, and in their social significance. His most famous Fabian pamphlet, "This Misery of Boots", lists the various problems faced by wearers of improper footwear—fit, condition, wear, and "the various sorts of chafe" (*Misery of Boots* 393)—as well as the various obstacles faced by those who would embark upon a "kind of Free Booting expedition" to fix the problem (400). Much of the energy of his Edwardian protagonists is spent on the problem of boots—or collars, or lodging, or dinners, or bicycles. For them, the goal is not the obliteration of the status quo, but 'disentanglement'—the achievement of just enough distance from the pressure of everyday needs to see and understand the world from a new perspective. The term 'disentanglement', originally appearing in Wells'

Experiment in Autobiography, has been taken up repeatedly by Wells critics and treated as a central trope in his writing[6]. Traditionally, it has been read through as a form of emancipation and self-development. Bellamy, for example, argues that moments of disentanglement represent "personal Utopianization" (116), and that the psychological transformation of select individuals through such a process is the real source of the "force and originality" of Wells' writing, "However much a Wells book may seem to be concerned with society on a large scale" (116). This reading of disentanglement paints Wells as a closet individualist, and downplays the limitations of individual agency in much of his work.

In fact, disentanglement frequently and emphatically does not mean escaping the material world in Wells' Edwardian novels, or achieving any kind of transcendence or personal actualization. Rather, Wells' protagonists most frequently achieve 'disentanglement' by being physically pulled out of their usual space by an external force, only to be quickly returned to their original state, richer in knowledge, but still under the control of external forces. Narratives of disentanglement serve to relate the experience of the protagonist to larger physical and social structures, relating part to whole and integrating their narrative into

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[6] The exploration of disentanglement in Wells criticism predates, and developed independently from, Amanda Anderson's work on the "dialectic between detachment and engagement" (*Power of Distance* 6) discernible in the work of Eliot, Dickens, Arnold, and others. According to Anderson, many Victorian authors "consider not only the limits but also the distinctive virtues of the conceptions of enabling detachment" (5), but these virtues have been overlooked due to critical models based on Enlightenment critique which "[insist] that cultural ideals of rationality or distance are inevitably erected as the exclusive province of elite groups" (5). Perhaps because Wells' critics tend in general to work along historicist lines rather than employing methodologies informed by Enlightenment critique, the question of productive detachment has not been overlooked in their work as Anderson argues it has been elsewhere. The topic of 'enabling detachment' is a fruitful point of connection between Wells and authors writing just before him, and may provide insight into the ways in which Victorian intellectual trends translated into early-twentieth-century middlebrow culture. However, given the constraints of this project, I will be primarily considering how existing criticism on 'disentanglement' in Wells can benefit from a materially-informed approach.

larger-scale processes. In this way, Wells is able to adapt conventional narrative form to accommodate the increased scale and decreased individual agency that are the logical consequences of evolutionary theory.

As evidence for Wells' supposed belief in the ascendance of the individual through 'personal Utopianization', Bellamy quotes Wells' dystopian novel *The War in the Air*:

> Bert Smallways was a vulgar little creature, the sort of pert, limited soul that the old civilization of the early twentieth century produced by the million in every country of the world. He had lived all his life in narrow streets, and between mean houses he could not look over, and in a narrow circle of ideas from which there was no escape. . . . Now by a curious accident he found himself lifted out of his marvellous modern world for a time, out of all the rush and confused appeals of it, and floating like a thing dead and disembodied between sea and sky. It was as if Heaven was experimenting with him, had picked him out as a sample from the English millions to look at him more nearly and to see what was happening to the soul of man. (115)

Removed from its context, this passage appears to support Bellamy's claim. What is missing from this passage, however, is the crucial information that Smallways reaches his exalted position by being swept away in a renegade balloon—a vehicle he neither understands nor is capable of operating. It is not 'God' who has picked him up, but the wind. Smallways has not reached a state of 'personal Utopianization', but a state of extreme physical danger. He narrowly avoids death

through a series of lucky accidents, and ultimately lands in a German military base, where he is taken hostage and brought along on an aerial raid of New York City. Technology enables Bert to become disentangled from his mundane limitations, but it does so at the cost of his control over his life. This is a far more troubled account of the power of flight than the technological triumphalism usually attributed to Wells. Trotter, for instance, argues that Wells' "enthusiasm for machines" leads him to portray tales of flight as means of "exemplifying the protagonists' fitness not only as technocrats but as lovers" (16). In contrast to this virile image of the man who has harnessed the machine, Bert is a 'sample' being used in an 'experiment'—the narrator's language indicates both Bert's typicality and his lack of agency in the process of disentanglement. He serves as an exemplar of a specific type, not a self-directed hero.

This sobering, troubling narrative of disentanglement is repeated several times in different texts by Wells. The disentanglement is almost always physical, enabled by an external force and/or an uncontrolled vehicle, and temporary. Far from emphasizing the power of individual transformation, these brief, dangerous voyages more often demonstrate the insignificance of the individual in the context of global space and geological time. If we read episodes of disentanglement literally, as explorations of the material limits of the habitable earth enabled by technological objects and only minimally controlled by their participants, rather than applying an allegorical reading that substitutes individual growth for literal journeys, we can recover the key role played by the environment in Wells' fiction. This recuperation of environmental agency in Wells' work is necessary if we are

to understand the diminished individual agency that characterizes his Edwardian protagonists.

Chief among these protagonists is George Ponderevo, hero of Wells' semi-autobiographical 'condition of England' novel *Tono-Bungay*. Wells' most serious attempt at writing a traditional English novel "along Dickens-Thackeray lines" (*Tono-Bungay* xxvii), *Tono-Bungay* takes the form of a *bildungsroman*, following George's education and personal progress. However, from the very beginning, George discounts his own contributions to the events that follow. Beginning his life as the impoverished child of a servant and ending it as a successful and prominent weapons engineer, George has a rags-to-riches story that would not be out of place in the Victorian tradition, yet the metaphors he uses to describe himself deny that he has anything to do with his own improvement. He opens the novel by observing that "[m]ost people in this world seem to live 'in character'; they have a beginning, a middle and an end, and the three are congruous with one another and true to the rules of their type" (*Tono-Bungay* 9). George's difference from such people is not due to any kind of emancipation or bravery, however. He simply lives the "kind of life" that one experiences when "[o]ne gets hit by some unusual transverse force, one is jerked out of one's stratum and lives crosswise for the rest of time, and, as it were, in a succession of samples" (9). George presents himself as a fossil—biological, but passive—being moved through different environments through no fault or choice of his own. He can see other social types with detachment due to his range of experience, but this

does not preclude his also being a passive specimen for others. He is a sample among samples, made different by the accidental effects of external forces.

Heredity is one of the most potent of these forces. George has achieved "this remarkable social range" not through "merit" but merely "the Accident of Birth" (*Tono-Bungay* 10) that made him the nephew of Teddy Ponderevo, inventor of the eponymous patent tonic that, "like a stupendous rocket" (10), takes them to the height of English society before returning Teddy "a little scarred and blistered perhaps, […] with my youth gone, my manhood eaten in upon, but greatly edified, into this Thames-side yard" (11). George's disentanglement is temporary and driven by external forces, and ends with his violent re-integration into the world from which he so recently escaped, both metaphorically in the collapse of the Tono-Bungay business empire, and literally in a series of glider and balloon accidents. Far from dismissing the material world as a meaningless obstacle on the path towards Utopia, Wells frequently relies on external physical forces and material objects to shape the lives of his characters, and just as frequently leaves them embedded in the same environment from which he has temporarily removed them. By constructing his protagonists as types, and emphasizing the importance of environmental factors in their lives, Wells creates narratives that respect the reduced role held by the individual in the framework of evolutionary theory. The individual is valued as a means to understand larger systems, not for his ability to transcend those systems. Again and again in his works, a synecdochic relationship between part and whole is underwritten by a belief in the material unity of human existence.

Conclusion

The presentation of individuals as representative elements of the material systems which they inhabit is a defining characteristic of the writing of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. Although they do not represent all middlebrow culture, they do typify a key stream of it that found a rich materialism in the tenets of evolutionary theory, a key topic in the middlebrow popularization of scientific knowledge. By acknowledging the richness and agency of the material world in their writings, we can recuperate the importance of the object world in their novels. Rather than a subject-object split, their writing assumes that subjects are shaped and defined by the object world, and that the object world is shaped in turn by its inhabitants. Seeing the individual as fundamentally defined by his or her relationships with external forces, spaces, and agents is not problematic for middlebrow authors as it is for the modernists, since the broad middlebrow investment in evolutionary theory views such dependence as factually self-evident.

Through their insistence on maintaining strong connections between part and whole, Edwardian middlebrow authors like Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy are differentiated from both their Victorian forebears and their modernist contemporaries and competitors. While both Victorians and modernists acknowledge the importance of the material world, neither views it as being as systematically all-encompassing as the Edwardian middlebrows. The emphasis placed by many middlebrow authors on the physical context of their characters is a conscious strategy based on well-articulated theories of the material connection

between part and whole. This strongly suggests that early-twentieth-century middlebrow literature can be defined by the investment in materiality that grows out of its practice of popularizing scientific knowledge, especially evolutionary theories. In the chapters that follow, I will explore how this material investment produces a rich and under-examined set of ethical and political practices. While charges of materialism have been wielded against middlebrow authors as pejoratives, reading their work through the lens of material criticism allows us to see the ways in which synecdochic materialism generates narrative and social strategies that are both responsive to their Edwardian context and uniquely middlebrow.

Chapter Two: Gender, Materiality, and the 'Battle of the Brows'.

Both arguments about the relative value of middlebrow and highbrow writing and discourses of materiality were heavily gendered in the early decades of the twentieth century. As Penny Sparke argues, the concept of decorative 'taste' was generally aligned in popular texts with "domesticity and femininity" (Sparke 74), while larger-scale 'design' was aligned with rationality, objectivity, and masculinity; women were assumed to be consumers and decorators, men inventors and architects. This division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' forms of interaction with the material world was reinforced in much of the literature of the time, including that of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy, who repeatedly associate female characters with myopic, aesthetic visions of material culture in contrast to the more expansive and pragmatic understanding of men. This attitude did not go unnoticed or unchallenged by their female contemporaries, who both insisted on the political and social importance of women's domestic spaces and expanded the range of environments inhabited by women in fiction. In this chapter, I will explore the various ways in which men and women authors use gendered discourses of materiality to establish the cultural standing of their own style of writing, contrasting Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's masculine middlebrow writing with the feminine middlebrow novels of Elizabeth Von Arnim and the highbrow writing of Dorothy Richardson. In a literary context in which both the value of middlebrow writing and the definition of ideal masculinity are being re-evaluated, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy align themselves with systematic materialism in order to establish

themselves as masculine middlebrow authors distinct from both the women who were their middlebrow peers, and their highbrow contemporaries and critics.

The critical project of tracing the 'masculine' middlebrow has lagged behind articulations of the 'feminine' middlebrow by a decade or so[7]. The association of the middlebrow with women has roots in early-twentieth-century discussions about middlebrow literature which saw a vigorous public debate taking place over the value of popular literature that critics have named the 'Battle of the Brows'. Gendered language plays a key role in this debate, with many authors assigning negative gendered attributes to the styles of writing they disliked. The middlebrow is often characterised as feminine due to its association with women writers and readers, as well as its investment in stereotypically feminine sentimental and domestic narratives. Nicola Humble argues that middlebrow literature "was largely written and consumed by women" and that this is "one important reason [...] for the subsequent critical neglect of the major part of the fiction published in Britain in these years [1920-1950]" (2). Recent criticism transforms this pejorative association between the middlebrow and femininity into a fertile source of feminist criticism, as "[m]uch of the research into the cultural productions of the middlebrow has focused on the reclamation of writing by and for women, the 'feminine' middlebrow" (Macdonald 1).

What I want to challenge is not the predominance of women writers and readers in English middlebrow culture, which by this point is well-established, but the claim that middlebrow literature is connected to women's literature because

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[7] I take two critical volumes as my key markers on this timeline: Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (2001) and *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr Miniver Read* (2011), edited by Kate Macdonald.

both are dismissed by the institutions and artists who make up 'high culture'. It is

perfectly possible for a highbrow writer to criticize middlebrow writing because it

is too *masculine*, as Richardson does, just as it is possible for middlebrow writers

to turn the strategy of highbrows against themselves by identifying not

middlebrow, but highbrow art with femininity, as Galsworthy does. Many

arguments about the gendering of middlebrow culture do not account for the

possibility that middlebrow and/or feminine culture are championed by many

writers, in ways that do not conform to the dominant discourse of the time. For

example, Andreas Huyssen argues in his frequently-cited study *After the Great*

Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism that "the political,

psychological, and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century *consistently*

and *obsessively* genders mass cultures and the masses as feminine, while high

culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of

male activities" (47, emphasis mine). Huyssen's equation of 'mass' culture[8] with

femininity and 'high' culture with masculinity rests on two general assumptions.

The first is that participants in and producers of mass culture do not have the

ability to define its value—the negative association of mass culture with

femininity implies a definition of mass culture from without, since participants in

mass culture would presumably avoid voluntarily associating it with negatively-

defined femininity. This discounts the ways in which participants in mass culture

argue for the value of its products. The second assumption implicit in Huyssen's

claim is that femininity is perceived as a negative characteristic. Huyssen

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[8] Huyssen's 'mass culture' contains both middlebrow and lowbrow culture. As Macdonald notes, Huyssen overlooks "the huge variation in the examples of cultural production that he assigned to 'mass culture'" (5).

overlooks the internal discussions taking place within middlebrow culture, as well as feminist arguments that re-cast femininity as a virtue. Male middlebrow writers including Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy align their own work with 'masculine' values, while emerging modernist writers like Richardson argue for the inclusion of 'feminine' writing in the highbrow pantheon. My aim is not to discount the central importance of women writers and readers to middlebrow culture, but to unsettle the equation of the middlebrow and the feminine in order to reveal the variety of ways in which men and women applied gendered terms to both middlebrow and highbrow culture in the early twentieth century as a means of establishing cultural value for particular styles of literature.

While it is true that around the turn of the century "the dominance of science, technology and rationality within the prevailing model of modernity meant the rule of a masculine cultural paradigm" while "the notion of 'taste' continued to align itself with domesticity and femininity" (Sparke 74), this binary does not necessarily entail the equation of masculinity and modernism. While Sparke sees the expression of 'science, technology and rationality' in high modernist design and architecture, one could just as easily locate these discourses in popular scientific texts and the middlebrow project of disseminating useful knowledge. In literature more so than in design, objectivity and rationality are strongly associated with a mainstream concept of 'progress' that modernism critiques. Critic Amanda Anderson identifies 'two modernities'—"one philosophical/political and associated with the Enlightenment, and one more self-consciously aesthetic (but certainly often still carrying philosophical and political

elements) and allied with a corrosive skepticism toward Enlightenment modernity" ("Victorian Studies" 197-8). Philosophical/political modernity embraces rationality and progress, while Aesthetic modernity critiques their power. Significantly, Anderson aligns 'Enlightenment' modernity, and its attendant 'masculine' values, with "'the Victorian,' whatever that might mean" (198) and 'Aesthetic' modernity with emerging modernism. Anderson is concerned with the late nineteenth century, but her model of the 'two modernities' is applicable to early-twentieth-century English literature. Pejorative descriptions of middlebrow literature identify Edwardian writers as belated, benighted Victorians rather than full participants in a modernity now defined by the aesthetic self-fashioning of high modernism. On the other hand, many middlebrow writers identified themselves as defenders of rationality and pragmatism in opposition to what they saw as destructive aesthetic decadence. Anderson's 'two modernities' serve as a reminder that masculine discourses do not always easily map onto canonical 'high culture' status.

For male middlebrow writers like Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, the stakes of establishing one's masculinity are especially high given that middlebrow writing emerges at a time when definitions of masculinity, like definitions of femininity, are in flux. New male role models including the clerk, the scientist, and the mechanical expert (cyclist, chauffer, pilot) came into play in the early years of the twentieth century, and occupy a central role in much middlebrow fiction with an implicit masculine audience. As a result, new definitions of successful middle class masculinity emerge. As Macdonald observes, "Within

'masculine' reading of this period new cultural values began to find a voice: science, business, living independently, the work of the office, increasing freedom from class rules" (17). The objectivity, rationality, and authoritative position which contribute to Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's self-representations as disinterested interpreters of large-scale systems are part of a new set of masculine values which emerge around the turn of the century. Intellectual and practical expertise characterize desirable masculine pursuits—white-collar work, scientific innovation, and practical labour. Given the frequent association of middlebrow writing with femininity, "[m]ale writers could be seen as being in danger of emasculation by association with women's writing" (Macdonald 16). Male middlebrow writers were therefore particularly concerned with aligning themselves and their work with new masculine values.

Women Characters in Masculine Middlebrow Novels

One of the key ways in which writers like Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy distinguish themselves from their female peers is by participating in gendered discourses about material culture. These authors provide concrete examples of the broad discursive practice noted by Sparke of aligning women with the small-scale materialism of the collector, the home-maker, and the consumer of art in early-twentieth-century Britain. In their fiction, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy portray this supposed myopic 'feminine' focus on small-scale material culture as detrimental to society at large for two key reasons. The first grows out of these authors' evolutionary viewpoint: women characters who are primarily consumers

appear in texts by Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy as negative figures who have abandoned their role as producers of children, the necessary raw material out of which the future race will be built. The second grows out of their belief in the importance of change: the attachments of women in their novels to the way things *are* keep them from seeing the way they could be. Female characters are often presented as being too invested in small-scale, domestic materiality to be able to see the larger material systems in which they are implicated.

One of the worst offenders on this count is the decadent, frivolous, and decidedly 'modern' Lady Agatha Sunderbund, who appears in Wells' war-time novel *The Soul of a Bishop* (1917), which he wrote during his brief phase of religious belief. The eponymous Bishop, Edward Scropes, has a vision of God as actually existing in the material world and rejects the immaterial spirituality and liturgical metaphor of Christianity. Lady Sunderbund, a fashionable and rich young woman, pledges to support Scropes as he works to establish his new religion. Their partnership falls apart, however, over a disagreement regarding how to build a cathedral to house his new religion. Scropes rejects the "quite new, quite modern" (*Soul of a Bishop* 233) building that Lady Sunderbund has designed, arguing that her obsession with aesthetics misses the point of his conviction that God exists throughout the material world. Scropes believes in "a God of politics, a God of such muddy and bloody wars as this war, a God of economics, a God of railway junctions and clinics and factories and evening schools, a God in fact of men" while Lady Sunderbund's God is "a God of artists and poets—of elegant poets, a God of bric-a-brac, a God of choice allusions"

(*Soul of a Bishop* 275). In comparison to the broad physical and academic systems valued by Scropes, Lady Sunderbund's obsession with aesthetics appears pitiful. The narrator makes this contrast explicit:

> Both [Scropes] and Lady Sunderbund professed universalism; but while his was the universalism of one who would simplify to the bare fundamentals of a common faith, hers was the universalism of the collector. Religion to him was something that illuminated the soul, to her it was something that illuminated prayer-books. (*Soul of a Bishop* 267).

Here, we clearly see the equation between women and taste articulated by Sparke. Female taste is represented not only as trivial, but as a distraction from the 'real' work of masculine endeavors.

Many of the negative characteristics attributed to female characters by middlebrow writers coincide with their complaints about modernism: a lack of pragmatism, political irrelevance, an obsession with surface appearance and aesthetics rather than with a broader 'reality'. The critique of modernism offered by the middlebrow is thus frequently heavily gendered. In Galsworthy's *The White Monkey*, for example, modernism is connected with 'feminine' material culture through the character of Fleur Forsyte. Whereas Fleur's father, Soames Forsyte, is deeply invested in amassing property and the financial productivity of his holdings, Fleur has no interest in either. Instead, she invests in the material world only as a consumer, obsessively decorating and re-decorating her home and "collecting people rather than furniture or bibelots" (*White Monkey* 24). Whereas previous generations of the Forsyte clan channeled the 'possessive instinct' that

runs in the family into house-building, real estate speculation, and amassing wealth, Fleur is simply a collector of aesthetically pleasing objects. Like Lady Sunderbund, Fleur is initially unable to move beyond her aesthetic habits and participate in larger political and social structures. Galsworthy presents modernist art as a key force in maintaining Fleur's detachment, criticizing both feminine taste and modernist art as numbing distractions which allow the younger generation to ignore what he sees as their responsibility to invest in national politics and, particularly in Fleur's case, to produce children.

In *The White Monkey*, modernism appears as a negative force which disables practical action and genuine emotional connections by encouraging irony, self-consciousness, and scepticism of tradition. Although 'modernism' was not a widespread term in 1924, *The White Monkey* contains criticism of aesthetic trends which we would now identify as modernist: atonal music, anti-mimetic art, and self-conscious experimental literature. Although Galsworthy does not name names, a practice which suggests an attempt to "conceal his contemporaries" (Fréchet 98), many groups we now call modernist can be identified in *The White Monkey*. The Vorticists appear as "Vertiginist[s]" (75), while a smart set of "gay, charming, free-and-easy" yet "snobbish" (39) writers and artists who "know everything—except mankind outside their own set" and run their creative energies "round and round in their own blooming circle" (39) are strongly suggestive of emerging modernist circles. Galsworthy is scathingly critical of such artists, re-framing the innovations of modernism as solipsistic practices which only have limited social importance.

While Fleur is initially a dedicated consumer of modernist music, art, and literature, she eventually realizes that she is suffering personally as a result. In a move that turns modernist values on their head, Fleur finds that self-consciousness is personally and politically *dis*abling and earnest sentimentality is the necessary cure. Fleur not only sees herself, but can "see herself seeing it—a triple-distilled modern" (*White Monkey* 184) who does not so much live as wait, self-consciously, "for the next moment of the plot" (184). Modern self-consciousness draws Fleur away from practical concerns by making her see her life as a work of aesthetic self-fashioning. Rather than being empowered by critical reflection on the meaning and purpose of her life, Fleur is convinced of her own "decorative" (185) meaninglessness. She imagines various roles for herself—volunteer nurse, feminist activist, back-to-the-land farmer, athlete—but is restrained from moving towards any of those roles by the "filaments of her self-vision": "So long as she saw herself she would do nothing—she knew it—for nothing would be worth doing!" (185). Yet so much of her personal and social identity relies on self-fashioning that she cannot conceive of giving up this habit of self-consciousness. Even though it paralyzes her, it seems to Fleur that "not to see herself would be worse than anything" (185). She conceives of her value, for the time being, in purely aesthetic terms, her function as 'decorative' rather than productive.

The antidote, for Galsworthy, is to break through self-consciousness by finding "some person or some principle outside oneself" that is "more precious than oneself" (*White Monkey* 256). In Fleur's case, this outward turn comes

through the birth of her and Michael's first child at the close of the novel. With the birth of her son Christopher, Fleur is "[f]reed from poetry and modern music" (*White Monkey* 300) as well as from her modernist friends, and channels her energy into "finding time for her son" who "represent[s] for her the reality of things" (300). Fleur's rejection of Modernism goes hand-in-hand with both her maternity and her political awakening. In subsequent novels she helps get her husband elected to parliament, supports his various schemes and initiatives, and runs a canteen for replacement workers during the General Strike and a rest home in the country for impoverished young women. Galsworthy presents maternity as one means of breaking out of the limited realm of feminine taste and engaging with broader concerns. Because the supposed frivolity and self-consciousness of modernist art delays Fleur's transformation from a consumer into a 'productive' member of society, Modernism is aligned by Galsworthy with trivial, 'feminine' taste and consumption. Galsworthy implicitly genders Modernism as feminine by aligning it with 'feminine' material culture. While his equation of maternity and feminine fulfillment is clearly problematic, his use of gendered discourse to criticize Modernism constitutes one example of how discussions of femininity operate in defenses of middlebrow culture.

Like Wells and Galsworthy, Bennett upholds the gendered distinction between taste and design in many of his novels. Edwin Clayhanger, for example, is passionate about architecture in contrast to his suitor, the artistically accomplished Janet Orgreave. In *The Old Wives' Tale*, while men are discovering bicycles, automobiles, and balloons, the matriarch of the Baines family

strenuously resists innovations as small as the introduction of modern tickets into her drapery shop, and remains focused on her pastries and needlework to the exclusion of much else. However, Bennett also links domestic with industrial activity to a much greater degree than Wells and Galsworthy. Many of his novels and short stories are set in the Five Towns, a fictionalized version of the English Potteries District. Because the region's industrial life is based on producing household goods, Bennett cannot help but consider how the manufacturing and domestic spheres of life in the Five Towns are connected. Clay is the common material around which life in the Five Towns revolves:

> The horse is less to the Arab than clay is to the Bursley man. He exists in it and by it; it fills his lungs and blanches his cheek; it keeps him alive and it kills him. His fingers close round it as round the hand of a friend. He knows all its tricks and aptitudes; when to coax and when to force it, when to rely on it and when to distrust it. (*Anna* 115)

Those who do not work with clay directly in the potbanks profit from its production, live in settlements established around the pottery industry, and drink and eat from its finished products at the kitchen table. Because clay pottery moves between industrial and domestic spaces, it allows Bennett to make connections between manufacturing and the marriage market in novels like *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902).

In *Anna of the Five Towns*, Bennett integrates a fairly straightforward marriage plot with criticism of the industrial practices of the Potteries region. While the novel's domestic, religious, tractable heroine Anna Tellwright fits

neatly into the Victorian ideal of a marriageable young woman, the narrative of her marriage breaks with convention by inserting Anna into a complex system of capitalist circulation of which the marriage market forms a key element. Anna's mother is dead, and her father Ephraim is a noted miser. Worth "sixty thousand of his own, apart from the fortune of his first wife" (*Anna* 33), Ephraim Tellwright nevertheless carefully monitors Anna's household purchases, which do not exceed a pound per week. The novel begins as Anna reaches the age of majority, and Ephraim informs her that she has now come into ownership of her own fortune, inherited from her mother and carefully invested by her father. Anna's receipt of investments in local infrastructure and potteries worth fifty thousand pounds marks her entry into a different system of value from the Sunday School morality she is used to. The property transforms her public character. Anna's holdings represent "the aristocracy of investments, based on commercial enterprises of which every business man in the Five Towns knew the entire soundness" and "conferred distinction on the possessor, like a great picture or a rare volume," "stifl[ing] all questions and insinuations" (*Anna* 42) about the person holding them. "Put before any jury of the Five Towns as evidence of character," the narrator jokes, "they would almost have exculpated a murderer" (42). Ephraim's presentation of the holdings marks Anna's entry into the public sphere, and the pottery industry.

Manufacture, for Bennett, cannot be divorced from its social surroundings. Anna's inheritance also marks her entry into the marriage market, since she is now a desirable catch. Her romantic life is deeply entangled with her financial

life. Her two suitors, Henry Mynors and Willie Price, are also tied to her through business: Anna is the major financial backer of Mynors' latest potteries project, as well as the owner of the Price family potbank. Her father immediately puts her to work sweating back rent out of the Prices, whose factory is too run down to make a decent profit. The small sums overdue from the Prices seem "larger to her than all the thousands and tens of thousands which she had received in the morning" (*Anna* 44), since she still thinks of money in terms of its ability to serve immediate physical needs rather than on the scale of high finance. Because Anna has been sequestered in the domestic sphere up to this point, she can only think of her business in terms of household expenditures, musing that "the total of this debt of Price's would […] keep [the Tellwright family] in food for two years" (45). This lack of perspective leads her to join others in pushing Titus Price, Willie's father, into suicide. Bennett uses Price's suicide to criticize the practice of treating business relationships as distinct from personal relationships. Having already established the interdependence of industrial and domestic life in the region, he shows the reader the consequences paid by Price when his neighbours and friends deny this interdependence, treating their relationship as strictly business and ruining him financially. Manufacturing provides ways of connecting and dividing the inhabitants of the Five Towns.

The individual products of that manufacture are also used to define social standing and relationships. Anna's eventual husband, Henry Mynors, uses a piece of pottery to mark the transition of their relationship from a strictly monetary arrangement to a romantic one, and to mark Anna's domestic labour as distinct

from the labour of working women. When Henry gives her a tour of one of his facilities as part of their business relationship, Anna asks to try 'band-and-line' painting—the addition of a simple embellishment to a finished plate. The woman who works the station is characterised by thoughtless, mechanical movement. She produces identical plates with "infallible exactitude", "hypnotis[ing] the observer" with the "stupendous phenomenon of absolute sameness" (*Anna* 121). The value of the paintress' work is determined by the market, and the goal of her work is to produce as little variation as possible. The plate that Anna produces, in contrast, takes on a value related to her personal value outside of the system of manufacture. She produces "a most creditable band, and a trembling but passable line" (122) on a single plate, which Mynors removes from the potbank. At a fundraising bazaar for the local Wesleyan church, he offers the plate, monogrammed with Anna's initials, to a local matron for sale (231). He promptly buys it back from her at many times its market value, publically differentiating Anna's plate from the thousands of others produced in the potbank. Even though the product of her labour is identical to those produced by the band-and-line woman, her labour is valued differently from that of the women employed in the factories she owns. Mynors treats Anna's plate as a romantic keepsake rather than a product of manufacture, separating her from the world of the factory. The plate becomes one of the merely decorative items that are seen as typical of frivolous feminine decorative taste. Yet Bennett has shown us the forgotten women's labour which produces these domestic goods, as well as foregrounding marriage and religious activity as two means to disavow that labour. Through his description of

the factory, Bennett reminds the reader of the very real and potentially dangerous women's work[9] that is left out of the discussion about feminine taste.

After her marriage, Anna returns to the domestic sphere, handing all of her holdings over to her husband, and requesting that he take care of all business matters while she tends their home. The novel thus re-establishes the connection between women and domestic material culture. Yet because the narrator repeatedly emphasizes that Anna only achieves her domestic role by virtue of her involvement in large-scale manufacture, the reader is left with a sense that the separation of these two spheres is more tenuous than it initially appears. As Anna's plate travels from the factory to her new home with Mynors, it reminds the reader of the intimate connection between large-scale 'masculine' and small-scale 'feminine' material culture. Bennett uses material culture to unsettle assumptions about the separation of industrial and domestic affairs.

The Response of Women Writers.

Despite the occasional significant exception such as *Anna of the Five Towns*, however, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy generally associate women with trivial forms of material culture, consumption, and taste. This association did not go unnoticed or unaddressed by their female peers. I will now turn to the work of two women writers whose work unsettles the association of femininity with small-scale objects and frivolous questions of taste: Von Arnim the middlebrow writer,

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[9] Lead poisoning was a serious problem for women who worked as painters, as Bennett notes elsewhere in the novel. When Mynors compliments Anna on her band-and-line work, Anna's happy comment that her "mother's mother was a paintress, and it must be in the blood" (122) reads as a bleak joke about the lead that is 'in the blood' of many other painters.

and Richardson the experimental novelist. Both authors give serious consideration to their characters' surroundings, and both use material things and spaces to shape the lives of their characters. In style and reputation, however, they could not be more different: Richardson is one of the pioneers of 'stream of consciousness' narration, while Von Arnim is a popular comedic writer whose work has only recently been taken seriously by academics. While both writers differentiate their work from mainstream realism by identifying it with male authors, they present very different 'feminine' alternatives. Von Arnim remains in the realm of the feminine middlebrow, while Richardson claims a distinct style of thought and language for women that is recognizably highbrow. Again, questions of the relative value of highbrow and middlebrow literature are bound up in gender issues, with the middlebrow being attributed both masculine and feminine characteristics in different contexts.

Both Richardson and Von Arnim differentiate themselves from male writers by identifying crude realism with 'masculine' modes of thought. In their work, men and masculine women produce realist writing by simply converting the object world around them into words. Both authors represent this rational, blunt approach as insensitive to the subtle connections which exist between objects and their owners, environments and their inhabitants. Von Arnim's best-known work, *Elizabeth and her German Garden,* features an unpleasant and roundly disliked 'new woman' character, Minora. In addition to being an unwanted houseguest, Minora constantly records her surroundings for inclusion in her planned book, "*Journeyings in Germany*" (*Elizabeth* 111). While Elizabeth, the diarist who

narrates the novel, also incorporates her home into a book project, she sees her own work as distinct from that of Minora. Elizabeth contextualizes spaces and objects in terms of their inhabitants, their histories of care and disrepair, and the human events which have taken place within and around them. Minora sees Elizabeth's home as a container "full of copy," the raw material that "you make books with" (109). Elizabeth has nothing but contempt for Minora's views of both writing and the material world, dismissing her writing as uncreative and masculine. Minora sympathizes with Elizabeth's husband, "the Man of Wrath" (132) and courts his attention and approval by policing the behaviour of the women in the house. Worse yet in Elizabeth's eyes, Minora is "going to take a man's name" (167) when she submits her manuscript, a choice which cements her alienation from the other women. Irais, a close friend of Elizabeth, views Minora's planned pseudonym as a token of her misogyny: "You will call yourself John Jones, or George Potts, or some such sternly commonplace name, to emphasise your uncompromising attitude towards all feminine weaknesses, and no one will be taken in" (167). Both Elizabeth and Irais consider this kind of writing to be uncreative and uninteresting—by directly turning the material world into 'copy', Minora bypasses creativity and individuality. The text in which Minora appears, Elizabeth's diary, consists of the same material presented with humour and personality, clearly a much better strategy in Von Arnim's opinion. In this account, women writers, freed from the burden of strict rationality and objectivity, have more creative freedom.

Popular realism also comes under fire in *Pilgrimage,* Richardson's multi-

volume account of the life of aspiring writer Miriam Henderson. When Miriam

visits a literary gathering hosted by Alma Wilson, an old school friend now

married to prominent writer Hypo Wilson, a fictionalized version of Wells, she

finds the conversation forced and uncomfortable until a young man, eager to

impress Hypo, asks the assembled group of authors and critics, "Why not write an

article about a lamp-post?" (*The Tunnel* 115). The suggestion instantly breathes

"fresh wonderful life-giving" (115) energy into the conversation. It is quickly

revealed, however, that this excitement is not due to genuine intellectual curiosity,

but because all of those present know that it is a topic that will please Hypo: "The

two young men were speaking towards Mr Wilson, obviously trying to draw him

in bringing along one of his topics; something that had been discussed here

before" (115-16). Miriam was hoping for deep literary conversation, and finds

instead a socially competitive group of "Clever literary people trying to say things

well" (116). The attitude the male guests display towards the role of material

objects in narrative is smug and ultimately shallow and instrumental. Miriam

derides the self-congratulatory enthusiasm the male writers display for their

practice of turning objects into copy. Using the character of Hypo, Richardson

criticizes mainstream realist fiction and its dependence on things.

However, while Richardson—like Woolf—criticizes the use of things in

mainstream fiction, she also makes extensive use of material description in her

own texts, as do many of her highbrow contemporaries. The narrator of

Pilgrimage pays obsessive attention to the details of the physical spaces inhabited

by its protagonist. One volume of *Pilgrimage, The Tunnel*, begins with a seven-

page description of a single room that would put Bennett to shame. The narrator

describes "the dark yellow graining of the wall-paper" (13), the "firm little deal

table" and "expanse of greyish white counterpane" (13), and lingers over

Miriam's tactile exploration of "iron framework" (14) of bars across the window.

Critic Jean Radford emphasizes the "thinginess" of the passage, which "serves to

remind the reader of the room's material existence, that things or objects exist

independently of human appetite and desires" (Radford 52). Yet although

Richardson displays an affinity for material description criticized as 'middlebrow'

by Woolf elsewhere, Richardson is highly critical of books produced for

"Middles" (*Dawn's Left Hand* 240), and Hypo, a writer we would now identify as

middlebrow, acts as one of the central antagonists in her story. Richardson relies

heavily on material detail, yet her work is strikingly different from that of the

middlebrow writers who do the same. What, then, distinguishes Richardson from

the 'materialists' criticized by Woolf?

The answer lies not in the simple presence or absence of material detail,

but in the presentation and use of those details within the narrative. Things are

not meaningful in and of themselves in Richardson, but rather gain narrative

significance as the content of her narrator's thoughts. Her ultimate goal is not to

explain the world, but to communicate how the world appears to Miriam. In order

to express Miriam's consciousness, Richardson uses flowing, elastic sentences

which are frequently interrupted by gaps and pauses. According to Elizabeth

Bronfen, Richardson believes that "the ambiguity and formlessness of her

language [are] an expression of a specifically feminine rhetoric" required to

escape the restrictions of materialistic, masculine thought, as evidenced by Richardson's argument that "Women see in terms of life. Men in terms of things" (Bronfen 141). Richardson may *use* things, but she does not see them as stable referents or as sources of secure knowledge, as do her male characters. The object world of *Pilgrimage* is not meant to represent an objective reality, to gesture beyond the experiences of the narrator, to document her period, or to do anything but record the idiosyncratic consciousness of one woman as faithfully as possible. Richardson's things resist easy interpretation, and are not meant to be integrated into broader material systems.

Unlike middlebrow authors, who tend to include more prescriptive interpretations of material objects and spaces in their texts (e.g. Bennett's careful explanation of the class coding of various pieces of clothing), Richardson does not provide direction to the reader as to how her material descriptions are meant to be interpreted. Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy value parts for the information they impart about the whole—Richardson constructs her prose in such a way as to make movement from part to whole extremely difficult. Critic Jean Radford argues that Richardson deliberately uses physical detail as "a device to delay or impede meaning-construction, to slow up the reading and 'hold up the development of the whole'" (19). Attempts to synthesize all of the physical details provided into something meaningful, to look for patterns of symbolism, information about 'typical' experiences, or signs of the time, result in frustration and confusion for the reader, who instead meets with a deluge of unconnected images. Frustrating the reader's attempts to transform the details of Miriam's life

into moral lessons or broad generalizations is, for Richardson, a feminist strategy in situations where easy understandings of generalized scientific 'truths' are used to define and limit women's experiences. Miriam is not reducible to a type, or meant to stand in for, say, 'New Women' in general. She is meant to be simply Miriam, a unique individual irreducible to the narrow categories in which women are organized. Richardson's insistence on the particularity of Miriam's experiences, communicated partially through her refusal to impose patterns of meaning on Miriam's material environment, is a means of resisting damaging generalizations and stereotypes. As Radford explains, "the valorisation of the detail over the whole, the particular over the general may be necessary when the conventions governing the whole are 'false'" (Radford 19). The confusing, overflowing catalogue of material items in *Pilgrimage* trains readers to accept the particularity of individual things and not to rely on pattern-seeking habits and generalizations—all lessons which should apply equally strongly to their interpretation of women characters.

Yet the refusal to integrate parts into a coherent whole is more than a temporary narrative strategy for Richardson—it is the central characteristic of what she sees as a uniquely feminine form of thought and language. Her choice of a highbrow register for *Pilgrimage* is the logical extension of her beliefs about how women think and speak. While highbrow writing of Richardson's period is generally represented by a list of men (Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence) with the exception of Woolf, Richardson argues that experimental literature is the natural and necessary venue for *women's* writing if they wish to avoid the damaging

generalizations characteristic of mainstream masculine culture. Inverting

Huyssen's argument that "the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse

around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass cultures

and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern,

clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities" (47), Richardson equates

high culture with feminine language and mass culture with masculine language.

Richardson's gendering of the different spheres of literary production is

made explicit over the course of *Pilgrimage*, as Miriam develops opinions about

the kind of writing she is suited to. One of the key interlocutors with whom she

discusses authorship is Hypo Wilson, who bears, as noted above, a direct

resemblance to Wells. While Miriam and Hypo cannot be taken as direct copies of

Richardson and Wells, we can be assured of a strong correlation between the

beliefs and actions of the fictional characters and their living counterparts. Wells

praises Richardson's "distinctive literary gift" and the "astonishingly vivid

memory," identifying himself with Hypo and commenting that Richardson has

"described our Worcester Park life with astonishing accuracy" (*Experiment* 471).

In the posthumous addition to his autobiography in which a much less inhibited

Wells details his sexual relationship with Richardson, Wells objects to what he

calls lapses in her "precision and innate truthfulness" (*Wells in Love* 64), but

confirms Richardson's overall presentation of their relationship, and refers "the

adventurous student" (64) to read *Dawn's Left Hand,* one of the constituent

volumes of *Pilgrimage*, for confirmation of the details of their affair. Given how

unflinchingly unflattering her depiction of Hypo is, the fullness of Wells'

identification with the character is surprising, and suggests a high degree of correlation between Richardson's writing and his memory of events. However, although Richardson shares many views on women and writing with her protagonist, she emphasized the distinction between herself and her character, insisting that "*Pilgrimage* is 'fiction' not autobiography" and raging at "reviewers who confused her with her character" (Radford 68). It is safe to assume, however, that inasmuch as both Hypo and Wells are successful male authors catering to middlebrow taste, and both Miriam and Richardson criticize masculine writing and search for feminine alternatives, we can map Miriam's conflict with Hypo onto Richardson's conflict with Wells with some confidence.

Miriam meets Hypo through her school friend Alma (the fictional analog of Catherine "Jane" Wells) immediately finds fault with his 'masculine' attitude towards language. Hypo does not converse so much as he holds forth; generalizations and factual statements make up the bulk of his conversation. At their very first encounter, Hypo asks Miriam a barrage of questions that are phrased as statements, and do not appear to require responses: "You caught the elusive three-fifteen. This is your bag" (*The Tunnel* 110). Unlike Miriam's language, there is no space here for ambiguity, interaction, or the unknown. While the narrator makes frequent use of ellipses to signify spaces of rest and silence, Hypo strings 'statements' together without a pause in order to maintain his control over the conversation:

The little man began making statements about Alma. Sitting back in his
high-backed chair, with his head bent and his fine hands clasping his large

handkerchief, he made little short statements, each improving on the one

before it and coming out of it, and little subdued snorting at the back of his

nose in the pauses between his sentences as if he were afraid of being

answered or interrupted before he developed the next thing. (*The Tunnel*

113)

Miriam later equates this assertive, factual use of language with masculine

thought in general, arguing that masculine language draws its habit of

generalizing from science, a system of knowledge which Miriam criticizes, along

with religion, for disempowering women[10]. Science may prove emancipatory for

the middlebrow man, but Richardson questions its usefulness to women in

general.

In addition to expressing himself in what Miriam sees as a masculine style,

Hypo encourages her to begin a career as a writer working in a similar register.

While the term 'middlebrow' is not used (*The Tunnel,* the first volume of

Pilgrimage in which Hypo appears, was written before the term was coined),

characters refer to 'Middles' as a target audience that seems very similar to 'the

middlebrow'. The kind of literary work Hypo proposes Miriam undertake falls

readily within present-day definitions of 'middlebrow' writing: mainstream

criticism and book reviewing, literary journalism, realism, and accessible

domestic novels. Hypo lays out a trajectory for Miriam's career as a middlebrow

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[10] "Religion in the world had nothing but insults for women. Christ was a man. If it was true that he was God taking on humanity—he took on *male* humanity . . . and the people who explained him, St Paul and the priests, the Anglicans and the Nonconformists, it was the same story everywhere. Even if religion could answer science and prove it wrong there was no hope, for women. And no intelligent person can prove science wrong. Life is poisoned, for women, at the very source. Science is true and will find out more and more, and things will grow more and more horrible." (*Tunnels 222*)

writer, beginning with criticism and ending, after the birth of a child and retirement to the suburbs, with a novel: "*Middles*. *Criticism*, which you'd do as other women do fancy-work. *Infant*. NOVEL" (*Dawn's Left Hand* 240). His language both distinguishes her from women in general (she can write criticism as easily as they can sew) and reduces her to an essentialized stereotype, whose creativity is dependent upon maternity. Elsewhere, Hypo suggests she draw on her experience as a dental assistant in order to write a novel about technological progress that bears a striking resemblance to the kind of novels written by Wells:

> You have in your hands material for a novel, a dental novel, a human novel and, as a background, a complete period, a period of unprecedented expansion in all sorts of directions. You've seen the growth of dentistry from a form of crude torture to a highly elaborate and scientific and almost painless process. And in your outer world you've seen an almost ceaseless transformation, from the beginning of the safety bicycle to the arrival of the motor car and the aeroplane. With the coming of flying, that period is ended, and another begins. You ought to document your period. (*Clear Horizon* 397)

In other words, Miriam ought to participate in the kind of systematic materiality that characterizes masculine middlebrow writing. Her experience at work is interesting only insofar as it represents a period, and Miriam's individual labour in the dentist's office is contextualized within technological progress in general. This progress defines 'her period'—the time between the invention of the bicycle and successful human flight. Hypo seeks connections between her life and broad

social and technological trends, while Miriam herself actively resists and breaks down such connections to preserve the particularity of her own experience.

Pilgrimage itself is evidence that Miriam does not follow the path laid out for her by Hypo. Kristin Bluemel notes that the savvy reader will connect the dots between Miriam's break with Hypo and Richardson's break with middlebrow literature:

> Instead of hearing the voice of the fictional Wilson, the knowing reader may hear H. G. Wells telling Dorothy that she should write a dental novel. This reader also knows that the doubling effect is only possible because Richardson took Wells's advice; *Pilgrimage* has been read as the dental novel that Wilson/Wells envisioned. (9)

Pilgrimage may be a 'dental novel', but it differs significantly from the project suggested by Hypo. Instead of contextualizing advances in dentistry within a narrative of technological progress, Miriam meditates on the drudgery and material labour these advances create for her. In Hypo's narrative, dentistry is part of technology's forward march; for Miriam, it is a generator of endless dirty and broken objects, the care of which is a Sisyphean task. The minutiae of Miriam's work at the dentist's office are described with revulsion and despair:

> Everything was in its worst state. She began the business of drying and cleansing, freeing fine points from minute closely adhering fragments, polishing instruments on the leather pad, repolishing them with the leather, scraping the many little burs with the fine wire brush, scraping the clamps, clearing the obstinate amalgam from slab and spatula. The tedium of the

> long series of small, precise, attention-demanding movements was
>
> aggravated by the prospect of a fresh set of implements already qualifying
>
> for another cleansing; the endless series to last as long as she stayed at
>
> Wimpole street . . . Were there any sort of people who could do this kind
>
> of thing patiently, without minding? . . . the evolution of dentistry was
>
> wonderful, but the more perfect it became the more and more of this sort
>
> of thing there would be . . . the more drudgery workers, at fixed salaries. . .
>
> (*The Tunnel* 40).

Here, Richardson uses extremely detailed, even excessive descriptions of things to

protest the meaninglessness her material labours. In her 'dental novel', the

ultimate object of enquiry is not her era, nor technology in general, but the effects

of that technology on a single life. In Miriam's scathing reformulation of Hypo's

narrative about dentistry we see an example of her subversive refusal to treat

individual experiences as 'typical' of greater patterns, which Radford describes

"the valorisation of the detail over the whole […] when the conventions

governing the whole are 'false'" (Radford 19). The narrative conventions of

progress associated with pre-war accounts of technology are 'false' insomuch as

they do not include space for experiences like Miriam's where the outcome of

technological innovation is not increased leisure, but increased labour.

To be fair, the drudgery of modernity is a theme to which Wells and other

male middlebrow writers devote considerable attention. Nor does Richardson's

criticism of Wells through the figure of Hypo fully do justice to Wells' lifelong

obsession with the particularity and individuality of things, which he terms "the

new Nominalism" (*The New Machiavelli* 296). In "The Scepticism of the Instrument", Wells argues that all attempts at classification have an intrinsic element of error. Scientific classification is "a necessary condition of the working of the mental implement", but "a departure from the objective truth of things" (384) whose idiosyncrasies always exceed any attempt at taxonomy. "[Y]ou get deflections that are difficult to trace, at each phase in the process" writes Wells; "Every species waggles about in its definition, every tool is a little loose in its handle, every scale has its individual error" (386). Scientific research, according to Wells, "is like firing at an inaccessible, unmarkable and indestructible target at an unknown distance, with a defective rifle and variable cartridges" (386). In her presentation of Hypo as intolerant of any ambiguity, Richardson is ironically guilty of some over-generalization of her own. If Richardson occasionally uses broad strokes to define her literary opposition, however, it is in the service of an important project of cultural critique in which she challenges gendered assumptions about the kind of writing which is appropriate for men and women.

Richardson places herself in the highbrow pantheon by identifying her work with that of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust in her 1938 foreword to *Pilgrimage*. Stylistically, the complexity of her language and high demands she places on the reader confirm this identification. Richardson places herself at the cutting edge of European realism. Acknowledging Zola, Balzac, and Bennett as realism's most famous practitioners, she defines her project as a modification of their collective 'masculine' style: finding that all successful realist authors "happened to be men", she set out to "produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism"

("Foreword" 9). Bluemel argues that Richardson is both trading on the established

success of realist writing and mounting a feminist critique of it: "A close reading

of Richardson's foreword suggests that she is trying to preserve the privilege of

masculinity for her brand of feminine realism while diminishing the importance of

the masculine realism against which she defines her differently gendered writing"

(Bluemel 28). She does not differentiate her work from mainstream middlebrow

writing by pejoratively labelling middlebrow culture 'feminine', as Huyssen's

argument would lead one to believe, but by labelling it masculine and insisting on

the defects of masculine language in general. Richardson's sense of the

indebtedness of masculine middlebrow writing to scientific discourse and its

interest in broad, sweeping narratives of material progress would likely be

accepted by Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy as a relatively accurate description of

their work. What they would reject is her next proposition: that this kind of

writing is limited by its insistence on generalization, and that feminine writing is

required to address this shortcoming.

Ultimately, the argument that middlebrow culture is inferior "mass

culture" and is therefore feminized relies on a belief that femininity and mass

culture are inferior to their similarly twinned corollaries, masculinity and high

culture. While Richardson is not a champion of mass culture, she does not view

women's thought and writing as inferior to men's. As a result, the equation

between mass culture and femininity does not hold in her writing. She affirms the

masculinity of writers like Wells while at the same time radically criticizing the

value of their work. For Richardson, women's language *is* highbrow language, by

virtue of its complexity, ambiguity, and particularity. The example of Richardson demonstrates that masculinity was attributed to middlebrow writing by its critics as well as its defenders, and that gendered discourse was central to negotiations of cultural prestige in the literary marketplace in the early twentieth century.

While Richardson unsettles the equation of femininity with middlebrow writing, Von Arnim enthusiastically participates in the 'feminine' middlebrow, while vigorously and humorously breaking down the perceived limitations of writing in this register. Like Richardson, Von Arnim explores the importance of built environments for women, injecting typically 'feminine' narrative forms including the fictional diary and the domestic novel with a trademark wit which often results in sharp political and feminist criticism. Unlike her character Minora, Von Arnim does not view houses and gardens as raw material out of which to manufacture copy. The homes and gardens that feature centrally in her most interesting works are not inert backdrops for her plots. Her women characters make and remake their surroundings in order to enable better lives for themselves. While Von Arnim uses constructed space as a tool for aesthetic self-fashioning of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, she also provides a broader exploration of material spaces as sites for negotiating national identity in her later novel *Christopher and Columbus*. Her exploration of women's spaces problematizes the pejorative connection between women and 'frivolous' or 'decorative' material culture by endowing feminine material culture with profound personal *and* political meaning.

Von Arnim's best remembered work, *Elizabeth's German Garden* (1898),

was an extremely popular novel. Like Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, it is a lightly fictionalized autobiography. Unlike *Pilgrimage*, it fits comfortably into the middlebrow register in terms of style, marketability, and implied audience. The popularity of Von Arnim's novel with a mainstream female audience delayed a serious critical response. Even Wells, a supporter of Von Arnim's work, did not see any political possibilities in her portrayals of the domestic realm. In his account of their lengthy affair in *H. G. Wells in Love*, Wells speaks of Von Arnim fondly, but condescendingly. Referring to her only as "little e" (*Wells in Love* 87) rather than by her full name, he remarks that she shared his obsession with house-building and "urge for the impossible perfect home" (*Wells in Love* 93), but "was incapable of philosophical thought or political ideas" (*Wells in Love* 87). Given the philosophical and political purposes that house-building and architecture plays in many of his own novels, as well as in the writing of contemporaries like Bennett, it is telling that Wells does not see the same potential in the writing of one of his female peers.

Yet while Wells treats Von Arnim's interest in 'decorative' material culture with contempt, Jennifer Shepherd argues that consumption is a key element in "developing the distinctly modern art of lifestyle, an aspect of cultural modernism that has been grossly neglected by its historians" (12). Consequently, the consumption of material culture is a "distinctively female register of modernism" (Shepherd 12) worthy of serious investigation. For Shepherd, consumption was not a passive process for women like Von Arnim, but an active way to cultivate both "the self and home in a manner that reflected a modern sense of progress and

change" (Shepherd 79). In *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, Elizabeth's cultivation of her garden and cultivation of herself go hand in hand. For her, gardening is a continual process that is an end in itself, rather than a path to a finished project. When houseguests claim "that if they had had the arranging of the garden it would have been finished long ago" Elizabeth responds that she "[doesn't] believe a garden ever is finished" (*Elizabeth* 57). The garden provides a refuge for Elizabeth, and an alternative to the more restrictive environment of her home, where she has to contend with servants and her husband, the censorious 'Man of Wrath'. It also provides an opportunity for self-education about horticulture. Elizabeth brings her gardener ideas from instruction books, which he rejects with disgust. Yet she continues to treat gardening as a source of self-improvement and self-education, looking forward to the future, when "the garden is a bower of loveliness and [she] learned in all its ways" and she can look back and laugh about her "first happy struggles and failures" (23). The cultivation of the garden provides Elizabeth with personal fulfillment, informal learning, and aesthetic pleasure.

Elizabeth frequently contrasts the cultivation of the garden to other activities related to feminine material culture. Elizabeth contrasts her life in the garden with her life indoors, which is crowded with "duties and annoyances, servants to exhort and admonish, furniture, and meals" (*Elizabeth* 33). She is pointedly dismissive of the domestic arts and fashionable appearance expected of her by her German neighbours. Elizabeth does not cook, and despises cleaning, saying with characteristic humour,

It cannot be right to be the slave of one's household gods, and I protest

that if my furniture ever annoyed me by wanting to be dusted when I

wanted to be doing something else, and there was no one to do the dusting

for me, I should cast it all into the nearest bonfire and sit and warm my

toes at the flames with great contentment. (90)

She prioritizes gardening over maintaining a fashionable wardrobe, spending her

"own private pin-money" on "roses and bulbs and other […] horticultural

indulgences" (154). By differentiating between rewarding and restrictive forms of

material engagement, Von Arnim suggests that women can find ways of

cultivating themselves and their environments within established practices of

feminine consumption.

Yet although Von Arnim focuses on the power of material culture and built

environments in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, the treatment of materiality

in the novel does not fit the model of systematic materialism defined above.

Elizabeth's experience with her garden is not integrated into larger material

systems. In fact, her gardening project is misunderstood by nearly every other

character, including her husband, friends, and houseguests. Nor does she find like

souls in the men who help her realize her vision for the garden. Her first gardener

quits over "a personal objection" to her "eccentric preference for plants in groups

rather than plants in lines" (*Elizabeth* 23), and his unhappy and reticent

replacement "[goes] mad soon after Whitsuntide" (52), "[a]fter which there was

nothing for it but to get him into an asylum as expeditiously as possible" (53).

Elizabeth's joy in gardening is shared only with the reader, since "[t]here is not a

creature in all this part of the world who could in the least understand with what heart-beatings I am looking forward to the flowering of these roses" (21). While the novel does participate in a larger conversation about women's spaces, it does not explicitly theorize the connection between Elizabeth's garden and other spaces and structures.

In her later novel *Christopher and Columbus* (1919)*,* Von Arnim comes much closer to the systematic materiality of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. Von Arnim charts the intersection of 'feminine' domestic material culture and nationalism through the story of orphaned half-German, half-English twins named Anna Rose and Anna Felicitas von Twinkler. Set during World War One, *Christopher and Columbus* uses domestic spaces to explore issues of national identity and wartime paranoia. Although the war is central to its plot, the novel is set almost entirely in domestic spaces, peopled with non-combatants. The 'two Annas' are primarily concerned with the war insofar as it affects their choice of homes. No longer welcome with their mother's relatives in England, they are shipped off to the United States, where they build a hybrid English-German tea-house before anti-German paranoia shuts it down. In this text, as in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, Von Arnim explores the ability of her female characters to create an environment that will allow them to live freely and happily. The war is an obstacle to this creation, and is understood through its effects on spaces and objects as much as its effects on people.

Von Arnim breaks down perceived boundaries between the masculine realm of conflict and the feminine territory of the 'home front' by expressing the

consequences of the war through metaphors drawn from feminine material culture. The narrator notes at one point that "the hideous necklace of war grew more and more frightful with each fresh bead of horror strung upon it" (*Christopher* 18), while the twins reflect that "whoever it is you've married, if it isn't one of your own countrymen, rises up against you, just as if he were too many meringues you'd had for dinner" (72). Contrary to the stereotype perpetuated by Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, among others—that investment in the feminine cultivation of domestic space prevents an understanding of larger political and social currents—Von Arnim combines small-scale material culture with commentary on nationalism and wartime paranoia.

As part of her project of integrating the domestic and the political, Von Arnim mocks the idea that 'masculine' scientific rationalism and 'feminine' domesticity are mutually exclusive terms. The twins' benefactor (and later, Anna-Rose's love interest), Edward Twist, combines both of these gendered characteristics. Twist embodies the values identified by Macdonald as typical of the masculine middlebrow ("science, business, living independently, the work of the office, increasing freedom from class rules" (17)). He is a successful inventor, combining his engineering background with entrepreneurial savvy, and lifting his family into the "lower upper-class" (*Christopher* 103). Moreover, he meets the twins on his voyage home from the front in France, which identifies him with the popular figure of the returning hero. He displays a typical middlebrow commitment to self-education, spending much of the voyage reading passages from "*Masterpieces You Must Master*, […] an American collection of English

poetry, professing in its preface to be a Short Cut to Culture" (78), and finishing

his recitations "a sort of gulp of satisfaction at having swallowed yet another solid

slab of culture" (80). Twist is a decidedly middlebrow man.

Far from seeing Twist as the ideal of middlebrow masculinity, however,

the narrator describes him as "a born mother" (*Christopher* 122). When the twins

suffer from seasickness on their journey to America, Twist transforms himself into

"their assiduous guardian", "feeding them on deck with the care of a mother-bird

for its fledglings" (82). Nor is his maternal behaviour a temporary response to the

dangers of the voyage—the narrator notes that Twist was "meant by Nature to be

a mother; but Nature, when she was half-way through him, forgot and turned him

into a man" (271-2). Even in his working life and war experience, Twist shows his

maternal nature. He is returning not from a tour of duty, but from volunteering as

a medic. The successful invention that funds his trip is "that now well-known

object on every breakfast table, Twist's Non-Trickler Teapot" (103), an icon of

domestic comfort. Even Twist's role as romantic male lead fails to make him

stereotypically masculine. His proposal to Anna-Rose at the novel's close contains

the same subversive insistence on his maternity as earlier passages: the narrator

notes that "If ever a man felt like a mother it was Mr. Twist at that moment" (493).

As Twist's name suggests, he is a character who subverts expectations. Von Arnim

re-casts characteristics usually aligned with middlebrow masculinity as feminine,

'motherly' traits, humorously challenging gender roles.

Von Arnim also challenges the association of domestic material culture

with a disempowering 'feminine' myopia. Twist's obsession with teapots does not

disbar him from a successful life in the public sphere. Instead, Twist's Non-Trickler Teapot is a source of personal freedom and power. When he is questioned by an American policeman on suspicion of sexual misconduct with the von Twinkler twins, Twist needs only identify himself as the inventor of the teapot to be fully and instantly exonerated:

> It was the teapot that had saved him,--that blessed teapot that was always protruding itself benevolently into his life. Mr. Twist had identified himself with it, and it had instantly saved him. In the shelter of his teapot Mr. Twist could go anywhere and do anything in America. Everybody had it. Everybody knew it. It was as pervasive of America as Ford's cars, but cosily, quietly pervasive. It was only less visible because it stayed at home. It was more like a wife than Ford's cars were. From a sinner caught red-handed, Mr. Twist, its amiable creator, leapt to the position of one who can do no wrong, for he had […] placed his teapot between himself and judgment [...] (*Christopher* 140)

The teapot is a shelter, a shield, a symbol of America, a wife, and a stand-in for Twist himself. Domestic material culture, in the form of the teapot, generates agency and mobility for Twist, rather than restricting him to a limited, feminine realm. Though the teapot 'stays at home', it empowers its inventor to 'go anywhere and do anything'. Over the span of a few short sentences, the narrator connects the teapot with the domestic sphere, heavy manufacture (Ford's cars) and American national identity, suggesting that since they are all related to the teapot, they are all related to each other. In this way, Von Arnim uses material

culture to break down divisions between gendered spheres of experience.

Locating the novel in the United States gives Von Arnim more freedom to play with the construction of novel and hybrid spaces, since America still functions in the English imagination at the time as a blank space where it is possible to construct anything. Instead of being "castaways, derelicts, two wretched little Germans who were neither really Germans nor really English because they so unfortunately, so complicatedly were both" (*Christopher* 1), Anna-Rose and Anna-Felicitas reinvent themselves "Christopher and Columbus" on the boat from England, "because they [are] setting out to discover a New World" (*Christopher* 2). The Annas, backed financially by Twist, build their new life in America by building a new space to inhabit: a tea house named The Open Arms which they plan to run for the benefit of the American Red Cross (269). Twist hopes that the American melting pot will reduce the twins' mixed heritage to an aesthetic style. He claims that their bi-national teahouse, "an English inn […] with a little German beer-garden […] wouldn't cause the least surprise or discomfort to anybody" (285) in California, where it shares the highway with "Swiss mountain chalets", "Italian villas", and buildings "like small Gothic cathedrals" (284-5). When the twins buy the cottage that will become The Open Arms, the narrator takes on their enthusiasm for the project: "This is the way you do things in America. You decide what it is that you really want, and you start right away and get it" (75). Their new national setting brings with it new opportunities to cultivate "the self and home" (Shepherd 79) in order to create a space where their German-English heritage will be welcome.

Again, the practice of shaping one's own environment is central to the novel. Partially, this is an instance of wish-fulfillment: many middlebrows began their lives as lowbrows, and the ability to shape one's own environment would have been a luxury that many aspired to. To be able not only to decorate one room of someone else's house, or the entire interior of a home of one's own, but to shape and plan an entire building or substantial outdoor space would have been a mark of great privilege. But *Christopher and Columbus* takes the reader far beyond simple class aspiration. Here, the fantasy is of starting a new life by inhabiting a new space, literally building a home for one's new life. In 1919, America still represents open space and possibility for many Europeans. It was a space where old rules and old structures alike did not impede new creations, where the middlebrow ideals of class mobility and the cultivation of space could co-exist. America represents a fluid environment in the European imagination, making it the perfect place to realize that Huxleyan ideal of changing oneself by changing one's space. California provides a blank canvas upon which Von Arnim can work out intra-European nationalist dynamics through the negotiation of space.

The project of building a new home for the twins eventually fails. As America becomes more involved in the war, anti-German sentiment increases. The inn is "is suspected of being run in the interests of the German Government" (*Christopher* 453), and the only customers the twins have are German nationals. When Twist is threatened by anti-German Americans with a boycott of his Non-Trickler Teapot ("It is to be put on an unofficial black list. It is to be banished

from the hotels" (453)), he promptly proposes to Anna-Rose and closes the Open

Arms. Anna-Felicitas is also engaged, to an English airman. The marriages are

meant to erase the twins' German heritage and assign them the nationalities of

their husbands. Twist tries to convince Anna-Rose to marry him by claiming that

she would "be an American right away […] Just as Anna-Felicitas is going to be

English" (498). Twist continues, "the day you marry me you'll be done with being

German for good and all" (498). While this is presented as the perfect solution to

Anna-Rose and Anna-Felicitas' situation, the reader has already seen earlier in the

novel that the strategy is not a guaranteed success. On the boat, they share a berth

with two German women, whose "husbands were American, but that didn't make

them less German. Nothing ever makes a German less German…" (52). The

twins' own parents also disprove Twist's claim—their mother did not become

German upon marriage, but remained English, and produced problematically

German/English children. Von Arnim uses marriage as a strategy for negotiating a

complicated system of nationalist ties, but it is not a panacea for dissolving war-

time tensions. Rather, the marriage plot and the war plot intersect uneasily, with

neither providing a clear direction for the twins' future.

By placing domestic life and home-building at the center of nationalist

conflict driven by the First World War, Von Arnim breaks down the divide

between women's experience and national politics. The War, the defining event of

the times, takes place not only on the battlefield, but in the tea-rooms and

bedrooms of the home front. Anna-Rose and Anna-Felicitas build a tea-house as

an attempt to make money off of their domestic abilities, only to find that just as

the domestic is always tangled up in questions of money, it is also always implicated in expressions of national taste and belonging. For Von Arnim, the home is not the politically neutral refuge imagined by the Victorians, to be carefully distinguished from the public realm. Rather, it is a site where nationalist, capitalist, and familial currents intersect. *Christopher and Columbus* explores 'feminine' material culture—teapots and teahouses—but rejects the stereotypical association of this material culture with limited scope and apolitical taste.

Von Arnim and Richardson both value women's spaces and feminine material culture, although they uses these spaces and objects to very different ends. Richardson aligns femininity with highbrow literature, while Von Arnim explores the full range of possible uses for feminine material culture within middlebrow literature. While Richardson subverts the association of the middlebrow and femininity by linking middlebrow writing with masculine thought and writing, Von Arnim problematizes gendered forms of middlebrow culture from within, feminizing the figure of the middlebrow man in Mr. Twist. Taken together with Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's articulations of the relationship between middlebrow culture and gender, Von Arnim and Richardson's work establishes that there was an active and complicated conversation taking place in the early decades of the twentieth century about how gender relates to the various 'brows'. Different forms of engagement with the material world, and different understandings of how the material world might be used as inspiration for writing, overlap frequently with gendered discourses and debates about literary merit. The intersection between gender, materiality, and the

middlebrow is a highly contested ground which various authors leverage in order to establish the value of their own work.

Ultimately, we must acknowledge the complex interactions between gender, materiality, and the 'battle of the brows' in order to understand how Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy fit into the literary landscape of the early twentieth century. Their articulations of the value of their own work do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they define themselves in opposition to highbrow and feminine authors, using gendered discourses of materiality to establish this opposition. Their equation of middlebrow authorship and masculinity unsettles the equation between high culture and masculinity assumed by critics like Huyssen, and the equation between middlebrow culture and femininity which dominates contemporary interpretations of middlebrow texts. Cultural prestige and marketability were both at stake for masculine middlebrow writers as they attempted to align their particular form of mass culture with stereotypically masculine values. In chapter one, I argue that the systematic materialism of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy arises out of a specific historical context: the rise of an educated middling class with an interest in popular science, especially evolutionary theory. In this chapter, I argue that a different element of their historical context sustains and intensifies their self-understanding as explorers of large-scale material systems: their alignment of undesirable forms of material engagement with femininity as a means of establishing themselves as masculine middlebrow authors during a time in which middlebrow writing was predominantly written and read by women.

Chapter Three: Middlebrow Homes in Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy.

As I argue above, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy were strongly influenced by evolutionary theorists, particularly Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer. This chapter focuses on one particular claim of Huxley's as it relates to middlebrow literature: that humans are capable of creating "artificial conditions" which prevent the "free play of struggle for survival" and replace it with "selection directed towards the administrator's ideal" (Huxley 78). In other words, the traits of a group of people can be intentionally altered by changing their environment to encourage the development of whichever traits a given 'administrator' values. Huxley does not give examples of actual 'administrators', although he strongly implies that 'civilized' men should take on this role. His language has both colonial and eugenicist connotations: he conflates "civilized man" and "ethical man" (110) and speaks of the need to destroy those "savage" traits which man "shares with the ape and the tiger" (51). There is no question that Huxley's ideas have very dangerous potential and were high influential. Wells' flirtations with eugenicist ideas are widely known. In this chapter, however, I will focus on the basic mechanism of change proposed by Huxley—the transformation of groups of people by transforming their surroundings—as it applies to the development of middle-class housing in England. Huxley's claim that humanity can suspend natural selection and replace it with 'ethical' evolution prompts the questions: what would ethical evolution look like in a middlebrow context? Which environments are available to be altered? How can they be altered, and by whom? What are the desired traits that this environmental change will encourage?

For Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, sites of suburban and provincial development provide the most direct opportunities for middlebrow agents to re-shape their immediate environments. In these places, educated middle-class men working as urban planners, architects, and engineers are able to make small changes to living spaces in order to encourage the development of rationality, efficiency, and pragmatic intelligence among their peers. Narratives of home-building, renovation, and suburban and provincial development found in the work of my chosen authors suggest that not only are middlebrow people particularly well-suited to take on these planning roles, but that through their work they are able to support the development of middlebrow culture. Galsworthy stands uncharacteristically apart from Wells and Bennett in his depiction of the suburbs. The most prominent example of suburban development in his work—Soames Forsyte's doomed house-building project in *The Man of Property*—is an abject failure. Soames attempts to fix his marital problems by simply re-locating them. While this story does have several characteristics in common with Wells and Bennett's depictions of non-metropolitan spaces (the potential of new developments, optimism about the new lifestyles they might encourage, the suburbs as a middlebrow space), it does not represent the transformation of built environments as a powerful source for social change, as do Wells and Bennett. As a result of this division, I consider Galsworthy separately from the other authors in this chapter.

Despite these differences, all three authors share a common sense of human vulnerability to the influence of built environments. The attempts of their

characters to improve their lives by materially altering their living spaces is not a symptom of technological triumphalism, but rather an acknowledgment of the power of surroundings to shape human behaviour. Structures and technologies made by human hands do provide individuals with a limited ability to alter their environments, but often must be adapted *to* as well. Wells comments in *Anticipations* that the material and social changes that come with modernity are "no longer amenable to [human] interpretations", having "an air of being processes as uncontrollable by such collective intelligence as men can at present command, and as indifferent to his local peculiarities and prejudices as the movements of winds and tides" (73). Galsworthy makes a similar claim in the introduction to his collected *Forsyte Saga*, writing that "Men are, in fact, quite unable to control their own inventions; they at best develop adaptability to the new conditions those inventions create" ("Preface" xi). Technological interventions in the material world are not, for Galsworthy, a *means* of adapting to that world, but rather an element of the environment to which humanity must adapt. Material elements in one's surroundings must be reckoned with regardless of their organic or artificial provenance. That is, the built environment is just as capable of asserting power over its inhabitants as the 'natural' environment. Huxley, while distinguishing between 'states of Art' and the 'state of nature', nevertheless maintains "that man, physical, intellectual, and moral, is as much a part of nature, as purely a product of the cosmic process, as the humblest weed" (70); the exertion of human control over small areas is "part and parcel of the cosmic process" (69). Human activity is part of the overall 'cosmic process',

rather than an exception to the 'natural' world. The interaction between groups of people and their environments is an ongoing struggle—one in which human success or even competence is far from assured—rather than a one-time assertion of dominance.

Wells and Bennett's writing contains a tension between excitement and frustration that David Trotter identifies as a key feature of early-twentieth-century utopian literature: "[t]o think utopia materially is to think in terms of built-in constraint as well as of built-in possibility" ("Modernism's Material Futures" 53). This balance between constraint and possibility in utopian narratives is even more strongly felt in middlebrow conceptions of more mundane projects. The desire to embody change in the design of new spaces is almost always checked by a constant awareness of the cost of materials, the opinions of neighbours, the size of housing lots, and the inertia of public opinion. As a result, narratives of home-building in the work of middlebrow authors emphasize the struggle involved in sustaining meaningful environmental changes. These narratives explore both the 'built-in constraint' and the 'built-in possibility' allowed by the resources available to the middling classes at the peripheries of England's cities.

Galsworthy and the Suburbs

A building site is, as Lynn Hapgood notes, "at first quite literally an empty space, a site which can be freshly 'mapped'" ("The Unwritten Suburb" 171) with new structures to support new and different lifestyles. Narratives of building in Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy express both the excitement which grows out of

this unprecedented opportunity and the frustrations born from the social and

material restraints placed on the full realization of its possibilities. Galsworthy's

depictions of the suburbs in *The Forsyte Saga* are distinct from Wells and

Bennett's depictions of suburban and provincial development, however. In *The*

Man of Property, Soames Forsyte moves to the suburbs in an attempt to revive his

failing marriage. Rather than presenting the change of setting as a productive way

of changing the behaviours of the Forsytes, Galsworthy uses Soames' move to the

suburbs to demonstrate the limitations of environmental changes, since the new

home does not create the results he desires. Instead of rekindling his marriage, his

decision to build a suburban home leads to its end: Irene has an affair with the

architect who designs the house, and eventually leaves Soames.

Still, Galsworthy's representations of the suburbs are part of the broad

middlebrow interest in the possibilities opened up by different living spaces.

Hapgood argues that Galsworthy views the suburb as a particularly middlebrow

location in "The Unwritten Suburb: Defining Spaces in John Galsworthy's *The*

Man of Property". According to Hapgood, the development of suburbs allows

middlebrow people a chance to develop and define a distinctive space, making the

suburb "a qualitatively different kind of psychological and political territory from

the urban with the potential of creating a new environment, determining

psychological states and, crucially, defining new class strata" (163). When

Soames becomes the first Forsyte to move to the suburbs, he consciously presents

himself as upwardly-mobile and free of the influence of London fashions. The

house where he initially resides with his wife Irene is haunted by unhappy

memories:

> In this house of his there was writing on every wall [...] He had married
>
> this woman, conquered her, made her his own, and it seemed to him
>
> contrary to the most fundamental of all laws, the law of possession, that he
>
> could do no more than own her body. [...] He did so want [to own her
>
> soul], and the writing said he never would. (*The Man of Property* 70-1)

Soames hopes that by isolating Irene from her friends, she will love him. In both

his house-building project and his marriage, Soames' need to control his

'possessions' cripples his ability to build a happy home. Hapgood argues that

Galsworthy "constructs the failure of Soames and of late nineteenth-century

capitalism through his failure to grasp the challenge of the suburbs" (77). One key

element of this failure, I argue, is Soames' misguided attempt to capitalize on the

potential of new built environments to support changes in their inhabitants.

Through Soames, Galsworthy criticizes attempts to solve problems by

simply relocating them. Soames is willing to move, but he is not willing to

change. Rather, he expects the new location to change his wife's attitude and

behaviour, while seeing no need to change his own. Building a house in the

suburbs is Soames' attempt to build a new life simply by willing it. This is very

different from Wells and Bennett's accounts of how the careful alteration of built

environments to encourage the development of particular traits can slowly alter

the people who live in them. Galsworthy is sceptical of such quick fixes

throughout the *Forsyte Chronicles*. In *The Silver Spoon*, for example, he recounts

the failure of two inner-city Londoners' attempt to radically alter their lives by

moving to Australia. Although the Bickets expect that the Australian sun will immediately make them stronger, more vibrant, and healthier, they ultimately find that Australians "don't seem to have any use for [the Bickets] and [the Bickets] don't seem to have any use for them" (*Silver Spoon* 401), and that life is not much different than it was in England. Yet the multiple examples of failed attempts to use changes of setting to change lives in Galsworthy's novels are counterbalanced by earnest arguments in favour of just this mechanism for social reform. As I discuss at greater length in Chapter Five, Michael Mont champions both slum clearance and emigration schemes in the later Forsyte novels, and is presented in a sympathetic and supportive light for doing so. Galsworthy clearly believes in the importance of environmental influence, as the passages about Forsyte 'habitats' which I examine in Chapter One clearly show. His negative portrayal of Soames' attempt to save his marriage by moving to the suburbs must be read in the context of his broader engagement with environmental influence. Galsworthy's portrayal of the suburbs is a critical exploration of how encouraging change by changing one's lived environment can go wrong, but it should not be taken as his final word on the topic of environmental influence in general.

Wells and Bennett's 'Tremendous Altercation with Nature'

Wells and Bennett provide more nuanced accounts of both the possibilities and the limitations of suburban and provincial developments in their work. At the turn of the century in England, suburbs and provincial towns were sites of active development of natural landscapes. Suburbs, for Wells, are borderlands where the

division between 'natural' and 'manmade' is undergoing transformation and negotiation. Bennett sets the bulk of his fiction in the provinces rather than the suburbs, but the overall effect is quite similar. The fixation of Bennett on the Potteries district meant that "[he] and his work came to be regarded as essentially provincial over the course of the twentieth century" (Koenigsberger 131), yet he found the setting fascinating in large part, I argue, because like the suburb, the Potteries district is a border zone between built and natural environments. His 1910 novel *Clayhanger* opens with its eponymous protagonist standing at the point of transition between industrial and natural landscapes: "the Knype and Mersey canal formed the western boundary of the industrialism of the Five Towns. To the east rose pitheads, chimneys, and kilns, tier above tier, dim in their own mists. To the west, Hillport Fields, grimed but possessing authentic hedge-rows and winding paths" (1). The Bennett characters who live in these peripheral zones can see the active creation of built environments out of the natural landscape. Newly developed spaces outside of established urban centers dramatize the construction of 'manmade' environments.

In some of their earliest correspondence, Wells and Bennett discuss the narrative potential of the Potteries district as a site of "the tremendous altercation with nature" inherent in the "romance of manufacture" (*Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells* 36). Wells is "moved by [the] phrase 'altercation with nature'" (37) in a letter from Bennett, and suggests that Bennett read Conrad—particularly *Almayer's Folly*—as an exemplar of this theme. *Almayer's Folly* bears a striking similarity to some of the best work of Bennett and Wells due to its central theme

of the reluctance of natural environments to be shaped by human desire. Both

Almayer's abortive search for gold and his inappropriately large and opulent

house are failed attempts to shape the material world to his own ends. Wells and

Bennett's shared fascination with humanity's 'altercation with nature' signals their

understanding of the difficulty inherent in altering one's material environment. In

this kind of 'altercation with nature', the tone is not triumphalist and human

subjects do not appear as heroes. Rather, 'nature' in its various manifestations

resists and escapes human control, frustrating and humbling those who attempt to

assert their individual wills over the material world.

The accounts of human struggles to alter their surroundings we see in

Wells and Bennett are strongly consonant with Huxley's description of the

difficulty inherent in creating a "state of Art [...]sustained by and dependent on

[man]" within "the state of nature" (Huxley 67). In *Evolution and Ethics*, Huxley

famously argues that we can alter the evolutionary path of humanity by altering its

environment. Ideal communities can be achieved "not by gradually adjusting the

men to the conditions around them, but by creating artificial conditions for them;

not by allowing the free play of the struggle for existence, but by excluding that

struggle; and by substituting selection directed towards the administrator's ideal

for the selection it exercises" (Huxley 78). Huxley's theory of promoting 'ethical

evolution' through the conscious alteration of humanity's material surroundings

restores some of the control wielded by humanity over its own destiny that was

lost with Darwin's discovery of the theory of natural selection. Large-scale

design, whether of a home, a suburb, or a subdivision, encompasses both

Darwinian pessimism and Huxleyan optimism—we may be at the mercy of our environments, but we can at least control our immediate surroundings, if only to a limited extent. While the ability to create 'states of Art' is empowering, Huxley cautions that "the limits within which this mastery of man over nature can be maintained are narrow" (72) and that natural forces are "constantly tending to break it down and destroy it" (70). The establishment of a Huxleyan 'state of Art' is a difficult and labour-intensive process which yields only temporary results. Because suburban and provincial developments sit at the boundary between states of 'art' and 'nature', they often appear in the writing of Wells and Bennett to remind the reader that 'states of art' in Huxley's terms are only temporary spaces carved at great cost out of the undeveloped landscape.

The paradigmatic example of a 'built environment' of the kind I will be discussing in this chapter is Huxley's imagined garden in *Evolution and Ethics*. Huxley uses the garden as an example of a 'state of Art' wherein natural selection has been suspended and replaced by the artificial selection on the part of the gardener: "Three or four years have elapsed since the state of nature […] was brought to an end, so far as a small patch of the soil is concerned, by the intervention of man" (67). The garden demonstrates both the immense possibilities of human intervention in the 'state of nature', and the precariousness of the 'states of Art' created by this intervention. While the gardener is able to grow "considerable quantities of vegetables, fruits, and flowers […] of kinds which neither now exist, nor have ever existed, except under conditions such as obtain in the garden" (67) and create an area which is "extraordinarily different"

(67) from its surroundings, this cultivated area will return to its original state without constant maintenance. Without "the watchful supervision of the gardener […] the walls and gates would decay; quadrupedal and bipedal intruders would devour and tread down the beautiful and useful plants" and after many years "little beyond the foundations of the wall and of the houses and frames would be left, in evidence of the victory of the cosmic powers at work in the state of nature" (68). Huxley labels the continuing work of maintaining 'states of Art' the "horticultural process" (69).

This process appears frequently in Wells' fiction. Wells' social problem novels, unlike his sweeping utopian fantasies, often present clumsy, frustrated attempts to create small-scale change on the part of bumbling protagonists. Despite the charges of technological triumphalism levelled against Wells[11], in his mid-career novels including *A New Machiavelli* (1911), *Tono-Bungay* (1909), and *The War in the Air* (1908), he frequently presents scientific knowledge and technological savvy as insufficient to the challenge of establishing lasting and stable built environments. In *A New Machiavelli*, narrator Dick Remington details the failures and frustrations of both scientific knowledge and reformist political movements when they are used to impose order on the chaotic world. His father's attempt at the "intensive culture" (27) of their garden is Wells' dramatization of what Huxley calls "the horticultural process" (Huxley 69). While Huxley does acknowledge that the 'state of Art' created by his ideal gardener is precarious and requires constant labour to keep it from falling back into a 'state of nature', he

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[11] See Trotter, David. *The English Novel in History, 1895-1920*. London; New York: Routledge, 1993; Woolf, Virginia. *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. London: Hogarth Press, 1924.

does not take the affective weight of this constant struggle into account. Wells transforms Huxley's account of a rhetorical garden into a messy personal narrative which fully acknowledges the human barriers to the maintenance of a Huxleyan 'state of nature'. Remington senior's attempt to create a highly productive garden through the application of rational scientific principles is unexpectedly difficult and fraught with failure, leading him to work in "spasms of immense vigour alternating with periods of paralyzing distaste for the garden" (*New Machiavelli* 27). The garden itself also has a difficult 'personality' that must be dealt with. A garden's "moods have to be watched; it does not wait upon the cultivator's convenience, but has times of its own" (*New Machiavelli* 27). By attempting to force his garden to produce more vegetables, Remington's father creates a "touchy and hysterical […] drugged and demoralized and over-irritated garden" (*New Machiavelli* 27). The Remingtons' attempt at intensive cultivation is fraught with difficulty, and requires constant labour and care to maintain. Wells expands on Huxley's warnings about the difficulty of maintaining 'states of Art' in this humorous example of the 'horticultural process'.

Despite seeing his father struggle with his garden, Remington junior remains convinced of the overall value of physically reforming the nation in order to produce better citizens. Where his father demonstrates the difficulty of altering the material world, Remington embodies Wells' own utopian optimism for the potential of technological progress. Again, we see Wells oscillating between frustration and hope in his depictions of the condition of England. Remington, a failed politician, speaks passionately of the potential for increasing rational

efficiency and technological development afforded by scientific progress in very much the terms we generally associate with Wells himself. In comparison to the "straggling, incidental, undisciplined and uncoordinated minority of inventors, experimenters, educators, writers and organizers" (*New Machiavelli* 13) of the past, Remington sees immense potential in the present population. The "progress of physical and mechanical science, of medicine and sanitation" (*New Machiavelli* 12-13) will bring about an "increase in general education and average efficiency" (*New Machiavelli* 13). Remington dreams of the potential this technological and educational progress has to bring into being "the human splendours the justly organized state may yet attain" (*New Machiavelli* 13). Yet Remington does not identify himself with Plato and other classical theorists of statecraft, but with Machiavelli, "more recent and less popular, […] still all human and earthly, a fallen brother" (*New Machiavelli* 11) who, like Remington himself, understands that grand reforming visions are always "extraordinarily entangled and mixed up with other, more intimate things" (*New Machiavelli* 10). Immediate material and personal constraints undercut the potential of increasing education and technological proficiency to empower social planners. The labour and frustration inherent in Huxley's 'horticultural process' interfere with Remington's glowing vision of technological progress.

Wells mockingly contrasts Remington's optimism about the potential of statecraft with his father's petty failures as a gardener in order to emphasize the difficulty of altering one's surroundings. The reader approaches Remington's dreams of building a World State with cynicism after seeing how impossible it is

for his father to build a functional home. Remington's father is constantly repairing a row of "palatial but structurally unsound" (*New Machiavelli* 21) stucco villas in the London suburbs. While Remington's father did not build the villas himself, he is constantly occupied with re-building them as they rapidly fall into disrepair. He characterizes the houses as malevolent creatures out to destroy his life, exhorting his son to "beware of Things! Before you know where you are you are waiting on them and minding them. They'll eat your life up. Eat up your hours and your blood and energy! When those houses came to me, I ought to have sold them--or fled the country. I ought to have cleared out. Sarcophagi—eaters of men!" (30-31). Remington's father sees humanity as "[s]laves to matter" wasting their energy "[m]inding inanimate things" (*New Machiavelli* 30). Property is "the curse of life" (31), an intensification of the "Primordial Curse" (27) that keeps him from successfully cultivating his garden. Although Remington takes his father's warning to heart as a child, as an adult he suggests that the problem lies not with the quality of education, but with any attempt to rationally conquer the natural world: "Science is the organized conquest of Nature, and I can quite understand that ancient libertine refusing to cooperate in her own undoing" (*New Machiavelli* 26).

Remington's political career turns out to be as fraught with frustration as his father's experiment in intensive cultivation. Throughout the course of the novel, Wells explores the contingency and vulnerability of 'states of Art' identified by Huxley, suggesting that successful planning, let alone the successful implementation of the resulting plans, is extremely difficult to achieve. When

Remington becomes a politician, he aligns himself with leftist intellectuals who are easily identifiable as fictionalized versions of members of the Fabian society. Altiora and Oscar Bailey—the fictional counterparts of Sidney and Beatrice Webb—take Remington into their circle of moderate reformers and recruit his help in the "development of an official administrative class in the modern state" (*New Machiavelli* 162) to oversee the technical development and planning of an equitable society. Like Remington's father, the Baileys are unsuccessful in their attempt to force a system of rational management on a chaotic world. Remington comes to despise their utilitarian rigidity, professing a "profound antagonism of spirit" (164) to their approach:

> Theirs was a philosophy devoid of finesse. Temperamentally the Baileys were specialized, concentrated, accurate, while I am urged, either by some inner force or some entirely assimilated influence in my training, always to round off and shadow my outlines. I hate them hard. I would sacrifice detail to modelling always, and the Baileys, it seemed to me, loved a world as flat and metallic as Sidney Cooper's cows. If they had the universe in hand, I know they would take down all the trees and put up stamped tin green shades and sunlight accumulators. Altiora thought trees hopelessly irregular and sea cliffs a great mistake. . . . (165)

We can read in this passage a great deal of Wells' personal animosity towards the Fabians in general and the Webbs in particular following his messy, public split with the society, but his mockery of the Fabians also contains a serious criticism of their overconfidence in the human intellect combined with an underestimation

of the complexity of the material world. Remington's attempts to enact practical socialist reform, like his father's attempt at intensive cultivation, is limited by the indifference of nature to human plans. Both characters' actions exemplify the fragile and contingent nature of any 'state of Art'.

Bennett uses provincial locations to explore similar issues. In his short stories and novels set in the Five Towns, Bennett discusses the region's development into a hub of pottery manufacture. Where Wells uses gardens and row houses as microcosms of the 'horticultural process', Bennett examines how the population of an entire manufacturing region labours to maintain a 'state of Art' on a much larger scale. His 1910 novel *Clayhanger* is especially concerned with documenting the history of the Five Towns and the planning—good and bad—that have shaped both the region and its inhabitants. Like Wells' suburbs, Bennett's provincial towns are sites of active development where built environments border on natural ones. The very location of the Five Towns at the border between industrial and natural environments prompts protagonist Edwin Clayhanger to investigate why they have been built the way they are, and what might be done to re-build them in a better form. *Clayhanger* is bookended by a simple question: why is clay made in the Five Towns? The question is first asked by a youthful Edwin on his last day of school, when he and his friend Charles Orgreave place bets on which barge full of clay will reach the canal bridge first. Charles knows where the clay comes from—Cornwall via Runcorn—but swiftly changes the topic when Edwin presses the matter further: "Seems devilish funny to me […] that they should bring clay all that roundabout way just to make crocks

of it here. Why should they choose just *this* place to make crocks in?" (2). It is only at the end of the novel that he is able to provide an answer to this question when it is repeated by his step-son George:

> It's like this. In the old days they used to make crocks anyhow, very rough, out of any old clay. And crocks were first made here because the people found common yellow clay, and the coal to burn it with, lying close together in the ground. You see how handy it was for them. […]Then people got more particular, you see, and when white clay was found somewhere else they had it brought here, and they had all the works and the tools they wanted, and the coal too. Very important, the coal! Much easier to bring the clay to the people and the works, than cart off all the people—and their families don't forget—and so on, to the clay, and build fresh works into the bargain. . . . That's why. (624)

A simple question about local manufacture reveals the complicated dependence of human life on its natural surroundings. The initial proximity of clay and coal establishes the area as a site of manufacture, leading to the creation of settled populations in built environments that in turn become as strong a determining force in the future of the district as its deposits of raw materials. Initially, coal and clay bring people to the region; subsequently, people bring more and different clay from farther afield.

That the region was built or planned at all is a revelation to Edwin, who grows up considering his surroundings to be more or less self-evident and unchanging. Edwin begins his interest in architecture by copying images of the

great cities of Europe, but learns to appreciate design closer to home from

Osmond Orgreave, father of his childhood friend and local architect. Orgreave

comments on the beauty of the Sytch Pottery, a building that Edwin had never

before noticed but "suddenly, miraculously and genuinely regard[s] as an

exquisitely beautiful edifice, on a plane with the edifices of the capitals of

Europe" (143), as soon as Orgreave pays it notice. Architecture provides Edwin

with a vocabulary for celebrating the beauty of his immediate surroundings,

giving dignity and value to an industrial landscape which few would find

beautiful. If environments are to be taken seriously as determinants of human

behaviour and character, a certain weight and importance must be attributed to all

built spaces, even those mundane edifices of the Five Towns. Edwin's clumsy

celebration of the architecture of buildings in Bursley is solidly in line with

Bennett's middlebrow project of promoting thoughtfulness and intellectual

improvement *within* the middling classes as they already exist. Not everyone can

escape to London—like many of his characters Bennett cannot leave the Five

Towns behind. If the environment is worth changing, the lives which are partially

determined by that environment must also be worth changing. Bennett's narratives

of home-building lend dignity to the lives of the middling classes in Britain's

industrial north.

'Confusion and Waste and Planlessness'

There is a darker side to Bennett's Five Towns, however. Many

middlebrow authors see built spaces as strong influences on human behaviour,

health, and productivity—negatively as well as positively—and seek to stop the damage that is already being done in addition to supporting the development of beneficial new traits. Wells and Bennett both roundly criticize the negative effects of badly-planned living spaces, as when Wells describes the misery caused by the "unsanitary, ugly house[s]" (*This Misery of Boots* 397) of the working and middle classes as an inducement to join the socialist movement. The omnipresence of environmental influence explains Wells' habit of imaginatively wiping out existing built environments in order to make way for "a better, breezier, jollier, happier, more adventurous and gallant world" (*Mr. Bennett* 13) in his utopian fiction. Building better living spaces is doubly necessary for these authors: it both introduces positive selection and eliminates existing homes which restrict the physical and emotional development of the people who live in unpleasant, cramped, and unsanitary conditions. Working to produce a better world is not only a pleasant attempt at improving neutral conditions for these authors—it is frequently a desperately necessary means of removing negative influences.

In Huxley's account of the ideal garden, 'nature' itself is the only opposing force. Wells and Bennett add the poor planning, adherence to habit, and their neighbour's resistance to change to the equation, presenting their builders and planners as fighting not only against nature, but against bad construction, bad planning, and other short-sighted and unskilled attempts to shape a given region. In *A New Machiavelli*, suburbs appear as a negative example of the material consequences of a lack of planning. The Victorian era, for Remington, is not a time of the successful ordering of the material world or the rise of technological

dominance, but "a hasty, trial experiment, a gigantic experiment of the most slovenly and wasteful kind" (39):

> The serene rhythms of the old-established agriculture, I see now, were everywhere being replaced by cultivation under notice and snatch crops; hedges ceased to be repaired, and were replaced by cheap iron railings or chunks of corrugated iron; more and more hoardings sprang up, and contributed more and more to the nomad tribes of filthy paper scraps that flew before the wind and overspread the country. The outskirts of Bromstead were a maze of exploitation roads that led nowhere, that ended in tarred fences studded with nails [...] and in trespass boards that used vehement language. Broken glass, tin cans, and ashes and paper abounded. (39)

The juxtaposition of agrarian and suburban life provides a contrast not between pristine nature and coarse humanity, but between a well-adapted way of life and its ill-adapted successor. Remington criticizes suburbs for being thoughtlessly planned and poorly executed. Each attempt at building a new suburb "left a legacy of products—houses, humanity, or what not—in its wake" (39). In this passage we see the strong sense Wells has of the interdependence of subject and object, as 'houses' and 'humanity' share the same fate at the hands of bad planning: transformation into 'waste'.

The "extraordinary confusion and waste and planlessness of human life" (*New Machiavelli* 32) in the suburbs leaves a lasting impression on Remington. 'Waste' is a loaded term for Wells. It appears frequently in *A New Machiavelli* as

well as *Tono-Bungay*. The narrator of the latter, George Ponderevo, suggests that the novel in its entirety "had far better have [been called] *Waste*" (*Tono-Bungay* 381) in recognition of the "wasting aimless fever of trade and money-making and pleasure-seeking" and the "wasted and wasteful and futile" (381) lives of men and women who fail to advance the human race through labour and eugenic reproduction. Wells' anxiety about waste is symptomatic of his sense of the difficulty of implementing Huxley's vision of a carefully planned environment that will produce a more ethical population. For Wells, all available resources must be channeled into the project of creating a World State—the ultimate Huxleyan 'state of Art'. Any material or social structures that do not support this goal actively impede it, since the world produces a finite amount of human and physical energy. To describe the suburbs as wasteful, then, is not to participate in the kind of unconscious classism that drives much of the criticism of these spaces, but to argue that they are unintentionally diverting the path of human evolution from the goal of peace and efficiency that Wells so desires. This can be seen clearly in Remington's claim that "Failure is not failure nor waste waste if it sweeps away illusion and lights the road to a plan" (*New Machiavelli* 40). Here, planning negates waste by channeling it into the larger project of ethical evolution.

Waste and inefficiency are also roundly criticized by Bennett. A lack of planning is evident everywhere in the Five Towns. In *Clayhanger*, the narrator describes the town as a mass of:

narrow uneven alleys leading to higgledy-piggledy workshops and kilns;

cottages transformed into factories and factories into cottages, clumsily,

hastily, because nothing matters so long as 'it will do'; everywhere

something forced to fulfil, badly, the function of something else; in brief,

the reign of the slovenly makeshift, shameless, filthy, and picturesque. (17-

18)

Bennett is critical of this 'makeshift' attitude towards building and city planning

because he believes strongly in the power of environmental influences. A decision

made years earlier to re-route the railway so that it runs through unpopulated land

is blamed for "a perhaps excessive provincialism" (2) which blights the entire

population of the region, while the "position of Mr. Clayhanger's easy chair—a

detail apparently trifling" (63) is "a strongly influencing factor in the family life"

(63) because it requires the children to disturb their mercurial father in order to

stoke the fire, and makes them cringing and subservient as a result. Bad

architecture and 'higgledy-piggledy' planning represent both a missed opportunity

to create beneficial environments, and an active source of negative influence.

Yet although Edwin's education is deficient on several fronts, he at least

gains a sense that things might be done differently—a shocking idea to his

working class father, who considers it blasphemously ungrateful of Edwin to be

unsatisfied with the status quo. Edwin retains a stubborn interest in architecture,

rather than the family business of printing, despite the fact that the existing

"architecture of the streets" (17) actively impedes the development of imagination

and intellectual curiosity. The same town that demoralizes Edwin and limits his

personal growth acts as a catalyst for his continued curiosity about the world.

Provincial towns are both disabling and inspiring in *Clayhanger*, and indeed in many other works by Bennett. Both Bennett and Wells use settings outside of established metropolitan centres to both dramatize the work of shaping environments to better suit the needs and desires of their human inhabitants, and emphasize the difficulty, labour, and frustration inherent in even a small-scale attempt to do so. Yet both authors also see great potential in these spaces. In the following section, I will examine the transformation of suburban and provincial built environments to support the emergence of middlebrow culture and the continuation of the ongoing education which supports that culture in both Bennett and Wells.

The Middlebrow Feedback Loop

Bennett and Wells frequently suggest that not only are architecture and residential development especially well-suited subjects for middlebrow writing, but that middlebrow people are especially well-suited to be architects and planners, thanks to their education compared to previous generations. Bennett explores this generational gap in depth in his *Clayhanger* trilogy. Darius Clayhanger leaves school to enter the workplace at age seven, laboriously rising through the ranks at a pottery factory before establishing his own business as a printer. His son, Edwin Clayhanger, is able to stay in school until the age of seventeen and develop lofty goals of becoming an architect. Unlike his father's generation, men of Edwin's age are able to imagine a different world, thanks to their freedom from immediate physical and financial needs. Edwin is able to re-

imagine the physical spaces of the Five Towns in a way that his father cannot. Wells similarly anticipates the rise of middlebrow men and women as architects of the future, calling in *Anticipations* for a class of "practical people, [...] engineering and medical and scientific people" (125) to join together and shape the future by literally redesigning the present. Wells and Bennett both suggest that the broad, ongoing education newly available to the middling classes will translate into the development of homes and districts which will support further learning and the continued development of middlebrow culture. As a result, suburban and provincial sites of residential development can be read as experiments in forming built environments supportive of middlebrow interests.

The most prominent of these interests is expanded and continuing education for the middle classes. In *A New Machiavelli*, Remington identifies education as the key to creating more stable and fruitful social organizations. He inherits his belief in the power of education from his father. Although Remington Senior is a science teacher, "taking a number of classes at the Bromstead Institute in Kent under the old Science and Art Department, and 'visiting' various schools" (*New Machiavelli* 21), his education is not equal to the endless struggle against chance and chaos that he is necessarily part of. Both Remington and his father hold up better planned, more accessible public education—that cornerstone of middlebrow culture—as a potential way out of this struggle. In his father's childhood, "the under-equipped and under-staffed National and British schools, supported by voluntary contributions and sectarian rivalries, made an ineffectual fight against [the] festering darkness" (*New Machiavelli* 23). Remington himself

has received a better education, which his father urges him to continue as the only means available to him to 'disentangle' himself from the chaos of the material world: "It isn't a world we live in, Dick: it's a cascade of accidents; it's a chaos exasperated by policemen! You be warned in time, Dick. You stick to a plan. […] Get education, get a good education. Fight your way to the top. It's your only chance" (*New Machiavelli* 31). Improved education for the middle classes—the key historical determinant of the rise of middlebrow culture—is presented as the key to overcoming the 'tyranny' of the material world by imparting the ability to execute the properly planned 'states of art' championed by the very theorist who dominated Wells' own middlebrow education.

Bennett also champions education, presenting the acquisition of private space for reading and study as necessary to the development of middlebrow readers. To this end, Edwin's interest in architecture is not merely an attempt to rebuild the environment of Bursley, but an attempt to expand the range of possible lives available to its inhabitants. After being forced to leave school at a relatively young age to join the family business, he surreptitiously creates a study in the attic of his childhood home, collecting "a table, a lamp, and a chair" (101) to make a space for practicing architectural drawings. Although his desire to be an architect is thwarted and he joins the family printing business, the desire is presented as laudable in and of itself as evidence of intellectual curiosity and critical awareness of his surroundings. Edwin's architectural career never materializes, but his middlebrow impulse towards informal continuing education thrives. Years later, when his father Darius agrees to build a new home, with Osmund Orgreave

working as the architect, Edwin once again manages to acquire private space in the family home which supports his habits of reading and leisure. As mentioned above, built-in bookshelves in his room become a major point of contention between him and his father. Edwin's middlebrow project of self-improvement through "cherished programmes of reading" (440) appears indulgent to his father, who expresses his displeasure with his son's intellectual inspiration by objecting passionately to the wooden planks which hold his reading material. A personal stove and an easy chair eventually join the bookshelves, as Edwin converts more and more of the house to not only reflect his taste, but actively enable his middlebrow lifestyle.

Edwin's study is a profoundly important location in the novel. The narrator comments that there is nothing noteworthy about the room to an outsider, who "might have said in its praise that it was light and airy" (*Clayhanger* 312). Edwin, with "divine vision," can see "with the surest conviction" that the room is "wonderful" (312). The room is not merely a space to sleep, but a "study" (312). That Edwin has a study is a remarkable personal victory. *Clayhanger* begins, after all, on the occasion of his permanently leaving school against his wishes and follows him through frustrated years studying in the un-insulated attic. As an adult, he is able to secure a private space for himself, dedicated only to study. New housing developments afford middlebrow individuals an opportunity not only to apply ideals of rational planning picked up in their newly expanded educations, but to support the broad middlebrow project of self-improvement and the circulation of knowledge. Bennett identifies knowledge about the material

history of the Five Towns as the primary marker of the difference in education between Edwin and his father. While Darius is so focused on survival that he has no time or inclination to question how things came to be the way they are, Edwin has the education, security, and leisure time necessary to question how his surroundings were constructed, and to begin to change those surroundings. Edwin's step-son George takes this progression one step further, by becoming the architect that Edwin always wanted to be. Edwin's ability to not only assume an authoritative role within his family, but to encourage his son in a way that his own father was not able to do is directly attributable to his extended education and pursuit of his intellectual interests. In other words, it is directly attributable to the rise of middlebrow culture.

Clayhanger, then, can be read as a celebration of the small-scale changes brought about by middlebrow individuals, and as a narrative defense of the informal educational schemes that were so widely derided. Bennett lends gravity and importance to small acts such as redesigning a room to include bookshelves, without losing sight of the poignant mediocrity and limitations of someone like Edwin. Because private studies are firmly associated with male privilege, the importance of these spaces for upwardly-mobile men of the middle classes can easily be overlooked. Modernist critic Victoria Rosner argues that while women increasingly had access to private studies and work spaces over the course of the early twentieth century, the study has traditionally been male territory, and symptomatic of male privilege: "Male writers have had rooms of their own in which to write throughout the history of English literature, rooms that are also the

site of male privacy" (Rosner 119). Rosner largely bases this assertion on the

history of private male spaces in middle-class and upper-middle-class dwellings.

For the first generation of middlebrow male authors, private working and study

space remained a luxury.

Attaining a private space is an aspirational goal for many of Wells and

Bennett's characters, as it was for the authors themselves. In an otherwise positive

review of *A Room of One's Own*, Bennett challenges Woolf's famous assertion that

"it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on it if you are

to write fiction or poetry" (*A Room of One's Own* 158): "I beg to state that I have

myself written long and formidable novels in bedrooms whose doors certainly had

no locks, and in the full dreadful knowledge that I had not five hundred a year of

my own—nor fifty" (*Critical Writings* 226). Calling himself a "low-brow" and

Woolf "queen of the high-brows" (*Critical Writings* 225), Bennett claims that

"from the moment when [he] obtained possession of both money and a lockable

door all the high-brows in London conspired together to assert that [he] could no

longer write" (226). There is an element of male privilege at play in Bennett's

review—he seemingly ignores the feminist context of Woolf's argument—but to

reduce Bennett's piece to gendered ignorance is to miss the important class

implications of his claim. Edwin Clayhanger's desire for a private study space can

be understood as a class-aspirational desire, and its attainment a key part in his

liberation through education from the limitations of his father's worldview. The

reading that Edwin hopes to accomplish in his private space is strictly ordered by

a self-imposed 'programme' of classics and edifying material (although he

frequently ignores this programme in order to indulge in Swift and other pleasurable reads). The vision of a young man sitting down with profound seriousness to a reading 'programme' may strike us as somewhat pompous and ridiculous, and Bennett does not spare his protagonist from exhibiting either of those characteristics. There remains, however, a real sense of the importance and novelty of Edwin's informal education given his circumstances. His 'programme' is nothing less than the fulfillment of that intellectual curiosity described at the novel's opening as a flame burning inside him "like an altar-fire, a miraculous and beautiful phenomenon, than which nothing is more miraculous nor more beautiful over the whole earth" (*Clayhanger* 17).

Wells felt so strongly about the need for private space in which to work and study that even after he commissioned his own country house with a purpose-built study, he still felt the lack of privacy to be the most intractable challenge to his creative productivity, and the possibility of private study to be one of the most remarkable achievements of the twentieth century. He opens his autobiography by complaining that in order to complete his life's work, he requires "a pleasant well-lit writing room in good air and a comfortable bedroom to sleep in—and, if the mood takes me, to write in—both free from distracting noises and indeed all unexpected disturbances" with a "secretary or at least a typist within call and out of earshot" and "an abundant library" (*Experiment* 4). These would provide the "immediate material conditions for the best possible work" (*Experiment* 4). Anticipating the reader's incredulity that one of the most successful and widely read authors of the last several decades could be deprived of a simple study, Wells

continues, "It is not that I am poor and unable to buy the things I want, but that I am quite unable to get the things I want. I can neither control my surroundings myself nor can I find helpers and allies who will protect me from the urgencies—from within and from without—of primary things. I do not see how there can be such helpers" (*Experiment* 5). Far from seeing a private study as an entitlement, Wells still sees private space as difficult to find and impossible to fully maintain.

Yet Wells sees the desire for private space as part of the increasing power of planning and intellectual exertion in humanity's struggle to shape its surroundings. He argues that people have only recently been able to their energies to leisure, study, and social planning instead of the fulfillment of basic needs. "Spaciousness and leisure, and even the desire for spaciousness and leisure," he writes, "have so far been exceptional" (*Experiment* 1-2) in human history. Until very recently, "[m]ost individual creatures […] have been "up against it" all the time, have been driven continually by fear and cravings, have had to respond to the unresting antagonisms of their surroundings […] Essentially, their living was a continuous adjustment to happenings" (*Experiment* 2). To escape this perpetual struggle for survival, "human foresight" has to be channeled into the project of "progressive emancipation of the attention from everyday urgencies" (*Experiment* 2). In Wells' eyes, the people of the twentieth century are "like early amphibians" (3) struggling to leave the water and trapped between modes of being: "the new land has not yet definitively emerged from the waters and we swim distressfully in an element we wish to abandon" (*Experiment* 3). For Wells, the way to ensure our freedom from 'everyday urgencies' and continue our development as a species

is to take control of our surroundings through careful planning.

As noted above, the question of exactly who should undertake the planning and work required to maintain a 'state of Art' within the 'state of nature' goes unanswered by Huxley. Huxley's theory of ethical evolution replaces natural selection with selection which conforms to the 'administrator's ideal'. There are clear eugenic implications of this phrase, but Huxley stops short of identifying who will take on the administrator's work of determining which traits are 'ideal'. Wells sees scientifically-educated middle-class people as the population who can identify these traits, and devise large-scale plans to implement supportive policies and build the material framework that will support their development. According to Wells, the development of suburban areas provides the large-scale equivalent of building private studies insofar as it has the possibility to support and consolidate informal education and reflection. Despite the negative representation of suburban space in *A New Machiavelli,* Wells sees immense possibility in suburbs as sites of renewed planning and innovation as well as nurseries for the rise of middlebrow subjects. In *Anticipations*, Wells predicts that suburbs will multiply and replace traditional urban centres until "'town' and 'city' will be, in truth, terms as obsolete as 'mail coach'" (53). In the future, England will be composed of a collection of broadly dispersed 'urban districts' or 'urban regions' (53). This expansion will result not in bland homogeneity, but in "a wide and quite unprecedented diversity in the various suburban townships and suburban districts" (49) which will spring up. Wells imagines a "curious and varied region, far less monotonous than our present English world" (53) in which "each district [...] will develop its own

differences of type and style" (54). The same suburbs which are a site of futile struggle against material constraint in *A New Machiavelli* hold the greatest promise for a better-organized, more humane nation in *Anticipations*. This ambivalence towards suburbs as generative of both frustration and optimism is consonant with Wells' career-long oscillation between optimism for the future and pessimism for the present. By projecting the suburbs even slightly into the future, he is able to emphasize their potential rather than their shortcomings.

One of the most intriguing possibilities Wells sees in the suburbs is in their ability to engender a class of educated, scientifically-minded people necessary to human improvement. Given the inevitable expansion of the suburbs as a result of improved modes of transport which make long commutes more practical, Wells proposes a program of adaptation to material change centered on education and the production of a class made up of an "ideal engineering sort of person" (102) who will spearhead the social and technical changes necessary for humanity to adapt to its new circumstances. This 'engineering class' has its roots in "a great inchoate mass of more or less capable people engaged more or less consciously in applying the growing body of scientific knowledge to the general needs, a great mass that will inevitably tend to organize itself in a system of interdependent educated classes" (87). Although Wells does not identify this group as middlebrow, we can label it as such in retrospect. Opposed to both the independently wealthy and the working classes, and characterized by a mixture of education, pragmatism, and broad scientific principles, this emerging mass has much in common with middlebrow subjects.

The dispersal of town and city populations into suburban regions will, according to Wells, give this 'inchoate mass' the opportunity to "become more and more homogeneous in their fundamental culture, more and more distinctly aware of a common 'general reason' in things, and of a common difference from the less functional masses" (125). In the "districts of industrial possibility" (125) opened up by the expansion of existing cities and towns, the educated middle classes will gather together, develop "the literature of their needs" (125), promote "positive science" as a "common ground for understanding the real pride of life" (125) and constitute a "sanely reproductive class" (125), organizing family life around sound evolutionary tenets. Suburban development and the rise of the middlebrow go hand in hand in this account. While Wells sees several obstacles to this class seizing political power, he believes that its expertise in matters of material management and applied sciences will inevitably place it in control of the nation:

> They will probably, under the development of warlike stresses, be
> discovered—they will discover themselves—almost surprisingly with
> roads and railways, carts and cities, drains, food supply, electrical supply,
> and water supply, and with guns and such implements of destruction and
> intimidation as men scarcely dream of yet, gathered in their hands. And
> they will be discovered, too, with a growing common consciousness of
> themselves as distinguished from the grey confusion, a common purpose
> and implication that the fearless analysis of science is already bringing to
> light. They will find themselves with bloodshed and horrible disasters

ahead, and the material apparatus of control entirely within their power.

(153)

I will discuss the role Wells sees for war in unsettling established power structures and ushering in the reign of the middlebrow in a subsequent chapter; for now, it is important to note the immense importance that Wells attributes to scientific education as a means to rationally organize those elements of the material world which fall within human control. Universal education and the popularization of scientific knowledge appear once more as the foundation upon which middlebrow culture will grow, in this case with weighty consequences for the entire nation. Wells sees his 'ideal engineer' as *the* "vitally important citizen of a progressive scientific State" (102). In *Anticipations* the suburb, as the nursery for this emerging class of scientifically educated people, is not only the inevitable outcome of technological changes, but the key to producing a rationally ordered state.

For both Wells and Bennett, new housing developments play an active role in supporting the emergence of middlebrow individuals and, by extension, middlebrow culture. Because suburban and provincial regions offer the middling classes opportunities to re-shape their living spaces, they can be used to provide those classes' spaces and structures which will hopefully enable them to continue the process of informal education and scientific planning that form the foundation of middlebrow culture. A positive feedback loop is formed wherein improvements in education prompt individuals like Edwin Clayhanger and Wells' ideal engineer to re-shape their living spaces in such a way as to encourage and support further

education. Evolutionary theory is a common topic for middlebrow literature, because it provides a scientific foundation for the importance of environment, which allows for the development of middlebrow culture through the creation of new built environments.

Conclusion

New homes and sites of residential development appear frequently in the work of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. Especially for Bennett and Wells, new styles of dwelling have the potential to support new practices and habits, particularly middlebrow programmes of self-education. The literal alteration of built environments seen in middlebrow novels is part of a broader conversation about the impact living spaces have on the behaviours of their inhabitants which took place in both middlebrow and highbrow literature in early-twentieth-century Britain. Victoria Rosner argues that modernists were also deeply concerned with how best to re-arrange living spaces to encourage new lifestyles. In *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, Rosner claims that "for Woolf, as for many others, the home was seen as a kind of laboratory for social experimentation" (5) where authors "found material expression" (12) of the changing relationships between men and women, employer and servant, parents and children. According to Rosner, modernist authors such as Woolf and Strachey re-organize both their literal homes and the living spaces in their writing to decenter "hierarchical and compartmentalized Victorian spaces" (8) in ways which "expos[e] the fundamental role of the built environment in creating the categories we use to

organize and understand who we are" (2). The importance of built environments in modernist writing is another site of connection between modernist and middlebrow writing. Despite Woolf's criticism of Bennett's fixation on architectural details, the two authors share a common interest in the impact of living spaces on those who live in them.

Subtle but important differences remain between highbrow and middlebrow representations of built environments, however. Although the 'Victorian spaces' which the modernists rebel against may play a 'fundamental role' in shaping the personalities of the people who inhabit them, this environmental power is seen as deliberately incorporated into these spaces by Victorian builders whose aim it was to give material form to their subjective values. Homes act as mediators between Victorian hierarchies and modernist subversion of those hierarchies, ultimately reflecting the desires of the individuals who plan them. The material world with which characters like Remington and Clayhanger wrestle is less directly expressive of human values and hierarchies. Homes and residential developments often represent the chaotic and indifferent nature of the physical world in Wells and Bennett's writing, not the careful encoding of human values into built space. Middlebrow literature more frequently represents houses and other built spaces as part of an intractable material world to which the subject must adapt. To return to the example from *Clayhanger* discussed above, Edwin's temperament is shaped by the design of his childhood home. The location of the window in the sitting room requires that his father's chair be placed between the children and the poker for the fire, resulting in the

children constantly wrestling with the decision between disturbing their mercurial father or being cold, and consequently becoming sheepish and passive individuals. The placement of the window which sets off such a consequential chain of events is not due to a desire on the part of the builder to express social hierarchy in material form, but simply the arbitrary consequence of a lack of planning. Clayhanger's life is altered by the blunt material qualities of his childhood home rather than by any conscious attempt to incorporate social hierarchies and Victorian values into living spaces. The consequences this space has for its inhabitants are largely unintended, but remain powerful regardless of their arbitrary nature.

Middlebrow authors, like modernists, view homes as sites of experimentation and possibility. Where they differ, I argue, is in the degree of arbitrariness they see in the material environment. Because of the strong legacy of evolutionary theory within the work of writers like Wells and Bennett, their work shows a clear understanding of the power of environmental influences, and the difficulty of establishing built environments which encourage the development of different traits than those which guarantee survival in the state of nature. Wells and Bennett share a belief with many modernists that changing living spaces can enable new ways of living, and explore how this mechanism for change might be harnessed in favour of middlebrow culture. For Wells and Bennett, however, the struggle is not one between different generations, but one between humanity and an indifferent and arbitrary material world.

Chapter Four: Wrestling with War

Before the First World War, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy all struggled to articulate the value of individual lives against the backdrop of the global struggle for survival and the evolutionary time scale. In their war-time and post-war writing, this struggle intensifies. While all three authors remain committed to the narrative integration of part and whole, they must go to greater lengths to insist upon the coherence which they see in the world after being badly shaken by the events of the war. Each author's personal response to the war differs significantly, yet there are several key characteristics which all three share. They all enter the war unsure of how to justify the importance of individual lives, but certain that each life is part of a wider struggle that drives the development of the human race. Initially, they seek to contextualize the War itself as a minor part of this inevitable struggle, minimizing its importance compared to the slow process of evolution and the sum total of conflict and competition for survival that evolutionary theory teaches is an inevitable feature of all life. Taking an expansive view of human development, they downplay the ability of individuals to alter the course of the war, instead foregrounding the roles played by technological and material obstacles and resources, and explicitly rejecting the importance of remarkable leaders and other 'Great Men'. Eventually, each finds this sprawling perspective incompatible with their need to address and mourn the specific losses and trauma of the War. The visceral, immediate experiences of loss and trauma of many in England and abroad are not so easily reduced to examples for or against the survival of the

fittest. Wells can imply that the gradual elimination of the "great useless masses of […] the People of the Abyss" (*Anticipations* 183) may be desirable in order to allow the 'life of the race' to move forward[12], but he cannot treat the death of Allied soldiers with the same sweeping tone without alienating his audience. What we see in Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's writing about the war and its aftermath, then, is each author's attempt to reconcile his systematizing tendency with the need to acknowledge the intensity of individual loss. In different ways, they wrestle with the limits of their previous strategies of integration, without ever fully abandoning the desire to reintegrate the traumas of the war into a broader conceptual framework.

World War One brings these authors to a point of crisis in which each must develop adaptive strategies to maintain narrative integration between part and whole. Too often, critics follow Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy only to the moment of crisis and dismiss the remainder of their career as "irrelevant" (Field 123) or their late-career writing as "obliviou[s]" (Sherry 61) of post-war realities. Such readings neglect to consider the complex strategies which these authors use to reassert order and coherence in the face of war, and their continued relevance to middlebrow audiences. Granted, middlebrow authors did not hold anywhere near the cultural capital of the 'men of 1914' among highbrow audiences after the war, but then again, this was never their audience. The middlebrow response of recuperation and reconciliation embodied in the war-time and post-war work of

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[12] A more striking and racially explicit passage along these lines also appears in *Anticipations*: "To the multiplying rejected of the white and yellow civilizations there will have been added a vast proportion of the black and brown races, and collectively those masses will propound the general question, 'What will you do with us, we hundreds of millions, who cannot keep pace with you?'" (242).

these three authors may rightly be criticized for relying on problematic narratives of progress and academically unpopular rhetorics of sentiment, faith, and family, but it nevertheless constitutes a popular response to the War which held great power for its immediate audience. Michael Levenson argues that through the war, modernist authors began to develop larger and more complex narrative forms which required them to move from "the self-contained fragment to the encyclopedia" (237). The development of middlebrow writing similarly emphasizes points of connection, but it begins from a very different starting point—already deeply convinced of the importance of integrating part to whole, middlebrow authors such as Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy required strategies to hold firm to this perspective despite profound challenges to the ability of rational dialogue to explain the horrors of mechanized warfare. In the following chapter, I will examine the strategies which they use to connect apparently meaningless fragmentary objects and individual experiences to each other to lend order to a chaotic time in England's history.

Middlebrow and modernist authors held very different cultural positions at the beginning of the war, and predictably responded to it in different ways. While the 'men of 1914' were emerging writers of or around fighting age, the first generation of middlebrow authors—those born in the 1860s and 70s—were generally too old to serve, but had established themselves as prominent authors and were therefore seen by the government and the mainstream press as important contributors to public discourse about the conflict. The public activity of the 'Edwardians' did not end with the close of the Edwardian era, but continued in

various forms into the war and inter-war periods. Frank Swinnerton recounts a wide range of participation in the war effort on the part of older writers: "Some of them […] went straight off upon romantic adventure. Some slipped into government service […] others were forced to do what they could to subsist for as long as possible" (176). The war provided both a challenge and a rallying point for middlebrow authors. Despite the "rule of well-established associations" by which "the Great War of 1914-18 locates the moment in which the new sensibility of English—and international—modernism comes fully into existence" (Sherry 6), middlebrow writing continued to enjoy great popularity and cultural influence in England in the war and interwar periods. Just as the war catalyzed the development of literary modernism, so did it challenge and provoke middlebrow authors to develop responses to the war suitable to their audience and register.

Rather than upsetting and challenging its audience, middlebrow writing provided comfort to readers through a moderately intellectual reframing of conflict in historical and evolutionary terms. Because middlebrow culture grows out of educational reform and often appeals to a strong desire for informal education among the middling classes, it is not surprising that many middlebrow writers took the same explanatory, educational approach to the war as they did to the other social and political phenomena discussed in their work. However, because (as I argue above) middlebrow writing often seeks to integrate individual events into scientific and social-scientific discourses which require large sample sizes to determine broad patterns, they often reduce those individual events to mere symptoms of larger processes or isolated data points with no inherent

significance. The war challenges this broad perspective, yet various authors successfully adapted their existing narrative styles to writing about the war and its consequences. Still, middlebrow realism appears to many in retrospect as representative of a status quo rocked by a crisis to which modernism was better equipped to respond.

While this narrative of the ascendancy of modernism does not account for the continued success and influence of middlebrow writers through the war and inter-war periods, it explains why the lasting relevance of Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy's writing on World War One is a matter of critical debate. Like many other Edwardians, they were spared from active combat and were positioned as trusted cultural commentators by virtue of their age and their established reputations. All three addressed the war and its consequences in considerable depth, in texts ranging from newspaper reports sent from the front lines to novels meditating on life on the home front. Wells and Bennett in particular became highly visible interpreters of the war in the mainstream press. In his memoir of the period, Swinnerton writes that "Newspaper proprietors, looking around for men with the common touch, who had strongly patriotic opinions and a gift for expressing them" seized upon Wells, Bennett, and Hilaire Belloc as writers who "could be relied upon for knowledge and pre-eminent lucidity" (177). The British government sent Wells and Bennett, along with other writers and artists, on official visits to the front. Wells later worked for the government under Lord Northcliffe, "devising propaganda to convince the Central Powers of the necessity for peace and world reconstruction" (Field 136), although he quit in

disillusionment in short order. He was not the only prominent author to participate in war-time propagandizing—in September of 1914, all three men were invited to join Cabinet Minister Charles Masterman at a dinner designed to recruit prominent authors to the task of producing propaganda. The guest list reads like a 'Who's Who' of masculine middlebrow authors, including Sir Henry Newbolt, J. W. Mackail, Arthur and R. H. Benson, G. M. Trevelyan, John Masefield, Robert Bridges, Anthony Hope Hawing, G. K. Chesterton, and James Barrie (Roby 43-4). Masterman went on to commission propaganda from a predominantly middlebrow stable of writers including "John Masefield, Arthur Conan Doyle, Hilaire Belloc, Rudyard Kipling, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and the best-selling novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward" (Deer 35), with Ford Madox Ford standing out as the lone "highbrow" participant.

Yet despite—or perhaps because of—their success in mainstream, government-sanctioned publications, these authors are not remembered by scholars as incisive commentators on the war. Frank Field writes that although Wells remained "phenomenally productive" as an author both during and after the war, Wells' reputation "never really recovered from the effects of the war"; that he was in fact "rendered irrelevant by a catastrophe that had exposed the hollowness of [his] message" (123). Field recounts Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon's dislike of Wells' treatment of Sassoon on a visit to a military hospital, during which Wells was "far more interested in pumping information" out of doctors "to secure confirmation of his theories on God […] than in enquiring about Sassoon's own experiences on the Front" (136). Walter Allen makes a similar claim about

Bennett's reputation, writing that "It is scarcely possible not to see Bennett as a war casualty" (qtd. Roby 4). The persistent sense that modernism is the dominant literary mode of the War has kept many from recognizing the continued influence and status enjoyed by middlebrow Edwardians throughout the First World War.

Accounts from contemporaries of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy paint a very different picture. Rather than comfortably popular authors becoming irrelevant thanks to an inability to respond to changing conditions, they describe a group of prominent contributors to public discourse transformed into national figures by a time of crisis. Shortly before the war, the names Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy were already being yoked together as the most prominent authors of the time. In 1911, Arthur Quiller Couch described them as "three eminent writers who appear to furnish the reviewer, between them, with all his touchstones of judgment and all his canons of taste" (qtd. Roby 11). Swinnerton has a similar sense of the prominence of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy before the war, but writes that before 1914 "they had merely made reputations as novelists" while the war transformed them into "national figures" (185). Kinley E. Roby, a later biographer of Bennett, echoes this assessment, writing that Bennett "entered the war essentially a private citizen and emerged from it a public figure" (27).

Sales figures from before and after the war support the claim that all three authors continued to grow in popularity well into the second decade of the twentieth century—most notably, Wells' novel about life on the home front, *Mr Britling Sees it Through* (1916), sold five times as many copies as his Edwardian

successes *Tono-Bungay* (1909) and the scandalous *Ann Veronica* (1909)[13]. After

an initial decline in sales at the beginning of the conflict, mainstream publishing

flourished: "Since soldiers in training or the trenches, weary of filth and blood,

needed diversion, and their wives and mothers needed reassurance as well as

spiritual refreshment, there was an outpouring of books and periodicals to meet

these needs" (Swinnerton 185). The aesthetic innovations of modernism—

dislocated and partial perspectives, fragmentary narratives, the rejection of easy

resolution—comprise one literary response to the trauma of the war, but they are

far from the only mode of narrating the conflict. In order to appeal to this

audience, middlebrow responses to war are more likely to attempt to overcome

dislocation and fragmentation through the restoration of domestic and national

harmony in their narratives.

Middlebrow writing about the First World War, by virtue of its need to be

accessible to a broad audience, did not generally participate in the aesthetic

experimentation that characterized highbrow responses to the conflict.

Oftentimes, middlebrow war writing sought to console the reader and translate the

war into relatable terms by narrating the war through the perspective of families

on the home front, as exemplified by Elizabeth Von Arnim's *Christopher and*

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[13] This figure is from Swinnerton, who provides similar sales figures showing a strong increase in sales for both Bennett and Galsworthy post-1914: "On its first publication in 1908, for example, *The Old Wives' Tale*, of which the great length frightened publishers, sold only between five and six thousand copies. John Galsworthy reveals in a letter of complaint that whereas *The Man of Property* (1906) had sold five thousand copies, *The Patrician*, published five years afterwards, had so little increased that sale that it attained only eight thousand. *Kipps*, published in 1905, and the first book by Wells to touch ten thousand, sold only 180 copies in the following year.

[…] *Tono-Bungay* and *Ann Veronica*, both 1909, barely reached the sales of twenty thousand apiece, in spite of the fact that *Ann Veronica* was widely banned by libraries, and therefore bought in great numbers at the bookshops. Their successors dropped so rapidly that the publishers felt unable to continue paying Wells the hitherto generous advances he asked. After the war, *Mr Britling Sees it Through* sold a hundred thousand copies in England; *Riceyman Steps* about half that number; and Galsworthy's later books up to seventy thousand a piece. (185-6)

Columbus, a comedic novel about two Anglo-German twins displaced by the war. Patriotic writing was also highly successful, including John Buchan's middlebrow war novels (*Mr. Standfast*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*). Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy have more in common with Von Arnim than with Buchan—rather than directly portraying scenes of war and intrigue, they explore the consequences of the war for the general public, seeking to console the reader and contextualize the war rather than to inflame patriotic fervour. All three were critical of the waste and human loss entailed in fighting the war, but remained broadly supportive of Britain's involvement and sought to make sense of the war rather than to radically challenge its necessity. None of the three authors wrote fiction set on the front lines of the war, although Bennett and Wells did produce war journalism. Their novels about the war instead focus on the 'home front', and their characters model strategies for making sense of the war.

The three authors also share a habit of contextualizing the war in broad terms as one of many historical events, as well as only one of many factors determining the success and happiness of individual English citizens. In addition to appealing to broad historical and technological developments as the real drivers of English history, all three actively denigrate the idea that 'Great Men', be they soldiers, thinkers, or politicians, can change the course of the war or of English history more broadly through individual excellence. Bennett devotes an entire novel to this concept, as the eponymous government minister and propaganda chief in his 'home front' novel *Lord Raingo* (1926) dies slowly of pneumonia at home while the war is won despite his inability to steer the newspapers. In fact, no

major character in the novel dies at the front. Deaths by car accident, suicide, and lingering illness remind the reader that chance still plays a heavy role in the course of characters' lives, and that the war is not the only source of destruction at play. Both of these narrative strategies—providing consolation by explaining the war, and contextualizing it within a larger set of factors—work to integrate part to whole in opposition to the modernist tendency to reject the possibility of such integration.

This is not to say that maintaining the narrative integration of part and whole was easy for middlebrow writers. The range of strategies they use to assert the possibility of this integration and the marked shifts in their styles and world views which accompany the conflict speak to the profundity of the challenge posed by war. Wells' unexpected and temporary turn to God during World War One is an especially fascinating example of a middlebrow attempt to provide a coherent foundation for individual action. His unusual personal religion and belief in a 'finite God' who fully inhabits the material world have a compelling internal coherence, and connect surprisingly well to his pre-war beliefs in the importance of the material world. Galsworthy similarly takes an unexpected turn as a result of the War. While the War itself does not appear in his *Forsyte Chronicles*, he examines the results of war at length in his post-war Forsyte trilogy *A Modern Comedy* (1924-28). This trilogy marks a notable change in tone for Galsworthy, who shifts from the ironic criticism of late-Victorian excess to an impassioned and earnest plea for recuperation of those Victorian values which he feels are worth retaining as an antidote to the social ills he sees proceeding from the conflict.

Galsworthy advocates for an increased investment in local agriculture, bolstering the birth rate, and improving the lived environments of the poor in an idiosyncratic combination of more-or-less conservative political goals which he fictionalizes and includes in his writing under the name 'Foggartism'. Bennett's response to the war does not involve as sharp a shift as those of Wells and Galsworthy, but his work shows an intensification of the evolutionary language seen in his earlier work, as well as the recasting of the resiliency of human life through struggle for survival as a source of comfort and potential inspiration rather than a source of drudgery and malaise. Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's responses to the challenges posed by the war demonstrate what Lynne Hapgood calls the "adaptability and flexibility of realist techniques" ("Transforming the Victorian" 22), unsettling a critical narrative that dismisses their inter-war contributions to English literary culture.

'The Ferret of War': Evolutionary Perspectives on Conflict in Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy

The use of evolutionary theory to downplay the significance of the crisis is a common response to the war among middlebrow writers. Many writers use evolutionary language to either appeal to a longer timescale in which the war appears as a minor episode, to argue that the stimulus of conflict is necessary in order to ward off degeneracy, or to assert the stability of environmental and biological influences which underlie social and political changes. In Galsworthy's introduction to his inter-war Forsyte trilogy *A Modern Comedy*, he complains that

"[e]veryone, having been in an earthquake which lasted four years" is now prone to "misjudgement of the English character and of the position of England" (14). He is confident that the despair and dislocation which generate these misjudgments will pass, however, since "[t]here never was a country where real deterioration of human fibre had less chance than in this island, because there is no other country whose climate is so changeable, so tempering to character, so formative of grit, and so basically healthy" (14). England's climate, rather than human activity, shapes the English character in Galsworthy's eyes, and so the war will not be able to permanently alter the future of the nation any more than it can alter the weather. At times, Bennett presents a similarly detached view of war in evolutionary terms. In his 1918 novel *The Pretty Lady*, the narrator comments that the intense war-time romances which make up the bulk of the novel are merely "the huge contrivances of certain active spermatozoa for producing other active spermatozoa" (138). *The Pretty Lady* appeals to evolutionary theory to downplay the importance of any individual conflict. As protagonist G. J. Hoape becomes increasingly involved in volunteer committee work for the maintenance of hospitals in France, he remains detached from the emotional cost of war. Even in a global war where "a whole generation, including himself, would rapidly vanish and the next […] stand in its place" (218), G. J. muses that the "path of evolution was unchangeably appointed" (218) and life would continue regardless of the outcome of the conflict.

Yet while all three authors use evolutionary theory to comfort readers by contextualizing the war as one element in a broader evolutionary struggle for

survival, the conflict forces them to re-evaluate this strategy. This is perhaps most clearly seen in Wells' shifting use of evolutionary language over the course of his early and mid-career. Before the First World War, Wells frequently justified war as a productive struggle that would hasten positive developments first in Western society, and then in what Wells calls the life of the 'race'—the collective life of all humanity—by extension. He quickly abandoned this stance after the advent of war. In his 1916 collection of war journalism *War and the Future*, Wells firmly asserts that he is "an extreme Pacifist" (247) who does not "merely want to stop this war [but] nail down war in its coffin" (247). While Wells avows that he has "always hated [war]" (247), this claim is clearly spurious to readers of his earlier work. In *Anticipations* (1901), Wells presents war as a necessary destabilizing force, out of whose chaos a more enlightened nation will emerge. In a state of war, the waste produced by everyday inefficiencies and stagnant traditions will no longer be tolerated, forcing the existing rulers to hand over control of England to an educated, rational class of 'engineering types':

> So long as there is peace the class of capable men may be mitigated and gagged and controlled, and the ostensible present order may flourish still in the hands of that other class of men which deals with the appearances of things. But as some supersaturated solution will crystallize out with the mere shaking of its beaker, so must the new order of men come into visibly organized existence through the concussions of war. (154)

War, according to Wells, will hasten the slow process of social and political development, and "finally bring about rapidly and under pressure the same result

as that to which the peaceful evolution slowly tends" (183). 'Peaceful evolution'

consists of "complex reactions and slow absorptions" while war wields "the

surgeon's knife […] [w]ar comes to simplify the issue and line out the thing with

knife-like cuts" (183). Far from always having hated war, Wells actively

champions it in his early works as a means to accelerate improvement in the

social organization and technological prowess of England. His conversion to

'extreme Pacifism' results directly from his experiences living through the large-

scale destruction of World War One.

In *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*, Wells explores his conversion to pacifism

in more detail. Although in *War and the Future* he denies his early interest in the

creative potential of conflict, Wells is much more honest in *Britling* about his

previous celebrations of the transformative power of war. Wells attributes his own

early opinions to the eponymous Mr. Britling, and then has the character slowly

reject these views over the course of the novel. Britling (whose name suggests

that he represents Britain in miniature) reacts to the declaration of war with the

same excitement which Wells expressed early in his career. Large-scale

destruction, for Britling, opens up grand possibilities for large-scale change.

Britling, like many of Wells' protagonists, is a fictionalized version of Wells

himself, so thinly veiled as to make mis-identification impossible. Britling is a

successful author and journalist, living in a manor house very much like Wells'

own, who shares Wells' love of field hockey, his marital infidelities, appearance,

and ideas. In a striking act of literary penance, Wells has Britling rehearse views

published by Wells himself in earlier works, only to reject them in horror when the loss of Britling's son Hugh brings the reality of war home.

Initially, Britling criticizes the complacency that the current social and physical environment has brought about in its inhabitants, using evolutionary language to explain his exhilaration at the thought of large-scale war. According to Britling, the "climate and temperament of our people and our island" (32) has slowly brought about an unplanned, but cosy, system of politics and economics that are so undemanding that they have left English men and women without a drive for change or improvement:

> We're like that little shell the *Lingula*, that is found in the oldest rocks and lives to-day: it fitted its easy conditions, and it has never modified since. Why should it? It excretes all its disturbing forces. Our younger sons go away and found colonial empires. Our surplus cottage children emigrate to Australia and Canada or migrate into the towns. It doesn't alter *this*. . . . (32)

The condition of England is not only safe, but "too safe" (47). The current generation has "grown up with no sense of danger—that is to say, with no sense of responsibility" and cannot "really believe that life can change very fundamentally any more forever" (47). England's climate and material conditions have selected for traits that are functional in peace time, but the nation lacks the stimuli of war and struggle that might select for other traits which Britling finds more desirable. Bored by endless week-end parties, Britling dreams of something coming along to "smash the system" (47) and usher in a new era of change.

At first, he believes that the war will provide precisely the necessary "smash". In contrast to the "stuffy comfort" of Britling's life, war offers "the magic call of unknown experience, of dangers and hardships" (199). He sees himself "face to face with the greatest catastrophe and the greatest opportunity in history" (201), musing:

> Now everything becomes fluid. We can redraw the map of the world. A week ago we were all quarrelling bitterly about things too little for human impatience. Now suddenly we face an epoch. This is an epoch. The world is plastic for men to do what they will with it. This is the end and the beginning of an age. This is something far greater than the French Revolution or the Reformation. . . . And we live in it. . . ." (201)

The war, in this account, broadens perspectives and forces Europeans to view their actions on a historical scale. In sharp contrast to the "crises of perception unleashed by the war" reflected in modernist "acknowledgment of a partial view and fractured perspectives" (Deer 48), Wells suggests that the war requires the opposite response: uniting diverse elements of the conflict into a collective, transformative opportunity to 'redraw the map of the world'. The destruction which necessarily accompanies such a time of immense possibility is dismissed by Britling using the language of the evolutionary struggle. Britling argues that all living creatures already live in a state of war, and that formal warfare is not morally different from the constant war for survival: "Life had a wrangling birth. On the head of every one of us rests the ancestral curse of fifty million murders" (290). For Britling, life is struggle, and peace leads to degeneracy: "The rabbit is

nimble, lives keenly, is prevented from degenerating into a diseased crawling eater of herbs by the incessant ferret. Without the ferret of war, what would life become? . . . . War is murder truly, but is not Peace decay?" (290). By taking a broad, impersonal view of war, Britling can overlook the pain and suffering endured by combatants and their families. In Britling's thinking, with its "tendency to spread outward from himself to generalised issues" (101), war becomes yet another mechanism driving the broad development of humanity, rather than a source of intense individual trauma. This 'generalizing tendency' is shared by Wells, as well as by Bennett and Galsworthy, inasmuch as their use of evolutionary theory requires them to take a long view of human development.

As a result of their biologically-inflected view of humanity on a large scale, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy all strongly criticize the possibility that any individual politician, general, or leader can effect large scale change. In his war journalism, Wells argues that the 'Great Man Theory'—the idea that history is best understood through the actions of a succession of great men—is both inaccurate and symptomatic of less developed forms of society. Dismissing "the idea of the superman" as the misconception of the process of evolution "developed by various people ignorant of biology and unaccustomed to biological ways of thinking" (*War and the Future* 258), Wells reminds the reader that "modifications of a species means really a secular change on the average" rather than the sudden appearance of eccentric individuals" (259), writing that "[a] species rises not by thrusting up peaks but by brimming up as a flood does" (259). Once again, we see the strong affinity between evolutionary theory and

middlebrow writing. The evolutionary progress of the human species, as Wells sees it, is dependent upon "a general increase of good will and skill and common sense" (259) in a broad majority of people; a powerful justification for the middlebrow project of informal education and the dissemination of useful information. Because Wells is intellectually convinced of the importance of broad, collective improvement, he once again privileges the group over the individual exception, writing that "[t]he coming of the superman means not an epidemic of [exceptional] personages but the disappearance of the Personage in the universal ascent" (259). Later in *War and the Future*, Wells describes his travels to the Italian-Austrian front, and uses the King of Italy, as well as his perceptions of Italian culture more broadly, as exemplars of the end of the superman and the rise of the always-improving masses. The overwhelming irony of Wells' choice of Italian politics to prove his point that the cult of the individual was on the wane is striking to any post-World-War-Two readers, but the ultimate historical inaccuracy of his ideas does not alter their significance as an alternative narrative response to WWI which emphasized the integration of individual lives intro grand narratives of human development rather than turning to fragmented narrative styles in an attempt to reproduce subjective experiences of loss.

Bennett is less prescriptive than Wells, but mounts a similar challenge to the 'Great Man' understanding of history in his two novels set during the First World War: *The Pretty Lady* and *Lord Raingo*. Both novels follow a male protagonist through ultimately futile attempts to assert his will over the progress of the war: G. J. Hoape, protagonist of *The Pretty Lady*, does committee work for

charitable hospitals for wounded soldiers, while the eponymous Lord Raingo

leads British propaganda work for the government. Despite the fact that *The*

Pretty Lady was written during the war (1918) while *Lord Raingo* (1926)

considers the war in retrospect, both novels provide a similar criticism of the

place of 'Great Men' in English history by emphasizing the power of chance and

the indifference of the universe to the individual will.

Lord Raingo is, in part, a critical portrait of William Aitken (Lord

Beaverbrook), the press baron who became Britain's first minister of information

in 1918 ("Aitken"). The novel opens as he successfully manoeuvres his way into a

lordship without the usual prerequisites of political service or sizeable party

donations because his potential as a propagandist is so highly prized by the Prime

Minister. Raingo's drive for control and power dominate the first half of the novel.

By the story's end, however, he has lost any semblance of control over his own

life or the affairs of the nation as he lies dying of pneumonia while the war is won

despite his absence from war councils at Downing Street, as the government he

fought so hard to become a member of loses power. The power which Raingo so

carefully amasses proves to be superficial. As he lies dying, his popularity with

the press remains his sole consolation: "Everything else might be all wrong, but

the advent of the press-men proved that he was still the great Raingo and a front-

page item" (*Lord Raingo* 297). Being 'the great Raingo' no longer means having

meaningful authority, but merely remaining a darling of the press. Raingo's death,

which closes the novel, is pointless and unromantic. Bennett's message is clear:

despite the popularity of singular figures in the mass media, real accomplishments

are achieved collectively and quietly. Like so many other Bennett characters[14], Raingo dies a meaningless death from a lingering lung disease. His death emphasizes that even in extraordinary times, the ordinary processes of life, illness, and death continue as they always have. Critic Robert Squillace argues convincingly that on his death bed, Raingo's conception of himself "dissolves under the pressure of his recognition, not of spirit […] but of material nature, of the precedence of the inscrutable logic of human death and reproduction over the masculine self's drive to preserve and continue itself" (180). Raingo's death, like that of many other Bennett characters, "represents the collision of the universe's indifference with the human illusion of its concern" (Squillace 164).

Many of the other deaths in *Lord Raingo* likewise reflect the 'universe's indifference'. In fact, only one minor character dies at war. The remaining deaths are due to accidents, illnesses, and suicides, remarkable only for their lack of larger significance in relation to the war. Bennett juxtaposes the senseless death of Raingo's wife Adela in a car accident with the apparently meaningful death of soldiers on the front, deflating the war-time rhetoric of noble sacrifice, in a scene in which her son Geoffrey, an escaped prisoner of war, arrives in England just in time to intercept her funeral procession, "tall and emaciated", wearing a uniform which "did not fit him" (*Lord Raingo* 176). Bennett foregrounds the perceived arbitrariness of human existence by contrasting Geoffrey's luck in surviving not only the conflict at the front, but also a dangerous escape in which many of his fellow prisoners died with Adela's death in a mundane accident. The triumphant

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[14] Robert Squillace documents the causes of death in Bennett's novels, concluding that "Novelists, like murderers, tend not to deviate from a single preferred method of killing" and that "[i]n Arnold Bennett's serious fiction, characters contract respiratory illnesses and die lingeringly in bed" (163).

soldier returning home to a happy family is recast as a shell-shock victim who cannot save either of his parents from dying at the hands of chance.

The Pretty Lady similarly disavows the meaning of individual action. Protagonist G. J. Hoape contributes to the war through indirect committee work, sitting through frustrating meetings where decisions are endlessly pushed into the future and internecine squabbles frequently distract from any real progress. Instead of the soldier, Bennett gives us the bureaucrat. Hoape travels to the front to inspect the hospitals which his committee supports, and returns with a smug self-confidence in his individual importance. His journey is "A wondrous experience, from which he had returned to England with a greatly increased self-respect and a sharper apprehension of the significance of the war" (*Pretty Lady* 135). There is a dry irony to the narrator's descriptions of Hoape's self-aggrandizement which later scenes confirm. When Hoape is caught in an air raid, he once again experiences the dangers of war as a source of intense individual affirmation: "One thought gradually gained ascendancy in his mind: 'I am saved!' It became exultant: 'I might have been blown to bits, but I am saved!' Despite the world's anguish and the besetting immanence of danger, life and the city which he inhabited had never seemed so enchanting, so lovely, as they did then" (234). The novel ultimately condemns Hoape's elated spectatorship of the war. Another of Hoape's friends and the head of his committee, Queenie Lechford, also indulges in the spectacle of the war and dies as a result. Standing on the roof of a building to exult in the drama of the air raids ("Isn't it splendid, G. J.? […] I shall always come up here for raids in the future. […] I love it. I love it. I only thought of it

tonight. It's the best thing to being a man and being at the Front. It is being at the

front" (256)) Queenie is struck and killed by a stray piece of shrapnel. Her death

destroys Hoape's sense of purpose in the war, as it demonstrates how shockingly

risky his enjoyment of air raids is, gives a serious blow to the hospital committee,

and calls an end to an incipient romance between him and Queenie. If the two had

married, their shared volunteerism would have made them a prominent success

story, and their romantic relationship would have provided some narrative

consolation for the losses suffered by others in the novel. Instead, Bennett closes

the text with Hoape afloat and alone, having lost the tools he once used to make

sense of his individual importance to the war effort.

Galsworthy sounds a similarly melancholy note in his presentation of the

perceived meaninglessness of individual action in the context of the war. In *The

White Monkey*, the narrator explains that the war produces a perceptual divide

between individual action and large-scale political affairs for the 'Lost

Generation' such that WWI veteran Michael Mont "constantly wondered if his

own affairs were worth paying attention to; and yet the condition of the world was

also such that sometimes one's own affairs seemed all that were worth paying

attention to" (74). Michael's individual life seems insignificant when compared to

the massive scale of either the war or the history of the human race, yet these

broad collections of human activity are so impervious to the intervention of

individuals that they may as well be ignored in favour of more immediate

concerns. Part and whole cannot be reconciled; this crisis produces the modernist

embrace of the immediate and the fragmentary. The same tension between the

seeming insignificance of individual life and the supreme importance of the lives of loved ones is seen in Michael's wife, Fleur, in her initial resistance to having a child because she cannot grasp the importance of individual lives after the immense losses of the war: "One more person in the world or out of it—what does it matter? [...] One more gnat to dance, one more ant to run about!" (280).

None of the three authors are content to leave their characters in these states of dislocation, working instead to reintegrate them into coherent networks of relationship. Each author confronts the limitations of his rational approach and preference for broad perspectives through his war fiction, and employs reconciliatory strategies to re-assert the importance of part-to-whole relationships in his work. In many of the novels in question, this narrative reintegration begins when their respective protagonists begin to see the limits of this way of thinking as they discover its incommensurability with their individual experiences of loss. While abstract human lives are easy enough to sacrifice to the idea of the survival and development of the species, the lives of friends and loved ones are not so easily dismissed. In *The Pretty Lady*, Hoape is confident that he can rationally understand the war, reflecting that even if "he had been failing to comprehend in detail the cause and the evolution of the war" (55) the remedy is simply to "go every morning to the club, at whatever inconvenience, for the especial purpose of studying and getting the true hand of the supreme topic" (55). After picking up some talking points about the war at his club, Hoape visits a friend, the society hostess and prominent aesthete Concepcion Smith. Yet when he shares the heartening information he has learned at the club—that 'equilibrium has been

established on the Western Front'—Concepcion reveals that her husband has just been killed in that very conflict. In a scene of high melodrama which clumsily reveals the incommensurability of journalistic analysis and personal loss, Smith collapses "to the floor, at full length on her back" (77), resisting Hoape's attempts to help her up: "'No, no!' she protested faintly, dreamily, with a feeble frown on her pale forehead. 'Let me lie. Equilibrium has been established on the Western Front.' This was her greatest mot" (77). Neither Hoape's rational analysis nor Smith's melodramatic performance provides an appropriate framework for the loss of Smith's husband, since the former relies on brutal detachment while the latter descends into bathos.

Wells' Religious Turn

A character's death likewise reveals the limits of Wells' application of evolutionary science to the scene of war. The death of Britling's son Hugh in *Mr Britling Sees it Through* acts as the fulcrum for the transformation of Wells' sense of the relationship between part and whole. In his early career, he tends to subordinate the individual to the species. In *Britling,* he renounces this view, intensely mourning the loss of individual life without appealing to the broader life of the species for solace. In an unexpected turn for a committed, life-long atheist, he—along with his protagonist—briefly but intensely turns to religion as a means of reconciling the cognitive dissonance between his intellectual beliefs and the experiences of war-time England. By connecting various fragmentary experiences, spaces, and physical objects to each other through a "finite God"

(*Britling* 406) who, for Wells, dwells in the material world, Wells is able to see a functional unity that transcends war-time destruction. Britling's conversion from atheism to religious belief at the end of the novel marks the beginning of Wells' own theological phase. Britling is pulled up short by the death of his son, and finds no way to honor his loss in his previous pro-war rhetoric. In order to work the individual event of his loss back into a broader understanding of the world, he turns to (an admittedly idiosyncratic and biological) God.

The unexpected appearance of God in the work of as vocal and committed an atheist as Wells is surprising to critics, as indeed it was for his initial readers. In the two years following the publication of *Britling,* Wells produced two more book-length articulations of his newfound faith: a theological work titled *God the Invisible King* (1917), and another novel, *The Soul of a Bishop* (1918), which follows Anglican bishop Edward Scropes through his rejection of the established church and embrace of a radically new, distinctly Wellsian system of belief. These fiction and non-fiction works are absolutely consistent with each other, as well as with Wells' statements of personal beliefs in his letters. Although Wells' theological period is an anomaly in his career, it informs a key shift in Wells' treatment of the relationship between the part and the whole. As noted above, Wells tends to subordinate part to whole in his early works. In the works which follow *Britling*, Wells does return to his previous habit of emphasizing the overall importance of the whole, but with a significant difference. In his theological writings, Wells presents the fact that the individual is a constituent part of a greater whole as a source of value and even immortality for the individual, rather

than minimizing the importance of that individual. Yet it is difficult to reconcile the Wells who can sweep away millions of lives in one gesture with the Wells whose Edwardian novels dwell lovingly on the minor idiosyncrasies of mediocre Englishmen. John Carey's analysis of Wells' profound ambivalence towards the value of individual lives takes on a new and profound urgency when applied to his war writing. As noted in chapter one, Carey writes that "[i]f the salvation of the world is what matters, then these scattered, unfulfilled lives […] really are waste. But to the individual they are not waste, but life", arguing that "Wells shuttled inconclusively between these two perceptions, and they came to dominate his creative thought" (149). By tracing the development of Wells' attitude towards the value of the individual as a member of the (human) 'race' from his early non-fiction through his war-time writing to his brief theological turn, we can see that the war played a significant role in determining his views.

As discussed above, the title character of *Britling* begins the novel with a belief in the evolutionary insignificance of individual lives which Wells himself held at the beginning of his career. The clearest articulation of Wells' early-career belief in the fundamental irrelevance of individual lives can be seen in his 1908 work of non-fiction, *First and Last Things*, in which he writes that "our individualities, our nations and states and races are but bubbles and clusters of foam upon the great stream of the blood of the species, incidental experiments in the growing knowledge and consciousness of the race" (69). Scientific language is used to justify privileging the whole over the part—individuals are 'incidental experiments', single data points which only become significant when analyzed as

minor constituents of broader patterns. Whether an individual's life is a subjective success or failure from his or her own point of view is irrelevant. The obliteration of the individual in its merger with the 'great stream of the blood of the species' is inevitable and not to be mourned any more than the popping of a bubble.

The value of the individual takes on a very different cast in *Mr. Britling Sees it Through,* in which Britling mourns the loss of individual life in terms so intimate that many readers mistakenly assumed that Wells himself had also lost a son in the war. After Britling's eldest son, Hugh, volunteers for combat and is killed in action, Britling is haunted by images of "the dead body of Hugh, [lying] face downward. At the back of the boy's head, rimmed by blood-stiffened hair— the hair that had once been 'as soft as the down of a bird'—was a big red hole" (*Britling* 417). In his vision soldiers "stepped on him—heedlessly [and] heeled the scattered stuff of his exquisite brain into the clay" (418). Wells' earlier articulations of the inevitable merger of the individual with the blood of the race are uneasily mirrored by the deeply disturbing image of the mixture of human brain tissue and dirt in a way that erases the functional difference between the two. Hugh is not a meaningless 'bubble' in the stream of the blood of the species, but a bloodied and desecrated loved one. Wells' impersonal metaphor comes into conflict with intensely personal violence, forcing a change in his conception of the value of the individual. In earlier texts, Wells values the dispersal of the individual into the collective memory and knowledge of the race. The literal dispersal of human body parts in the mud of the front lines rephrases the loss of individual consciousness as a real, physical loss that cannot be recuperated through the

continued life of the race. The war makes real to Wells the affective costs of destruction. A shift in the temporal focus of his project results: no longer able to overlook the present 'wasting' of lives to focus on the future to which their destruction contributes, Wells turns to the present and infuses it with sacred presence in order to justify its preservation and singular value.

At the novel's close, Britling becomes convinced of the omnipresence of "God, who fights through men against Blind Force and Night and Non-Existence; who is the end, who is the meaning" (*Britling* 442). Through this deification of 'meaning' working against 'non-existence' Wells re-asserts a general coherence in the world which counteracts the apparent dissolution of connections brought about by the war. Men may still "shrivel and pass—like paper thrust into a flame" (442), but for Britling the immediate presence of God within the material world transforms this waste into meaningful participation in the unfolding of history. In Britling's conversion, we see for the first time the concept of a 'finite God'[15] which animates much of Wells' war-time writing: "God is not absolute; God is finite. . . . A finite God who struggles in his great and comprehensive way as we struggle in our weak and silly way—who is *with* us—[...]within Nature and necessity" (406). Wells presents his idiosyncratic redefinition of God as a necessary response to World War One, arguing in a later text that only his 'finite

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[15] While the concept of a 'finite God' appears in a minor school of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theology called 'process theology' (of which William James was the most prominent proponent), it does not appear that Wells is participating in this theological conversation in any meaningful way. In process theology, God is understood to exist in constant dialectical movement (or process) between two poles of existence: the material and the transcendent. Wells does not engage with the Hegelian roots of this idea, nor does he present materiality as only *part* of God's existence. Given his familiarity with James it is fair to assume that he may have borrowed terminology from process theology, but that is where any intersection between the two ends.

God' can be "a God of such muddy and bloody wars as this war" (*Soul of a Bishop* 275). In *Britling*, the appearance of God also follows directly from the consequences of the war—in this case, the death of Britling's son. Writing to a German woman who has also lost a son in the conflict, he claims that it is "[o]ur sons who have shown us God" (*Britling* 442)—that is, the loss of their sons has driven Britling to an extreme change in worldview, without which he does not feel that he can meaningfully interpret the world.

This turn to religious faith subtly transforms Wells' sense of how the part relates to the whole. And so we have Wells in *God the Invisible King* rehearsing his argument from *First and Last Things*, but with a significant difference:

> A little while ago we current individuals, we who are alive now, were each of us distributed between two parents, then between four grandparents, and so on backward, we are temporarily assembled, as it were, out of an ancestral diffusion; we stand our trial, and presently our individuality is dispersed and mixed again with other individualities in an uncertain multitude of descendants. But the species [like God] is not like this; it goes on steadily from newness to newness, remaining still a unity. The drama of the individual life is a mere episode, beneficial or abandoned, in this continuing adventure of the species. (71)

The vulnerability of the individual remains—'our individuality is dispersed and mixed again' echoes 'our individualities [...] are but bubbles and clusters of foam upon the great stream of the blood of the species'—but the brutal mixing of Hugh's brain tissue into the dirt of the battleground is not a meaningless loss, but

a contribution to the 'continuing adventure of the species', which, along with Wells' vision of God, ensures continuity and 'unity' despite the constant state of flux in which he lives. Wells underpins the chance-driven process of the evolution of the species with a theological unity which lends assurance and meaning to the endless deaths which allow that evolution to move forward.

For Wells, the conceptual merger of the individual with the life of what he calls variably 'the race' and 'the species' ensures immortality through the collective life of humankind. Instead of the individual salvation offered by mainstream religions, Wells calls for collective salvation. In a letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* in defense of his theology, he argues that his "conception of immortality for the individual life now and forever is the merger of that life in the greater being of the race. As Man I may live for ever; as H. G. Wells I die and end. [...] We touch immortality now as surely as ever mankind will touch it. We are all parts of one immortality" (*Correspondence* 511). Whereas in earlier writing, Wells denigrates the importance of the individual life as insignificant in the context of the overall development of humankind, in this letter from his religious period, Wells inverts his argument, claiming that the participation of an individual life in the broader life of the species preserves and upholds that life, endowing it with immortality. Wells uses his newfound faith to attribute value to individual lives, enabling him to respond to the individual losses of the war while maintaining an overall emphasis on the life of the species rather than the individual organism. That his way of reconciling part and whole in the face of war involves such a dramatic departure from his own deeply held and

publically professed beliefs demonstrates what a serious challenge the war posed to the broad evolutionary logic through which he had previously made sense of human history.

As quickly as Wells finds God, he loses him—in his *Experiment in Autobiography* Wells documents how by 1918 "God as a character disappears from [his] work" and in his 1932 work *What Are We to Do with Our Lives* he offers "the most explicit renunciation and apology" (578) for a recourse to God that he now dismisses as merely a "phase of terminological disingenuousness" (578) during which he mistakenly applied the name of God to broad humanist principles. Critics and readers have also been dismissive of Wells' religious writings, reducing them to the clichéd experience of an atheist in a foxhole. However, Wells' war-time conviction that the material world *is* the sacred world can be read productively both as Wells' response to the large-scale destruction of the war, as well as an important step in the development of the politics that result from his belief in the power of material environments to shape the future of the human race. Wells' religious writings deserve further attention for the insight they give us into his changing beliefs about the role of the material world in the development of humanity.

In his religious works, Wells attempts to build a system of belief that can be reconciled with the condition of modern England and the trauma of the War by locating divinity in the material constituents of the nation. The vision of God that Wells introduces in *Britling* and elaborates in *The Soul of a Bishop* and *God the Invisible King* is not a traditional Judeo-Christian deity, but a finite entity which

fully inhabits the material world. Wells' God is "no abstraction nor trick of words, no Infinite [but is] as real as a bayonet thrust or an embrace" (*God the Invisible King* 56). Although God has no specific material form, Wells claims that he is present throughout the material world, forming a "synthetic reality" in much the same way that England is formed of "this or that spadeful of mud in my garden [...] all the tons of chalk in Kent [and] all the lumps of limestone in Yorkshire" (*God the Invisible King* 61). The whole—England—is defined by its constituent parts—mud, chalk, limestone—and those parts, in turn, are animated and made valuable by their belonging to the whole. Wells' definition of God as a 'synthetic reality' comes extremely close to deifying the very process of connecting part to whole itself; his belief in God is essentially the belief that parts must make a coherent whole, dressed in theological language. Wells' turn to faith, then, constitutes his major strategy for re-asserting the integration of part and whole in the context of inter-war England.

'Something Outside Oneself': Galsworthy's Response

Galsworthy's examination of the aftermath of WWI presents the problem of reintegration of part and whole in sentimental and practical, rather than religious terms. While Wells models a middlebrow alternative to modernist war narratives by emphasizing integration, Galsworthy explicitly blames modernist art and writing for sustaining and reinforcing the feelings of dislocation and alienation brought about by the war. Although Galsworthy did not experience the war as a soldier, nor did he attempt to portray the experiences of the trenches, his

intimate contact with injured soldiers and their wounded bodies as a volunteer

masseuse at a hospital in France gives his writing about the consequences of war

emotional weight and urgency. Galsworthy writes about how to overcome the

social and psychological effects of war not because he wishes to minimize its

impact or because he is distanced from its real costs, but because his experiences

during the war convince him of the need for reintegration and healing.

Although the fighting itself does not appear directly in Galsworthy's

'Forsyte' novels, its effects are felt strongly by members of the younger

generation of the family who come to the fore in *A Modern Comedy*[16]. In chapter

two, I briefly discussed Fleur Mont as an example of the equation of modernist art

with frivolous feminine material culture in Galsworthy's writing. Fleur's sense of

detachment and intense self-consciousness are part of what Galsworthy sees as a

larger generational crisis in *A Modern Comedy* that is exacerbated by the Great

War. In the introduction to the collection, Galsworthy complains that "[t]he

generation which came in when Queen Victoria went out, through new ideas

about the treatment of children, because of new modes of locomotion, and owing

to the Great War, has decided that everything requires re-valuation"

("Introduction" 15). The war shrinks the horizon of meaningful action to matters

of individual desire—"since there is, seemingly, very little future before property,

and less before life, [the current generation] is determined to live now or never,

without bother about the fate of such offspring as it may chance to have […] when

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[16] Although *To Let* (1921), the final volume of the first Forsyte trilogy, deals with the war in passing, its focus remains on the elder generation of the family. *A Modern Comedy* marks a shift in focus to the younger Forsytes who were of fighting age during the conflict, and as such contains a much more complex reading of the psychological and cultural impacts of the war.

everything is keyed to such a pitch of uncertainty, to secure the future at the expense of the present no longer seems worthwhile" (15). Throughout the trilogy, Galsworthy's narrator and characters repeatedly exhort the reader to plan for the future and invest practically in the material productivity of the nation in order to overcome the shock of the war. Marriage, parenthood, and practical engagement in mainstream politics make up the core of Galsworthy's prescribed remedy for the detachment and cynicism which define the 'Lost Generation'. While the actual content of Galsworthy's plan for reintegration of part and whole diverges greatly from Wells' politics, Galsworthy's program for recovery plays a similar role in his mid-career adaptation to the exigencies of the inter-war period.

The first novel in *A Modern Comedy*, *The White Monkey,* opens with a lengthy indictment of the various crises resulting from the detachment and lack of vision which follow from the war. Michael's father, Sir Lawrence Mont, complains of the same short-sightedness that Galsworthy identifies in the introduction, ranting that "The fine, the large, the florid—[are] all off! No far sighted views, no big schemes, no great principles, no great religion, or great art—in cliques and backwaters, small men in small hats" (*White Monkey* 22). This passage frames the crisis of modernity as a crisis of perspective in which the dislocated, partial perspective of the individual is dominant. This change in perspective leads to an abandonment of the material constituents of the nation, since their maintenance only has value in a future that seems too far off to be worth working towards. According to Mont, Politicians "turned their tails on the Land the moment the war was over" (19) and only concerned themselves with re-

election; the decline of the aristocracy means that there is no longer a connection between political power and tradition—"No connection between posteriors and posterity!" (20)—and his son's generation is getting into the dangerous habit of not "thinking about children" (20) preferring to maintain their social lives instead. Britain's politics, economic base, and family life are all characterized by what Mont calls "a certain unreality" (20). Practical concerns about the production of value and the reproduction of the population are being sidelined in favour of more superficial concerns.

For Galsworthy these various manifestations of a widespread rejection of 'reality' share a common root: the collective emotional trauma of the First World War. According to Mont's son Michael, the war has "killed sentiment" (*White Monkey* 255), producing a generation that has "had so much reality that [they] don't want any more" (255). Since "only reality really makes you feel […] if you pretend there is no reality, you don't have to feel" (255). Michael's rejection of 'reality' and denigration of sentiment go hand in hand, with potentially devastating personal and political results. The solution, Galsworthy suggests, lies in the encouragement of sentiment and sympathy as a means of reconnecting disaffected moderns to the world of practical concerns and material objects. Because Galsworthy sees modernist art as discouraging earnest sentiment in favour of scepticism, he views it as a key force in maintaining the sense of 'unreality' articulated by Mont. Galsworthy's objections to the supposed emotional and physical detachment of modernism became critical commonplaces in the intervening decades. Indeed, much recent scholarship on modernism

emphasizes its engagement with material culture in order to counterbalance a long tradition of viewing the movement as consumed by 'abstraction'[17]. For Galsworthy, however, the perceived abstraction and detachment of modernist art is a pressing cultural concern. He uniformly presents modernism as disabling practical action and genuine emotional connections by encouraging irony, self-consciousness, and scepticism of tradition.

Galsworthy's rejection of irony and exhortation of earnest sentimentality constitute another marked mid-career transformation resulting from the First World War. While the atheist Wells turned to God, the initially cynical and ironic Galsworthy became a champion of practical political action and investment in the material future of England. Contrary to Fussell's argument that the First World War incited a "characteristic irony" (4) which would dominate English literature for years to come, Galsworthy's writing shows a marked rejection of irony and turn towards sincerity and earnest exhortation for practical improvement. For readers of *The Forsyte Saga*, it is surprising to find Galsworthy championing England's good through materialism—albeit a specific, politically productive form of materialism—when so many of his earlier characters suffer from over-attachment to things. In the new context of interwar modernity, however, material engagement appears in a very different light. In his preface to *The Forsyte Saga*, Galsworthy writes that by the time of the collection's publication in 1921, "the state of England is as surely too molten and bankrupt as in the eighties it was too

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[17] See for example Bill Brown's article "The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)" for representations of materiality in modernist texts, and George Borstein's *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* for discussion of the investment of modernist authors in the material form of their own texts.

congealed and low-percented" ("Preface" x). The 'congealed' 1880s, characterized by the concentration of wealth and goods in the hands of the upper classes and by relative social immobility, have given way to the 'molten' twenties, when money and goods circulate too freely, and speculative financial dealings threaten to undermine old systems of concrete value. Whereas overinvestment in material culture was the key affliction of Galsworthy's Victorian characters, underinvestment in the external world is the crisis of his moderns. They have retreated into themselves, and the resulting solipsism has proved to be politically and personally paralyzing. In *The White Monkey*, investment in the material world becomes a necessary precondition for any meaningful system of ethics or ethical action, both on the individual and national scale. For anything to matter, *things* have to matter, especially in the wake of a war that has left the younger generation feeling that "England's dished, [...] Europe's dished, Heaven's dished, and so is Hell! No future in anything but the air" (*White Monkey* 61). In the earlier Forsyte novels a conservative sense of property was a liability, but in the later novels material engagement becomes a necessary corrective to modern (and at times explicitly modernist) abstraction. In the new cultural context of interwar England, Galsworthy radically re-evaluates the importance of the material world, moving from criticism of crude materialism to proposing a materially grounded political program focused on supporting the physical foundations of England as a "definite community" (*White Monkey* 19).

This political engagement marks a new stage in Galsworthy's career, as he turns from ironic criticism to earnest social planning. Galsworthy is largely

remembered as both the author and the recipient of negative cultural critique—

after satirizing the Victorian over-investment in property, he was criticized in turn

for his own 'materialism' by emerging modernist writers. While his earlier

Forsyte novels do maintain a largely critical tone, his later novels contain more

positive articulations of his alternative to the vulgar materialism of his Victorian

characters. In place of the hoards of *bric-a-brac* that paralyze their parents,

members of the new generation of Forsytes concentrate on farmland, hygienic

homes, and physical reproduction as means of practical investment in the future of

the nation. In *The White Monkey*, Galsworthy offers an unexpectedly rich account

of the personal and political costs of modernist detachment from 'reality', and

articulates an embodied alternative of material and sympathetic engagement with

the external world. As his nephew Rudolph Sauter wrote upon hearing

Galsworthy read early drafts of the novel, "In this book at last you see him

championing the cause of England's good, openly—no longer the outsider! but

the man deeply concerned" (qtd. Gindin 506).

   Galsworthy's characters mirror his own transition from ironic critic to

earnest champion. Michael and Fleur Mont first appear in *The White Monkey* as

critical and self-conscious consumers of art and literature which foreground

detachment and ironic cleverness, and present "sentimentalism" as "the

unforgiveable offense" (28). With relentless repetition, Galsworthy hammers this

point home: for Michael and Fleur, "Sentiment [is]'slop' and championship mere

condescension", "pity [is] pop", "Pity [is] pulp!" and "sentiment [...] swosh!;

"pity [...] punk" and "Sentiment [...] bilge!" (*White Monkey* 28; 104; 143; 155;

161). As noted above, for Michael, the rejection of reality and sentiment go hand in hand. Fleur and Michael are reluctant to engage practically with the larger material issues that Galsworthy introduces in Sir Lawrence Mont's opening monologue: the production of value, reproduction of the English people, and material stewardship of the nation. To return to reality requires emotional engagement with other people, but it is exactly this emotional engagement that the war makes too costly and modernism rejects. Galsworthy uses the Monts to demonstrate what has been lost, in his eyes, in the transition to modernity, and how these losses can be regained.

Galsworthy directly contrasts Michael's recommitment to sentiment, family, and national pride with the rejection of these mainstream values by Michael's friend, Wilfrid Desert. The two men meet during the First World War as wounded soldiers in the same hospital, and their friendship is consolidated when Michael, a publisher, produces Wilfrid's first successful volume of poetry, *Copper Coins*. Wilfrid later acts as best man at Michael's wedding to Fleur, but competes with Michael for Fleur's affections and tries to convince her to leave Michael for him. Their competition over Fleur is a flash point for their contrasting beliefs about how best to live in the wake of the war. While Michael successfully re-integrates into English society, Desert becomes a voluntary exile, leaving England for "the East" (*White Monkey* 220). In their relationship, Galsworthy embodies different responses to the experience of war, which he presents as intimately connected to the two men's respective attitudes towards both nationalism and Modernist literary culture.

Wilfrid is almost a caricature of a Modernist author—born to a wealthy family and well-educated, he is nevertheless a haunted and restless person with a "dread of being hemmed in by people" (*White Monkey* 45) and a confrontational style of writing. His personal philosophy would not be out of place in the pages of *Blast:*

> I lived so long with horror and death; I saw men so in the raw; I put hope of anything out of my mind so utterly, that I can never more have the faintest respect for theories, promises, conventions, moralities, and principles. I have hated too much the men who wallowed in them while I was wallowing in mud and blood. Illusion is off. No religion and no philosophy will satisfy me—words, all words. […] Laugh at it—there's nothing else to do! (45)

For Wilfrid, the war has invalidated all previous ways of making sense of the world. Michael—who frequently serves as Galsworthy's mouthpiece—reacts very differently, taking from his experiences on the front the now-familiar insight that he is part of a greater system to which he is subordinate. He turns to the war as a model for survival in post-war London, remembering that "In the war [one] somehow managed to feel himself not so dashed important; reached a condition of acquiescence, fatalism" (*White Monkey* 156). While he rejects the fatalism and questions the "Who dies if England live' sort of sob-stuff state" (156), he insists upon the virtue of seeing himself as a minor part of a larger process: "'Bloody but unbowed' might be tripe; still—get up when you were knocked down! The whole was big, oneself was little!" (156). Michael rejects the dominance of desire in the

modernist culture typified by Fleur's *avant garde* artist friends, insisting that "passion [and] jealously" should not "destroy one's sportsmanship" (156), and maintains his belief in being a 'gentleman'.

A later scene confirms Galsworthy's earnest support of Michael's belief in 'sportsmanship' and gentlemanly behaviour—Fleur, having chosen Michael over Wilfrid, finds Wilfrid leaning against her living room window from the outside late at night in a tableaux which literally places Wilfrid outside the realm of domestic security and reproduction. Having lost Fleur to Michael, Wilfrid visits her house before leaving England to wander in 'the East': "Against the pane was a face, the forehead pressed against the glass, the eyes closed as if it had been there a long time. In the dark it seemed featureless, vaguely pale. […] It was ghastly—face without body" (*White Monkey* 186). Michael returns after Wilfrid's departure, and Fleur informs him that she is pregnant with their first child. In a direct mirroring of Wilfrid's behaviour, Michael "flatten[s] his face against the glass" (193) from the *inside*, exactly where "[o]utside […] Wilfrid's face had been flattened" (193). The didactic meaning of the passage is clear. Wilfrid is excluded from both family life and the nation; his fragmented appearance ('face without body') suggests that he has not been reintegrated into a coherent social network. Michael's paternity solidifies his position on the 'inside', guaranteeing his investment in the future because of his concern for his future child—as Galsworthy argues the young generation needs to do in the trilogy's introduction.

Galsworthy ties Michael's successful re-entry into family life to both his engagement in national politics (in subsequent novels he becomes a Tory MP) and

his taste in literature. Just as Galsworthy blames modernist art and literature for sustaining the cynicism and 'unreality' resulting from the war, he holds up middlebrow literature as an antidote to these afflictions. Towards the end of *The White Monkey*, Michael reflects on his career in publishing, wondering if the production of literature has merit, or is merely "a blooming gaff [...] just helping on England's sickness" (*White Monkey* 280). He decides that books that provide "comfort and diversion" (280) are still wanted and necessary in an England that "ha[s] to go on—go on!" (280) in spite of the trials of modernity. Such books are clearly not those of fashionable London's "blooming circle[18]" (*White Monkey* 39), but rather books more like Galsworthy's own. In contrast, Wilfrid embraces the life of an artist in exile, writing increasingly radical poetry. While Michael sees his work in publishing as providing 'comfort and diversion' to the masses, Wilfrid argues that "Poetry's only possible when you may be blown up at any moment" (*White Monkey* 23). In a move that represents his deepening cynicism towards traditional measures of value and success, he follows up *Copper Coins* with a collection titled *Counterfeits*. He hands the manuscript of the latter to Michael through the window of a train on the first leg of his journey 'East', calling the poems "wretched things!" (195). Wilfrid's cynical attitude towards his poems, which have taken on a bitingly critical tone, develops alongside his increasing distance from English society, culminating in his self-exile. Galsworthy equates modernism with exile and middlebrow culture with national service through the figures of Wilfrid and Michael.

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[18] Galsworthy's repeated use of the word 'blooming' in reference to *avant garde* literature, and the absence of this term elsewhere in his work, suggests that he is intentionally punning on 'Bloomsbury'.

In the novel's closing, Galsworthy appeals once again to the slow nature of evolutionary change and the insignificance of small changes in the face of the slow march of human development, in this case to argue for the relevance of middlebrow literature. Not only is middlebrow writing still relevant after the war, he implies, but it is a necessary component of the reintegration of soldiers into the fabric of national life. Galsworthy's belief in the value of middlebrow writing is expressed through Michael's rejection of the current taste for novelty. Artistic taste, Michael argues, cannot radically change when human nature does not. Contrary to Woolf's assertion that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 4), Michael claims that "There isn't ten per cent difference between now and thirty years ago" (*White Monkey* 214) and that "emancipated people" are no more than "an excrescence, small, and noisy" (214) in a world that largely pays them no heed. Tellingly, he compares the stability of human behaviour to the stability of the material world, claiming "all the old values and prejudices" are "no more gone […] than the rows of villas and the little grey houses" (214). The radical novelty of modernism is, Galsworthy implies, disconnected from both the steadiness of human nature and the solidity of the human environment. This fundamental stability guarantees the demise of modernism in Galsworthy's eyes. 'Emancipated people' can do what they will, Michael concludes, but they will not keep the vast majority of people from the straightforward enjoyment of unfashionable art: "D'you know, only one hundred and fifty thousand people in this country have ever heard a Beethoven Symphony? How many, do you suppose, think old B. a back number? Five

thousand, perhaps, out of forty-two millions. How's that for emancipation?"

(215). The slow pace of evolutionary development justifies Michael's rejection of

the radical novelty claimed by modernism, which in turn recommits him to both

middlebrow culture and practical investment in the future of the English nation.

For Galsworthy, culture, politics, and materiality are profoundly

interdependent. The degree of co-ordination apparent between these three aspects

of inter-war life in Galsworthy's fiction mirrors Galsworthy's own enduring

commitment to the integration of part and whole. Bennett's commitment to a more

naturalistic style of realism prevents him from taking on the didactic tone which

allows Galsworthy to argue for conceptual and practical reintegration. In his

writing about the war, he makes use of broad perspectives—both historical and

literal—to suggest the large-scale coherence which Galsworthy advocates more

directly.

Over There: Bennett at the Front

Bennett's war journalism provides a particularly rich example of the

middlebrow tendency to reconcile part and whole, given that the visual landscape

of the front is dominated by piles of fragmentary debris, and perspectives are

truncated by the walls of the trench. The Western Front is not a setting that offers

easy evidence of integration between parts and whole. Typical scenes of

destruction and fragmentation do appear in the war journalism of both Wells and

Bennett. The key for understanding the middlebrow response to war is to trace

how these scenes are later recuperated into narratives of healing and consolation.

Bennett reports seeing "a Teddy-bear left on what remains of a flight of stairs, a bedstead buried to the knobs in debris, [and] skeletons of birds in a cage hanging under an eave" (*Over There* 20) in his tour of Rheims, and seeing the main street in Arras reduced to "a curving double row of mounds of brick, stone, and refuse" with "no resemblance to houses; […] no resemblance to anything whatever except mounds of brick, stone, and refuse" (34). Wells paints a pathetic image of soldiers weighed down with fragmentary souvenirs of the front that they hope might provide "a clew" or "pieces in evidence" (*War and the Future* 246) that will help others make sense of their experiences, each man carrying a "peripatetic museum" (246) consisting of "a considerable weight of broken objects, bits of shell, cartridge-clips, [and] helmets" (246). Wells himself, "the least collecting of men", brings home "Italian cartridges, Austrian cartridges, the fuse of an Austrian shell, a broken Italian bayonet, and a note that is worth half a franc within the confines of Amiens" (246). Yet neither Wells nor Bennett is content to linger with the fragments without trying to make some sense of how they fit into a larger picture. Wells jokes about semi-deliberately misplacing both "a large heavy piece of exploded shell" (246) and "two really very large and almost complete specimens of some species of *Ammonites*" (247) during his journeys around the front, writing "I doubt if they would have thrown any very conclusive light upon the war" (247). In contrast to the modernist tendency to dwell on "the radiant fragment, the luminous detail, the visionary moment" (Levenson 236), Wells and Bennett work to integrate the piles of broken objects at the front into a meaningful, measurable world.

Bennett opens the first article in his collection of journalism *Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front* with a scene that is remarkably similar to the opening of his novel *The Old Wives' Tale*. In both texts, the narrator takes a broad view of the geographical, historical, and political context of individual characters that are unaware of their role in broader networks. *The Old Wives' Tale* begins with the observation that although the Baines sisters "paid no heed to the manifold interest of their situation, of which, indeed, they had never been conscious" (37) they nevertheless existed at the centre of a region that metonymically stands in for the whole country: "England in little, lost in the midst of England" (37). The opening scene of *Over There* literalizes the implied 'view from above' of the novel, placing Bennett on a balcony overlooking Paris. Amongst "trees […] rooted in the history of France" (1) a couple play "one of those second-rate ball games beloved by the French petite bourgeoisie" (1), having "forgotten, if they ever knew, that they are playing at a terrific and long-drawn moment of crisis in a spot sacred to the finest civilization" (1). In both cases, the implied relationship between individuals and their broader contexts is the same: despite being unable or unwilling to see the broader picture, individuals always participate in larger material and political networks.

The 'view from above' of Bennett's opening passage is a difficult perspective to attain during the war—as Patrick Deer notes, "[o]n the Western Front, for general and private alike, to be seen was to risk violent death" (22), a risk which produced a "disorienting collapse of vision" (22) both in the trenches themselves and in writing about the war. While Bennett opens his account of the

front in the role of the omniscient narrator, looking down from on high and imposing meaning on a scene, this perspective shifts as his tour progresses. During a tour of the trenches, he takes on the role of the unconscious individual (similar to the ball players in his opening scene) who is unable to see the big picture, yet he maintains a strong belief that the part must always relate to the whole, despite his own temporary inability to take a broader view. He complains that despite being given full access to the government-approved areas which he tours, he cannot make sense of the information he is given due to the "apparent vagueness and casualness of war on its present scarcely conceivable scale" (*Over There* 38), lamenting that "a mere fragment of it defeats the imagination, and the bits of even the fragment cannot be fitted together" (39). Yet within a matter of paragraphs he rejects this position, claiming that "after a short experience at the front one realises that though the conduct of the campaign may be mysterious, it is neither vague nor casual" (41). Despite the appearance of disorder, Bennett begins to see glimpses of intense focus and strategic action, writing that "the antagonists are continually at grips, like wrestlers, straining every muscle to obtain the slightest advantage [and that] "Casual" would be the very last adjective to apply to those activities" (42). Bennett does not generalize his own sense of confusion and dislocation to all human experience, but rather assumes that just as he was able to integrate the unconscious experience of the couple playing ball into a broader narrative, there exists somewhere a consciousness that can make sense of Bennett's own fragmented experiences at the front into a larger, conscious process

of war. Although he is personally unable to fully understand the war, Bennett

retains his belief in the integration of part to whole.

Bennett even makes the most frightening and disorientating experience in

his tour of the front into a lesson about the omnipresence of ingenuity, planning,

and strategy. When enemy shell fire begins to strike near his location, Bennett is

forced to take shelter in a trench: "At last a shell seemed to drop right upon me.

The earth shook under me. My eyes and nose were affected by the fumes of the

explosion" (*Over There* 43). Rather than expanding on his sensory confusion,

Bennett contrasts his panic with the careful planning which produced both the

shell and the trench that saved him from it. He writes that "[a] trench is a

wonderful contrivance" and that the shrapnel from the shell was "a many-facetted

ball, beautifully made, and calculated to produce the maximum wound" (43). By

praising the technical ingenuity that has gone into the materials of war, Bennett

suggests that there is a hidden order to the entire conflict, writing that the

experience made him "realis[e] once again, and more profoundly, that there is

nothing casual in the conduct of war" (43).

In addition to emphasizing the human planning and control that go into the

war, Bennett also counteracts the apparently chaotic and unimaginable nature of

the war by contextualizing it in terms of previous conflicts, and demonstrating

that those conflicts have not seriously altered patterns of human life and

settlement. When he visits Arras, he recounts the city's history of conquest

beginning with the Vandals—"I mean the original Vandals" (*Over There* 32)—and

continuing through the Franks, Normans, Charles the Simple, Lothair, and Hugh

Capet (32). He comments that "[u]nder Louis XI it was atrociously outraged […]

its citizens expatriated, and its name changed" (32). Yet even this conquest was

"Useless! The name returned, and the citizens" (32). By rehearsing the military

history of Arras, Bennett strongly suggests that military activity is not powerful

enough to overcome long-established habits of life and local customs, and implies

that the Germans will be equally unsuccessful at unsettling the people of Arras in

the long run. This passage resonates strongly with Hoape's argument in *The Pretty

Lady* about the inability of war to alter the course of evolution, and Wells' de-

emphasis of conflict in his history of Europe.

Just as the war cannot permanently change human habits, Bennett implies

that it cannot disrupt biological cycles of growth and harvest, or the human

impulse to cultivate and create. He repeatedly contrasts scenes of military activity

or industrial decay with abundant fields of vegetation, suggesting that the

destruction of the war is massive in human terms, but negligible in its impact on

the organic vegetable life of the region. Recounting his first view of soldiers'

graves and the signs reading "Respect the Tombs" that hung over them, Bennett

comments that "the wheat and oats are not respecting the tombs" and that

"[e]verywhere the crops have encroached on them, half-hiding them, smothering

them, climbing right over them. In one place wheat is ripening out of the very

body of a German soldier" (*Over There* 12). The fecundity of the earth stands in

direct competition with the destruction of war. Bennett writes that "[w]heat and

oats and flaming poppies had now conquered the land, had overrun and possessed

it as no Germans could ever do" (10). Trenches are transformed into furrows

ready for planting, as "[t]he raw earth of the trenches struggle[e] vainly against the tide of germination" (10). If the 'universe's indifference' is a source of insecurity and despair in *Lord Raingo*, it is a source of comfort and reassurance in *Over There*.

The multiplication of plant life is unconscious of and impervious to the effects of war, comforting readers with a vision of growth, plenty, and the continuity of life even among the tombs of the war dead. At times, Bennett's glowing accounts of the fecundity of the land appear to be unrelated to human activity, as in the passage describing wheat growing over tombs. At others, they are testaments to the productivity of human cultivation. At one point, Bennett contrasts "smokeless" factories (*Over There* 14) in disrepair with bucolic scenes of "[p]easant women […] stooping in the vineyards" where "the whole of the earth seemed to be cultivated and yielding bounteously" giving him an "impression of peace, majesty, grandeur, and of the mild, splendid richness of the soil of France" (14). The agricultural activity proceeds despite taking place "within a mile and a half of the German wire entanglements" (15) and despite the objections of French officers. The impulse to cultivate the earth, in this account, overrides the impulse to destruction embodied in the German trenches.

Where Bennett cannot personally occupy an expansive visual perspective, then, he provides a broad conceptual perspective, contextualizing German aggression in the broader flow of history, the European development of technology, the ancient rhythms of cultivation and harvest, and the endless reproduction of living matter despite chaos. As an antidote for the breakdown of

meaning following the war, Bennett offers practical information—the kind of popular history and science which make up a key subsection of middlebrow writing are deployed here as comforting sources of context which partially contain and explain the effects of war. General education, therefore, constitutes Bennett's strategy for ameliorating the condition of middlebrow readers during the war. This strategy resonates strongly with his pre-war fiction, in which an understanding of the material, historical, and geological determinants of one's environment appears again and again as the sole path to success and happiness for his protagonists.

If Bennett appeals to education, both Wells and Galsworthy argue that the cure for the perceived breakdown of meaning and purpose incited by the war is service, whether in the name of Wells' finite God or Galsworthy's material well-being of the nation. Both authors view service to others as a way to get outside of oneself, and to connect with the broader community in a way that reconnects part to whole. In *God the Invisible King*, Wells lists a "great and growing number of occupations that belong already to God's kingdom" including "research, teaching, creative art, creative administration, cultivation, construction, maintenance, and the honest satisfaction of honest practical human needs" (112), concluding that "Service, and service alone, is the criterion that the quickened conscience will recognise" (112). He presents religion, understood broadly, as the only social force which can justify and sustain this service by lending meaning to individual activities that seem insignificant in the face of the war. Like Michael Mont, characters in Wells' *Mr. Britling Sees it Through* are troubled by the seeming incommensurability between large-scale political events and their individual and

domestic lives. Mr. Direck, a young American author and volunteer soldier, complains like Michael that "It's as if your daily life didn't matter, as if politics didn't matter, as if the King and the social round and business and all those things weren't anything really, and as though you felt there was something else—out of sight—round the corner—that you ought to be getting at…" (154). For Direck, the way to "square the two together" (155) and reconcile individual desires with national action is to see both as facets of one religion: "I don't mean this Religion or that Religion but just Religion itself, a Big, Solemn, Comprehensive Idea that holds you and me and all the world together in one great, grand universal scheme..." (155-156). In this formulation, religion does not consist of any particular dogma ('this Religion or that Religion') but in the fundamental belief that all actions are connected to each other in 'one great, grand universal scheme' and are thus fundamentally meaningful and valuable. Wells' religious faith is in the relationship between part and whole, a relationship that he cannot logically sustain during the war, yet strongly believes is absolutely necessary to meaningful action.

In the chapter that follows, I will take up Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's ideas for meaningful education and service, arguing that they constitute materially-grounded forms of middlebrow politics. Bennett's call for an understanding of the large-scale material determinants of one's life, Wells' 'great, grand, universal scheme', and Galsworthy's sense that something 'outside oneself' must matter more than oneself all insist on the integration of part and

whole, and suggest that the only way that the individual can relate to the greater

whole is through reference to material 'others'.

Chapter Five: Matters of Concern—Materiality and Politics

> …I think that after the creative activity of the Victorian age it was quite necessary, not only for literature but for life, that someone should write the books that Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy have written. Yet what odd books they are! Sometimes I wonder if we are right to call them books at all. For they leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something—to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque. (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 12)

This dissertation grew out of a humorous comment made by Virginia Woolf—that H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy lay "enormous stress upon the fabric of things" (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 18) at the expense of exploring "life" and "human nature" (16)—a comment that, when taken more seriously than she intended, provides unexpected insight into the role of material environments in middlebrow writing. In my final chapter, I want to return once again to Woolf's *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, and give equally serious consideration to another of her arguments about these authors. In the passage above, Woolf claims that unlike better novels, which can be enjoyed for their own sake as works of art, the novels of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy are only made 'complete' by connecting their narratives to the real world—joining a society or writing a cheque. The contrast she presents between often didactic middlebrow writing and highbrow 'art for art's sake' is familiar enough, but it is surprisingly difficult to name a society which one might join or donate to as a result of reading, say, a Bennett novel. In the case of Wells, a cheque addressed to the Fabians should do well enough, but which society is the reader meant to join after reading *The Forsyte Saga*? What about Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale*, a realist novel about petty shopkeepers and hoteliers? Even the more obvious connection

between Wells and socialism is quite limited in the context of his life's output, given that his membership in the Fabians only lasted a handful of years. Some of his novels, like *The New Machiavelli*, explicitly advocate for socialism, but many do not. Whose name goes on the cheque to fix the 'Condition of England' despaired of in *Tono-Bungay*?

Focusing on depictions of the material world in the writing of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy provides answers to these questions. Despite the difficulty of pinpointing the correct society to join or cheque to write in response to Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, political and social issues are not absent from the work of these authors. To the contrary, their characters and narrators present a wide range of strategies for improving the 'Condition of England', from technological innovation to slum clearance, back-to-the land schemes, and popular education. Their disparate social projects and political schemes share a belief that environment determines character, and that any given environment can be altered (albeit often at great cost) to alter the character of its inhabitants in turn. As a result, this chapter builds in many ways on the exploration of evolutionary theory in the works of these three authors undertaken in chapter one, by following up on the issue of environmental influence to ask how, in the light of this influence, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy felt their characters could effect political and social change. Wells' internationalism and pacifism, Galsworthy's defense of local agriculture, and Bennett's implicit argument for industrial reform are all, I argue, profoundly informed by their authors' shared belief in the central importance of the material environment to human endeavour. The fact that many

of the schemes backed by Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy don't fit neatly into a particular party platform or a have a dedicated society pursuing their ends speaks to the way in which their materially-engaged politics arise in response to particular environmental influences.

A reading of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's political beliefs in which materiality takes center stage productively re-articulates these authors' relationship to each other and attests to the ability of material objects to anchor political networks which stretch across party lines. Wells' internationalist pacifism and Galsworthy's nationalist belief in protectionism for English agriculture may seem at odds with each other politically, but both grow out of a shared belief in the importance of environment, and the new understanding of Britain's geologically-determined vulnerability to attack in the age of flight. Examining the material roots of their political beliefs allows us to draw connections between Wells, whose views have received a great deal of popular and critical attention, and Galsworthy, whose views have been almost entirely overlooked. Building links between their political views reveals the unexpected complexity of Galsworthy's thought, and integrates Wells more thoroughly into his immediate historical context, in opposition to accounts which paint him as a prophetic figure whose thought was ahead of his time. The stakes are even higher for a discussion of Bennett's politics, since he alone out of these three authors does not provide an explicit argument for his political beliefs in his fiction. His account of the ways in which the landscape of the Five Towns bears a permanent record of the negative consequences of manufacture, however, provides a biting critique of unbridled

industrialism. By examining the material constituents of the Five Towns—raw clay and coal, along with the factories which consume them—we can elucidate the implicit argument for reform contained in his descriptions of the region's landscape.

The Limitations of Thing Theory

As I note in chapter one, however, while examining the material objects around which these authors articulate their politics reveals new connections between them, the dominant forms of thing theory and material-culture criticism currently applied to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are too focused on following individual items in circulation to be useful in discussing more expansive material networks. The examination of materiality in middlebrow literature poses a methodological challenge, since the bulk of thing theorists and proponents of material methodologies focus on remarkable individual 'things' rather than the broader material environments described by my authors. It is often the practical, material knowledge (or lack thereof) of middlebrow characters that determines their ability to engage with the context in which they are immersed. We see this clearly in the work of writers with explicit political agendas like Upton Sinclair. J. Arnold Ross' intricate knowledge of oil field technology in relation to politics in Sinclair's *Oil!* allows him to influence national politics, while Jurgis Rudkus' ignorance of the class struggle inherent in the machinations of the slaughterhouse industry in Sinclair's *The Jungle* dooms him to poverty. A similar dynamic is visible, albeit more subtly, in many other middlebrow works.

Wells, for example, places a high premium on technological knowledge. George Ponderevo's experiments with aeronautics allow him to become a technocrat in *Tono-Bungay*, while Bert Smallways' inability to understand or control aircraft in Wells' *The War in the Air* makes him an impotent observer of a fictional World War. Middlebrow writing values the practical knowledge acquired by its protagonists as a tool which can be used to gain larger-scale understanding of material networks.

Models of material criticism and thing theory which have developed since the 1980s provide some useful tools for exploring these networks, but are ultimately too indebted to a Marxist and post-Marxist emphasis on commodity exchange to account for the non-commodified elements of the material environments which are so central to Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. While critics such as Arjun Appadurai, Bill Brown, and Elaine Freedgood challenge Marx's narrow definition of the commodity, and resist a reading of material culture which relies too heavily on a negative Marxist understanding of material goods as symptomatic products of a destructive capitalist system, they nevertheless retain Marx's focus on moments of exchange as the key site for understanding the social status of a material 'thing'[19]. One of the most common critical moves practiced by critics such as Appadurai, Brown, and Freedgood is to

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[19] One important exception to the dominance of exchange in work on material culture is Walter Benjamin's discussion of collections, which Brown takes up in *A Sense of Things*. Yet I would argue that the allure of collections is also grounded in an intellectual history growing out of Marx—when the homogenization of commodities appears as a symptom of capitalism, the thing whose unique qualities separate it from the mundane matter of the marketplace appears as somehow resistant to, or at least indicative of the cracks and slippages in, an economy which otherwise exerts great control over the circulation and consumption of material goods. Much of the powerful draw of the collection comes from its apparent exceptionalism in a context where exchange is the default.

unsettle commodity fetishism by following a commodity through various phases of its production, bringing the historical conditions of its production and circulation into view—thereby using material culture as a jumping off point for a discussion of cultural materialism. Appadurai's highly influential introduction to *The Social Life of Things* builds the foundation for this kind of exchange-driven critique of material culture. Rejecting Marx's restriction of commodities to capitalist economies, he re-defines the commodity as "*any thing intended for exchange*" (Appadurai 9), and proposes a "methodological fetishism" in which critics will "follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (5).

This 'methodological fetishism' has been highly productive. Following things as they circulate allows critics to avoid the "prevalent modernist intellectual tendency to regard things as superficial and morally suspect phenomena" (Chow 365) and to offer in its place creative and compelling readings of the 'social life of things'. As a result, critics are able to track an increasingly wide range of objects as they are exchanged, collected, and consumed. Freedgood in particular follows the 'things' in Victorian novels over vast distances through what she calls a "lengthy metonymic search beyond the covers of the text" (5) in order to reveal the colonial violence which underwrites Victorian 'thing culture'. Yet the critical excitement generated by the inclusion of a wide variety of fascinating things in scholarly conversation—from Rorschach blots and defecating mechanical ducks to glass botanical models and soap

bubbles[20]—leads to an over-emphasis of exceptional and liminal things, to the

exclusion of less eccentric elements of the material world. The double emphases

on the thing in motion and the emphasis on the exceptional thing evident in much

material-culture criticism constitute serious limitations when examining

middlebrow literature. Landscapes may not be in motion, for example, but they

comprise some of the most potent material influences in evolutionarily-inflected

work.

In their attempts to free material-culture criticism from the narrow model

of commodity fetishism articulated by Marx, critics have unwittingly recreated the

modernist privileging of luminous things over mundane objects which formed one

aspect of the early-twentieth-century 'Battle of the Brows'. In "Thing Theory",

Brown defines things as liminal entities which challenge subject-object

distinctions, writing that things can be conceived "as what is excessive in objects,

as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as

objects […] the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and

totems" (5). It is easy to see why a modernist critic such as Brown embodies the

tendency in thing theory to look for the exceptional 'thing' rather than the

mundane 'object', for the literary equivalent of Heidegger's broken tool rather

than the "cancer" and "calico" (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 18) that Woolf finds

so meaningless in Bennett's writing. High modernist literature, with its intentional

aesthetic complexity and heavy reliance on defamiliarization, contains many

examples of liminal 'things' which justify the application of thing theory.

Middlebrow writing, with its commitment to accessibility, is much less likely to

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[20] See Lorraine Daston's *Things That Talk* and Brown's *Things*.

contain such challenging items. It is easy to locate luminous 'things' in Joyce, Woolf, and Pound, but not in, say, von Arnim, John Buchan, or Bennett. A material reading of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy therefore requires models of materiality which fall outside of the intellectual tradition following from Marx through Appadurai, Brown, and Freedgood for three reasons: to accommodate large-scale, non-commodified material entities; to escape the emphasis on exchange and motion which precludes analysis of static elements of the landscape; and to overcome the thing-theoretical emphasis on exceptional and liminal things which re-creates an outdated privileging of modernist writing over the middlebrow.

Wells' Tonics and Truths

Tono-Bungay, H. G. Wells' 1909 'Condition of England' novel, provides an apt case study of the usefulness and the limitations of commodity-focused approaches to interpreting novelistic 'things'. *Tono-Bungay* has been read as a criticism of commodity fetishism and the power of advertising in articles which focus on the fictional patent tonic from which the novel takes its name. Productive as these readings are, their focus on the most visible commodity in the novel constricts their interpretations by overlooking the other explorations of materiality undertaken by Wells. The novel also contains a significant sub-plot centered on the exploration of larger material environments through the use of experimental air and water vehicles. George's travels in these vehicles remind him of his own bodily vulnerability, as he suffers repeated crashes and injuries. His experiments

with flight also shift his perspective. Seeing Britain and Continental Europe from above reveals the close proximity of European nations to George, along with their mutual vulnerability to attack in the coming age of aerial warfare. Through this plot line, Wells lays the ground work for his growing internationalism and pacifism, two central pillars of his later political thought which, as I will establish, share a material foundation in the geological isolation of England, and its vulnerability from the air. In the case of *Tono-Bungay*, a thing-theoretical reading focusing on the most prominent commodified 'thing' in the text is less productive in terms of understanding Wells' budding, materially-informed politics than a reading focusing on his exploration of space and environment.

Tono-Bungay's main plot line follows the protagonist George Ponderevo on his social ascent as he joins his uncle Teddy in manufacturing and marketing the eponymous patent tonic. Tono-Bungay can be read as an allegory for any number of commodities whose values are artificially inflated through clever advertising, but it bears the closest resemblance to Coca-Cola. George describes it as "slightly injurious rubbish" (*Tono-Bungay* 147) consisting of "a flavouring matter and an aromatic spirit" combined with "two very vivid tonics" (presumably caffeine and cocaine), and a secret ingredient which "makes it pretty intoxicating" (131) (presumably alcohol, although the Ponderevos also market an explicitly alcoholic version to the Scots). George narrates his experiences in the familiar economic terms of boom and bust. His uncle Teddy rises through the social ranks "[a]straddle on Tono-Bungay […] like a comet—rather, like a stupendous rocket!" (10) with George "hanging on to his coat-tails all the way through" (11). George

goes on to describe how, after the bubble bursts and the pair are financially and personally ruined, "I fell again, a little scarred and blistered perhaps […] my manhood eaten in upon, but greatly edified, into this Thames-side yard" (1) where he begins a second career as an engineer of naval destroyers.

The novel's criticism of commodity fetishism and its power to inflate the exchange value of a commodity far beyond its practical use value fits easily within the received popular understanding of Wells as a socialist and reformer. Critics have read the quack tonic as a symbol of capitalist commodification in general, and used it as a jumping off point to consider Wells in relationship to other socialist thinkers of his age. Patrick Brantlinger and Richard Higgins compare Wells' novel to Thorstein Veblen's theories of waste and conspicuous consumption, arguing that his two careers as marketer and weapons engineer reflect the "general wastefulness of capitalism and human history" (468), while Walter Kupinse argues that George "hints as the provisionality of all constructions of value" (70) by transforming the waste product *Tono-Bungay* into monetary value, and transforming value back into waste through the destructive capabilities of his naval warships. Compelling as these readings are, they run into a problem when it comes time to address the novel's controversial final scene.

Looking back on the frivolous waste of the Tono-Bungay empire and his own obsessive drive to build ever greater airships, George congratulates himself on landing "amidst the fine realities of steel" (*Tono-Bungay* 11) by taking on a contract with the British government to build naval destroyers. Travelling along the Thames in his X2, George surveys the changed face of London under a sky

filled with "the flicker of a squadron of warships waving white swords of light"

(388). Despite the mechanical triumph of his ship and his masterful position at its

bow, George admits that his destroyer has little social value: "stark and swift,

irrelevant to most human interests" (388), the X2 "isn't intended for the empire,

or indeed for the hands of any European power" (389) but rather for an un-named,

unknown distant country. George has "long since ceased to trouble much" (389)

about the ultimate destination of his products, ending the novel with the cryptic

reflection, "I have come to see myself from the outside, my country from the

outside—without illusions. We make and pass. We are all things that make and

pass, striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea" (389). Yet despite the

transience of human life, George hears sounding "[T]hrough the confusion" of

London's sprawling bustle "another note [...] something that is at once human

achievement and the most inhuman of all existing things" (388). Given the

emphasis placed on waste, abstraction, and decay throughout the novel, this note

of clarity is difficult to reconcile with George's position on the bow of the X2, a

difficulty that is amplified when he not only claims the destroyer as a figure of

that clarity, but continues, "Sometimes I call this reality Science, sometimes I call

it Truth. But it is something we draw by pain and effort out of the heart of life,

that we disentangle and make clear" (388).

Patrick Parrinder, tongue firmly in cheek, describes the whirlpool of

critical debate over this closing by observing that "Few readers have found this

affirmation [...] entirely satisfactory" (75). Debate about exactly how

unsatisfactory the ending of *Tono-Bungay* is, and to what end, center on two major

points: whether or not the scene is meant to be ironic, and whether or not George's viewpoint corresponds or contrasts with that of Wells. Mark Schorer makes a case for Wells' sincerity, writing that "as far as one can tell Wells intends no irony, although he may here have come upon the essence of the major irony in modern history" (75), that progress and destruction are inevitably linked. Schorer views this discovery as entirely accidental, since Wells refuses to pay "a minimum of attention to technique" or "[tell] us what he meant" (75). Parrinder largely agrees with Schorer, but argues that the juxtaposition of destruction and progress is intentional, and that George is ventriloquising Wells' interest in "revolutionary theory and scientific humanism" (77), and his belief that it is "through catastrophe that men are brought to their senses" (77). For Parrinder, "to have reached a scientific analysis of people and society, as George's life has shown, is to have cut oneself off from their sources of nourishment" (77) while for Brantlinger and Higgins, this passage confirms that George has "achieved the critical and ideological distance necessary to write his novel" (468), albeit at the cost of surrendering to the compromises of capitalism. The implication of both arguments is that George's detachment is a symptom of living in the industrial age, surrounded by a degenerating social system.

Each of these readings has limitations. Schorer's dismissive attitude towards Wells undermines the integrity of the rest of his reading. If, for Schorer, Wells' writing does not stand up to complex interpretation at the novel's close, why does the novel as a whole justify critical engagement? Parrinder's reading is more persuasive, but his suggestion, along with Brantlinger and Higgins, that the

closing demonstrates George's isolation from society requires us to overlook the

apparent sincerity of George's claim to have access to 'Truth' with a capital 'T'.

These limitations are largely the result of forcing the X2 into an interpretive

framework which assumes that capitalist commodities are the central material

concern of the novel. In other words, these readings interpret the naval destroyer

by comparing it to the titular patent tonic, instead of to the other experimental

vehicles featured in the text.

George is careful to note that the rise and fall he experienced during his

time marketing Tono-Bungay involved "more, you know, than a figurative soar"

(*Tono-Bungay* 11). Alongside the figurative journey of his Uncle Teddy's rocket,

Teddy undertakes several literal journeys, many of which mimic the flight pattern

of his experience with Tono-Bungay: a steep rise, followed by a precipitous and

costly fall. In a significant sub-plot, George develops and flies experimental

gliders and balloons. His most successful machine, the Lord Roberts β, takes its

first long flight at exactly the moment that the Tono-Bungay Empire reaches its

"zenith" (*Tono-Bungay* 11). Yet as often as Wells compares George's experiments

with flight to his work on Tono-Bungay, the two careers also stand in marked

contrast to each other. Disillusioned with his role in the Tono-Bungay empire,

George turns to experimental aeronautics as a way to escape the disembodied

world of high commerce and get into "some *stuff* [...] something to hold onto"

(*Tono-Bungay* 203), something more tangible than the "soapsuds" and "bunkum"

(*Tono-Bungay* 203) that make up his uncle Teddy's world. Ironically, the research

that he begins 'holding onto' for stability produces vehicles that he must

desperately hold onto for dear life. Racking up "two smashes and a broken rib" (*Tono-Bungay* 281) in quick succession, George enters an arbitrary realm of chance, where "death or injury [is] about equal to the chance of success" (*Tono-Bungay* 279).

The danger of his experiments is justified, however, by the literal broadening of perspective provided by the machine. The disentanglement afforded by flying is risky, but also edifying and invigorating. Describing his first soar, George says, "I felt intensely alive and my nerves were strung like a bow" (*Tono-Bungay* 279). Later, when George and Teddy flee the country (and their own financial ruin) in George's most successful design, the Lord Roberts Beta, George has a breathtaking glimpse of the landscape below:

> [I have] one continuous memory of a countryside lying, as it seemed, under snow, with square patches of dimness, white phantoms of roads, rents and pools of velvety blackness, and lamp-jewelled houses. I remember a train boring its way like a hastening caterpillar or fire across the landscape, and how distinctly I heard its clatter. (*Tono-Bungay* 353)

The sense of human vulnerability and transience that George gains from his flight is amplified by his Uncle Teddy's death in the following chapter from an illness exacerbated by the cold air of high altitudes. George's experimental flying machines enable him to explore his wider natural environment, to view it from different perspectives, and ultimately to understand that his role in the universe is a very small one indeed. This experience bears a strong resemblance to his closing observation on the deck of the X2 that 'we are all things that make and pass'.

George's experimental flying machines and his naval destroyer are not, then, symptoms of a wasteful and destructive capitalist system akin to Tono-Bungay itself, as Kupinse suggests. Rather, they are the physical tools by which George comes to understand that the material environment which enables human existence is so great in scope as to make the patent tonic appear insignificant. This is the 'human and inhuman' truth George mentions in his speech from the deck of the X2: that the physical world both enables human activity and is profoundly indifferent to that activity.

Here we see the limits of material-culture criticism which focuses on commodity exchange. In Wells' *Tono-Bungay* it is much less productive to follow the titular patent tonic through its cycle of production and consumption than it is to follow the protagonist, George Ponderevo, in his fantastic voyages on experimental balloons and gliders. By tracking George's motion, we can see the total view of England as a material determinant of her inhabitants' personalities. In other words, a strict focus on the most prominent commodified 'thing' in *Tono-Bungay* has actually prevented critics from connecting George's experiments with aeronautics to other accounts of perspective-altering journeys in Wells' writing. If we read the air and sea voyages in these texts literally, as explorations of the material limits of the habitable earth enabled by technological objects which inform a global perspective, rather than reading the literal journeys as allegories for individual growth or economic forces, we can recover the key role played by the environment in Wells' fiction.

As I argue earlier, the popularization of evolutionary theory undergirds

Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's understanding of the role played by the environment in shaping its inhabitants. An evolutionary understanding of the material world requires a theory of 'things' that allows for stillness as well as movement—that can accommodate permanent features of the landscape alongside circuits of commodity exchange. Critics like Elizabeth Grosz, who grounds her reading of materiality in evolutionary theory, allow us to read larger material networks as significant participants in the history of a given region. In her work on 'The Thing', Grosz argues that evolutionary theory is the root of an intellectual tradition of material engagement that stands in stark contrast to the mechanistic Enlightenment view of the object world associated with Descartes and Newton. For Grosz, Darwin's theories mark the beginning of an "alternative lineage […] in which the thing is not conceived as other, or binary double, of the subject, the self, embodiment, or consciousness, but as its condition and the resource for the subject's being and enduring" (Grosz 124). Wells, with his formative experience of studying under Thomas Huxley, is located firmly within this intellectual tradition.

If we approach *Tono-Bungay* as a text participating in a Darwinian intellectual tradition concerned with the influence of material environments, rather than as a text participating in the critique of commodity fetishism proceeding from Marx, the logical connections between the novel's various plotlines becomes clear. By experimenting with flight, George literally broadens his perspective, and comes to understand his immediate surroundings as a small component of a larger material environment. His later career building the X2

confirms that this experience has changed his understanding of his importance in the world. By physically removing himself from his immediate environment, he comes to see England "from the outside—without illusions" and is able to understand that it, like all things, will "make and pass, striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea" (*Tono-Bungay* 389). The 'Truth' that attains as a result of his experiments is the physical vulnerability of the human race, and its collective insignificance on the scale of geological time. George's experiments with flight provide him with more 'reality' than the 'soapsuds and bunkum' of the Tono-Bungay Empire precisely because they allow him to view the real, material determinants of human life on a greater scale. This reading preserves the criticism of advertising and capitalist excess seen in the novel by other critics, but decenters the role of that criticism in the text. The wastefulness of Tono-Bungay is not indicative of a generally wasteful and disordered universe. Rather, it is to be condemned specifically because its trivial wastefulness is irrelevant in the face of what Wells still believes to be an orderly world which can be understood through the laws of science.

Reading George's journeys in *Tono-Bungay* in this light also reveals connections between George's narrative and similar tales from Wells' Edwardian novels and essays. In a collection of journalistic essays titled *The Future in America* (1906), Wells describes standing on the bow of a massive steamship and reflecting on the ultimate insignificance of individual action in a manner which strongly mirrors his description of George's journey down the Thames on the X2. Wells experiences his trip as a symptom of the incomprehensibility of modern

technology, describing how "the scale of size, the scale of power, the speed and dimensions of things about us alter remorselessly—to some limit we cannot at present descry" (*Future in America* 28). The steamship Carmania, "with its unparalleled steadfastness, its racing, tireless great turbines, its vast population of 3,244 souls", denies its human origin, and "has on the whole a tremendous effect of having come by fate and its own forces" (*Future in America* 24). Wells sees the ship as generating political apathy through its apparent lack of dependence on human agents. In contrast, Wells himself uses the ship as a reminder of the transience of such accomplishments, through the view of the stars that is enabled by the very vehicle they reduce to near-meaninglessness, writing "Out there I had been reminded of space and time. Out there the ship was just a hastening ephemeral fire-fly that had chanced to happen across the eternal tumult of the winds and sea" (*Future in America* 33). This passage provides a direct parallel to George's reflection in *Tono-Bungay* that 'we are all things that make and pass.' In both scenes, physical journeys on technologically advanced vehicles provide the narrator with an overwhelming awareness of the larger material networks in which he is embedded, and the limited capacity of humanity to alter or resist the physical forces by which it is shaped.

George's experience of flight also bears a striking resemblance to that of Bert Smallways from Wells' *The War in the Air* (1906). In chapter one, I discuss Bert's experience of being swept away by a renegade balloon, finding himself "himself lifted out of his marvellous modern world for a time, out of all the rush and confused appeals of it, and floating like a thing dead and disembodied

between sea and sky" (*War in the Air* 52). Bert's ill-fated balloon flight lands him in the middle of a German army base, where he is taken prisoner and joins a zeppelin fleet on an attack on New York City. Looking down on the damage done to the city, Bert comes to the "incredible discovery that such disasters were not only possible now in this strange, gigantic, foreign New York, but also in London [...] that the little island in the silver seas was at the end of its immunity" (*War in the Air* 150). The vantage from above is ultimately humbling rather than empowering, since it demonstrates the vulnerability and interconnectedness of peoples and nations. Bert is left with a sense of increased responsibility rather than indifference or removal, as he realizes that one cannot "vote for war and a spirited foreign policy, and go secure from such horrible things" (150). Bert is echoing Wells' own warning that with the militarization of the air, England "is no longer, from the military point of view, an in-accessible island" (qtd. Gibbs-Smith 148) in spite of the navy that had protected the country for so long. The international travel and literal change in perspective afforded by an aerial view of Europe led Wells to an internationalism that would occupy a central place in his writing for the rest of his life.

Immediately after World War One, Wells began work on his massively best-selling *Outline of History* (1920). Intended to create greater understanding and prevent the nationalist histories which Wells felt played a part in encouraging hostilities, the *Outline* begins with a reflection on "The Earth in Space and Time". Wells explains the limits of the habitable earth to his readers using air and ocean travel as instructive examples:

For in all this enormous vacancy of space we know certainly of life only

upon the surface of our earth. It does not penetrate much more than three

miles down into the 4,000 miles that separate us from the centre of our

globe, and it does not reach more than five miles above its surface.

Apparently all the limitlessness of space is otherwise empty and dead.

The deepest ocean dredgings go down to five miles. The highest recorded

flight of an aeroplane is little more than four miles. Men have reached to

seven miles up in balloons, but at a cost of great suffering. No bird can fly

so high as five miles, and small birds and insects which have been carried

up by aeroplanes drop off insensible far below that level. (*Outline of*

History 27)

Wells' view of the world is so profoundly shaped by his scientific training that the

first thing he wants to communicate to an eager audience after the close of the

most traumatic conflict England has ever experienced is the fact that we share a

finite environment. He does not open with psychological theories, or an

articulation of different political frameworks. For Wells, history cannot be

understood unless the reader grasps the specific environmental conditions which

partially determine that history. International co-operation and pacifism are

necessary, for Wells, because warring nations share a small scrap of inhabitable

space.

Wells' socialism and internationalist pacifism have been well documented

by generations of scholars[21], but the foundation of Wells' views in a material

understanding of global interconnectedness has been largely overlooked. As a

result, Wells appears as a more unique figure in public intellectual history than he

actually was. Many interpreters of Wells' ideas are evangelists rather than critics,

more committed to spreading the word of their chosen prophet than to analyzing

his participation in a historical conversation about the material world. One

consequence of this attitude is that Wells is often presented as a lone voice in the

wilderness[22]. Although his early socialism is, of course, discussed in the context

of the Fabian movement, his later advocacy for the League of Nations and dogged

pursuit of a "World State" tends to appear as individual charges in a largely

indifferent intellectual context. Instead of explaining Wells in relationship to other

thinkers, scholars discussing the later Wells tend to explain him in relationship to

world events, as though his views developed in an intellectual vacuum. The result:

scholars present Wells as a radical and a counter-cultural force, to the detriment of

our understanding of both Wells himself and his middlebrow context.

While Wells' single-minded dedication to the promotion of a World State

does set him apart from his middlebrow peers, both his central means of spreading

his message (popular scientific and historical education) and the belief in

environmental influence which underwrites it are absolutely typical of

middlebrow writing in the early twentieth century. Wells' reputation as an

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[21] Warren Wagar's early account *H. G. Wells and the World State* (1961), and John Partington's recent *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells* (2003) are the most important critical accounts.

[22] Wagar's comparison of Wells to the Biblical prophet Jeremiah typifies this approach: "[Wells] scolded and warned. The Joshua who had stormed the walls of the Victorian Jericho became now, for the majority of his readers, a wailing Jeremiah. And, with Jeremiah, he was not content to complain and diagnose and threaten. He offered a comprehensive scheme of proposals to bring mankind to world unity" (9)

idiosyncratic socialist makes a comparison between his leftist, sometimes scandalous politics and Galsworthy's conservative 'little Englander' mentality appear incongruous. Yet when both authors' beliefs are re-cast as materially-oriented politics, strong congruities become clear, as do similarities to the criticisms of industrialism contained in Bennett's 'Five Towns' fiction. All three authors take the material determinants of human life deeply seriously. It should come as no surprise, then, that their respective models of political action are articulated around those spaces, networks, and objects.

Galsworthy's 'Matters of Concern'

Like Wells, Galsworthy criticizes the excesses of consumer capitalism in his writing, and like Wells, Galsworthy contextualizes small-scale material culture within a much wider material network. While Wells explores the limits of habitable space, Galsworthy's focus remains on England, and his agenda is one of material stewardship of the nation. Galsworthy argues for better management of English agriculture, as a means of re-engaging citizens with 'the Land', and the reinvigoration of English architecture, as means of producing happier, healthier citizens. These two goals both demonstrate the importance of the material environment to Galsworthy. The latter involves altering the lived environments of working class people in the belief that changing their living spaces will change their lives, while the former is evidence of Galsworthy's overriding belief that earnest engagement with 'reality', here in the form of the land, is the best antidote to the abstraction he sees as the blight of modernity. Galsworthy's use of material

things, ranging from potatoes and chickens to houses, farms, and slums, as jumping off points for his politics bears a strong resemblance to science studies critic Bruno Latour's approach of treating objects as "matters of concern". Latour argues that objects have for too long been considered "matters of fact", and treated as inert content for political processes. To the contrary:

> It's clear that each object--each issue--generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties [and] binds all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of 'the political.' (Latour 154)

The objects that make up Galsworthy's state of England—locally-grown potatoes, art exhibitions, country houses, pound coins, stomachs, impoverished bodies, seats of mutton—can be seen to map out just such a public space. By taking into account the ways that objects organize communities and generate politics, Latour hopes to describe "an object-oriented democracy" (154) that treats these objects as "matters of concern" rather than "matters of fact". To treat objects as "matters of fact" is to adopt an empiricist stance which sees them as separate from the subject, constituting so much raw material on which subjects exert their wills. The term "matters of concern", in contrast, acknowledges the interplay between subject and object, suggesting that just as the subject is invested in (concerned by) the object, so can the object exert power and influence over the subject (creating 'cause for

concern').

Galsworthy's earnest engagement with these 'matters of concern' develops late in his career. As noted in chapter four, *The Forsyte Saga* criticizes and ironically comments on the status quo rather than advancing a definite alternative, and it is not until *A Modern Comedy*—the middle trilogy of *The Forsyte Chronicles*—that he begins to advocate for his own system of beliefs rather than criticizing others'. As a result, critics have not yet explored the politics—fictionalized as 'Foggartism' and advocated by Michael Mont, who acts as Galsworthy's mouthpiece—which appear in his mid-to-late career. Foggartism is a loose collection of political schemes based around the re-invigoration of English agriculture, the mass emigration of adolescents to the colonies, defense of the air, the end of unemployment and the clearing of slums. These diverse tenets share a focal point: the acknowledgment of the central importance of an individual's surroundings.

The call for an increase in English agricultural production is justified in Galsworthy's fiction in two key ways: as a guarantee of food security now that air travel has neutralized the military advantage once afforded by England's navy; and through a sentimental belief that since 'the Land' has shaped and sustained local inhabitants for generations, it provides the proper and fulfilling object for their labour and affective attachments. In *A Modern Comedy* and *The End of the Chapter* (the second and third trilogies in the nine-volume *Forsyte Chronicles*) members of the extended Forsyte family increasingly choose farming as both a career and a hobby, as well as take up the reinvigoration of English agriculture as

a central political belief. Their renewed interest in agriculture reverses a multi-generational drift away from manual and agricultural labour. The family traces its roots back to Jolyon 'Superior Dossett' Forsyte, claiming him as their patriarch in large part because he was the first Forsyte to *escape* a life of farm labour. Superior Dossett Forsyte's success as a mason produces the capital necessary to enable his children to own houses rather than to build them, and to speculate in real estate. The following generation continue this trend of upward mobility and increasing distance from manual labour, and live largely off of intangible investments and inheritances. The rise of the Forsytes is directly tied to their progressive indifference to what Galsworthy calls 'the Land'.

Yet when Jolyon 'Jon' Forsyte, great-grandson of Jolyon 'Superior Dossett' Forsyte, is called to choose a career in the 1920s, with a near-complete freedom from financial pressures and class restrictions, he opts to return to the ancestral Forsyte occupation of farming. The older generation of Forsytes—those who reached their prime in the closing decades of the nineteenth century—also rediscover agriculture as a source of intense personal fulfillment, but in the form of a hobby. Soames Forsyte, having transitioned from avaricious villain to cherished elder statesman over the course of the first four novels, starts a hobby farm at his house in the suburbs. The farm marks Soames' complete rehabilitation in Galsworthy's narrative. Soames begins as the titular "Man of Property", obsessed with collecting and controlling his goods. From a miser, he becomes a speculator, trading in fine art not from any genuine aesthetic interest, but purely for profit. His hobby farm allows him to produce concrete value (rather than

hoarding it, or circulating abstract value) for the first time. Soames finds peace in gardening and hobby farming: "Often now, morning or evening, he would walk among his vegetables—they were real and restful, and you could eat them" (*Silver Spoon* 371). His direct consumption of what he produces circumvents the anxiety and alienation he experiences in earlier novels, and he is finally happy.

Galsworthy presents Soames' interest in growing vegetables and raising livestock as an evolutionary throwback to the "atavistic instincts" (*Silver Spoon* 372) passed along from "a long line of Forsyte 'agriculturalists'" (*Silver Spoon* 372). Towards the end of his life, Soames feels increasingly drawn to his 'agricultural' heritage, even undertaking a trip to see the farmland his ancestors worked. The landscape of the area provides Soames with a major key for understanding his own character and that of his family, once he sees the environment which shaped them over several generations:

> …something moved in him, as if the salty independence of that lonely spot were still in his bones. Old Jolyon and his own father and the rest of his uncles—no wonder they'd been independent, with this air and loneliness in their blood; and crabbed with the pickling of it—unable to give up, to let go, to die. For a moment he seemed to understand even himself. Southern spot, south aspect, not any of your northern roughness, but free, and salt, and solitary from sunrise to sunset, year in, year out, like that lonely rock with the gulls on it, for ever and for ever. (*Swan Song* 818)

Farming is not simply a particularly attractive hobby for Soames. Spending time laboring outdoors in a particular environment, according to the narrator, has

actively informed the virtues and personalities of his ancestors, which he has inherited.

While Soames' renewed interest in agriculture brings him to the region that was his family's home for generations, young Jon's return to 'the Land' is mediated through travel to the colonies. He spends time first in the Canadian Okanogan, then in the American South, eventually returning to England with an American wife, Anne Wilmot. Galsworthy repeatedly invokes travel and emigration to the colonies as a cure for the individual deterioration of England's town and city population. One of the central aims of Foggartism is to save children from "this over-bloated town condition, with its blight and smoky ugliness" (*Silver Spoon* 310) which leaves them "without a chance from birth" (*Silver Spoon* 310). The goal is to "Catch them early, catch them often, catch them before they were […] spoiled for the land; make them men and women of property, give them air and give them sun--the most decent folk in the world, give them a chance!" (*Silver Spoon* 539). By exposing the lower classes to a physically active outdoor life in order to physically improve bodies rendered small, sickly, and weak by prolonged exposure to the sooty air and cramped spaces of English towns, Galsworthy (as mediated through his fictional 'Foggartism') hopes that they may develop a passion for the land which will eventually be brought back to England, and re-stock the dwindling agricultural populations in the country. Although Galsworthy does support imperial 'civilizing' of the Dominions, he primarily sees the colonies as beneficial physical environments for people raised in England, and a necessary counterbalances to the detrimental material

environments of the towns and slums. The stated goal of Foggartist emigration is to balance economic supply and demand between Britain and her colonies, yet Foggart's focus on the emigration of youth, rather than adults, suggests that the re-shaping of the body politic through a radical change of environment is its true goal. Both the reinvigoration of lived environments in England and the movement of English people into 'unspoiled' colonial space serve this purpose, whether one benefits from a better environment by emigrating, or by staying still and altering one's current surroundings.

Galsworthy's emphasis on environmental influence explains why Foggartism calls for the organized emigration of young people between fifteen and eighteen, rather than of adults or families. The bodies of the young still have a chance of being substantially altered by a new environment—are still *adaptable*—while the habits and the physical make-up of older adults is already firmly established by their original surroundings. Sid and Victorine Bicket, for instance, are a working-class couple introduced in *The White Monkey* who emigrate to Australia with Michael's help. They hope that the new environment will cure Victorine's chronic health problems and allow them to have children who will flourish in the new environment. In *The Silver Spoon*, however, Sid Bicket writes to inform Michael that life is more difficult in the colonies than it was in England, that they cannot find useful work to do, and that the people already settled in Australia "don't seem to have any use for [the Bickets] and [the Bickets] don't seem to have any use for them" (*Silver Spoon* 401). Any benefit from the Bickets' emigration will be reaped by the next generation, not by themselves.

A similar disappointment results from Michael's attempt to contribute to the revitalization of local agriculture by setting up an experimental 'back to the land' chicken farm staffed by a disabled veteran, an unemployed hairdresser, and an Austrian couple stranded in England by poverty. The townsfolk make a miserable group of farm labourers, and the Austrian man promptly hangs himself, igniting a scandal in the press and harming Michael's political career: "For three days no paper could be taken up which did not contain come allusion, illustrated, to 'The Tragedy on a Buckinghamshire estate'; 'German actor hangs himself'; 'The drama at Lippinghall'; Tragic end of an experiment'; 'Right to Left: Mr Michael Mont, Member for mid-Bucks; Bergfeld, the German actor who hanged himself; Mrs Bergfeld.'" (*Silver Spoon* 449). Galsworthy advocates for a return to manual labour and farming in general, but does not shy away from the difficulties involved in executing his schemes. In fact, without the counter-examples of Jon and Soames, as well as corroborating evidence from Galsworthy's personal writing which confirms his support of the tenets of 'Foggartism', it would be easy to read *A Modern Comedy* as a humorous condemnation of attempts to resurrect a long-dead farming lifestyle. Given the evidence to the contrary, however, it becomes evident that Galsworthy is making a subtler point: interaction with the material environment in the form of 'the Land' is only beneficial if one is open to being influenced by that environment.

One of the reasons that Galsworthy's particular form of 'object-oriented politics' has gone unremarked by critics is his strangely persistent habit of providing careful and often devastating critiques of his own beliefs within his

novels. As mentioned above, he provides examples of how badly colonial emigration and back-to-the-land schemes can fail, and provides reasonably realistic responses from opposing parties to Michael's speech on Foggartism in the house. Perhaps Galsworthy's readiness to criticize his own positions comes from the same dedication to literary realism that leads him to give equal weight to the concerns of labour and management in his popular play *Strife* (1909), which Frank Swinnerton describes as "an attempt to stage a series of phenomena, all concerning the conditions of human life, but a series of phenomena rather than an intimate study of men's lives" (103). Yet this view cannot account for Galsworthy's repeated use of his fiction as a soap box for issues he cares deeply about, including domestic abuse, divorce law reform, and the humane treatment of animals. There is no equal treatment given to those who oppose animal welfare. Far from it—Michael's cousin Hubert Cherrell, who beats a Bolivian donkey driver to death for mistreating the animals in his charge, appears as an unfairly persecuted and sympathetic character when he is tried for the man's murder. While Foggartism receives support from Michael, one of the series' most consistently rational and honourable characters, even he criticizes it at times. Why does Galsworthy appear so doubtful about the success and value of a program to which he devotes such considerable time and attention in his novels?

A partial answer is found in Galsworthy's portrayal of Foggart himself, who appears as the representative of an authentic, but fading and nostalgic Englishness. Shortly after Michael's speech on Foggartism in the House, Sir James Foggart invites him to come out to lunch at his country manor and discuss

the book *The Parlous State of England* which lays out his program. Expecting to encounter "Some gaitered old countryman with little grey whiskers, neat, weathered and firm-featured; or one of those short-necked John Bulls, still extant, square and weighty, with a flat top to his head, and a flat white topper on it" he instead meets "a huge old man, grey-bearded and grey-locked, like a superannuated British lion, in an old velvet coat with whitened seams" (*Silver Spoon 403*). Here, Foggart stands for an obsolete model of national pride which Galsworthy presents with a great deal of nostalgia. In his representation of Foggart, Galsworthy indicates that he recognizes the impracticality and even the obsolescence of the schemes presented under the name of the 'superannuated British lion', perhaps mirroring his sense of his own age and his own struggles to remain relevant through the 1920s and 30s. The scene closes with "a peculiar rumbling noise" (407) rising from Foggart's chair—not the roar of the British lion, but the snore of a feeble old man. Without rejecting the principles which underwrite Foggartism, this scene clearly aligns the program with the views of an older generation. Michael, as a representative of the younger population, leaves feeling that "Foggartism had never seemed […] a more forlorn hope than in this sanctum of its fount and origin" (407).

Michael's disillusionment with Foggart does not mark the end of object-oriented politics in the series, however. Over the course of the remainder of the trilogy, Foggartism fades away, and farming in general comes to take its place as a synecdoche for a general belief in the importance of understanding, attending to, and being shaped by one's material environment. After Michael is thwarted in his

attempts to plant the seeds of Foggartism in the public conscience, he modifies his platform to focus primarily on increased agricultural production and slum clearance (the latter will be discussed at more length later). Michael champions increased production of "The Three Ps […] potatoes, poultry, and pork" (*End of the Chapter* 609). If England can supply its own demand for these three products, Michael argues, a broad change in Britain's agricultural policies will result, creating a more self-sufficient nation. In other words, Michael shifts from promoting a set of intellectual principles to urging others to adopt an 'object-oriented democracy'. Party lines may prevent others from embracing Foggartism as "based […] on the destruction of Free Trade" (*Silver Spoon* 395) or an elitist policy developed "in order that the capitalist class may be relieved of the menace lurking in Unemployment" (*Silver Spoon* 395), but there are no such calcified political and sentimental attachments to the cultivation of pork. This is not to argue that some objects exist outside of the realm of politics. The fresh articulations of political agendas made possible by a focus on objects *requires* that those objects be loci of human investment, not of their purity or sheer 'otherness'. In other words, 'Pork, Poultry, and Potatoes' become 'matters of concern' in Latour's terms: a group of items which "gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties […] in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of 'the political'" (Latour 154). Michael is able to bring groups of people together around the issue of agricultural development who would be normally be unwilling to co-operate because of their conflicting political allegiances. Granted, this is less radical than the vision of re-

mapping public space laid out by Latour, but it nonetheless is an intriguing example of the possibilities opened up by a focus on material objects rather than abstract ideals.

Bennett's 'Curiously Unchanged Society'

Our perception of Bennett, much more so than Wells and Galsworthy, is distorted when viewed through a critical framework which follows the pathways of commodity exchange. This is not because his novels lack commodified things—to the contrary, his Five Towns fiction focuses heavily on pottery manufacture. Bennett's failure to explore the full cycle of production and exchange of pottery as it circulates beyond the boundaries of the region, however, makes him appear dismissive or even ignorant of the full material conditions of their circulation. In a keynote address at the 2012 "Material Cultures in the Space Between" conference, material-culture theorist Freedgood criticized Bennett for his single-minded focus on the potteries district, arguing that it disavows the global inequalities which sustain the industrial system he describes. For Freedgood, both Bennett's "Industrial" thing theory and the "Modernist" thing theory typified by Woolf are limited in their scope—"Modernist" thing theory by virtue of its aesthetic practice of keeping "everything within the book" and resisting didacticism and literal reference, and "Industrial" thing theory by virtue of its spatial and political restriction to the material practices of a single nation, or even a single region within that nation ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf"). In contrast to both of these models, Freedgood proposes that critics of materiality

practice "One Worldly Thing Theory," looking at material trajectories that extend both "outside the novel" and "outside the nation" in order to examine "how racialized labour sustains the first two models" and to "decolonize modernism and modernity" ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf").

In this model, Bennett's focus on a single region can only appear as limited, since this regional focus necessarily excludes several stages of the production and circulation of clay goods—the mining of clay in Runcorn, the sale of finished pieces of pottery in England and abroad, and the history of pottery's importation to England from Asia. Because many critics of material culture take exchange and motion to be the most salient features of the 'social life' of a thing, and critics see the social relevance of a thing primarily through its 'trajectories' and history of exchange, fiction which fails to 'follow the things themselves' along these paths seems politically suspect—thus Freedgood's challenge to critics to do the work of decolonization that she argues Bennett's text is incapable of. Without disagreeing with Freedgood's project, I argue that Bennett can actually provide intense and biting criticism of industrialism and its relationship to colonialism by refusing to leave the potteries region. As academics, we tend to automatically attribute greater awareness and political efficacy to thinkers with a global range, but Bennett's work demonstrates that when we denigrate regional narratives for their inherent limitation of scope, we miss the potent critique that can reside there. Bennett's regional focus allows him to record the consequences felt in England as a center of colonial and industrial activity and, more importantly, to insist on the permanence and seriousness of these consequences by

writing them into the landscape of the Five Towns.

In his introduction to Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*, Frank Swinnerton comments that Bennett had kept his story "within the framework of a single district, so that every event contributed to the presentation of a curiously unchanged society" (12). The reason for this regional focus can be found in Bennett's indebtedness to Victorian popular science, especially the writing of Spencer and Huxley. By focusing single-mindedly on a particular region, a particular environment, through the lives of dozens of characters and multiple generations, Bennett is able to record the lasting influence that that environment has on its inhabitants, as well as to recognize the marks left by those inhabitants on their surroundings in turn. By viewing Bennett's treatment of the landscape of the Five Towns and its key constituent—clay—through an evolutionary rather than an industrial lens, we can see political potency of his regional focus. Bennett uses the material landscape of the Five Towns region that hosts much of his fiction to record the negative consequences of industrialism for the region's inhabitants. In a time when the global circulation of goods and people meant that the wasted lives produced by the factory system could be expelled from the region almost as easily as its crockeries could be exported abroad, Bennett's narrator foregrounds the permanent material alterations in the landscape of the Five Towns resulting from industrial excess in order to counteract the tendency of industrialist characters to disavow the negative impacts of their factories on their neighbours.

To fully understand the political potency of Bennett's intense regionalism, it is necessary to reconceptualise the Five Towns as an environment capable of

selecting for given traits in its population. Here I am once again using 'environment' to describe the sum total of 'lived environments' in Bennett's texts—that is, to encapsulate all spaces inhabited by people, regardless of the degree of human intervention or development involved. While the environment of the Five Towns is shaped by commodity exchange, it is not reducible to that exchange. Rather, it provides a relatively stable material record of the industrial activity of its inhabitants, and shapes those inhabitants just as it is shaped by them in turn. Instead of tracing the circulation of goods as they travel through various environments, Bennett requires us to stop attending to the movement of commodity exchange in order to examine the marks it leaves on one particular region.

The "alternative lineage" of materiality that Grosz traces from Darwin, rather than from Marx, is more suitable to criticism of Bennett, given the evolutionary underpinnings of his work. In *Anna of the Five Towns*, even more so than in Bennett's other works set in the region, clay takes a central position. Clay provides 'the means by which life itself grows and develops' (to borrow Grosz' language), justifying the creation of the Five Towns themselves and providing labour and income for generations of their residents. The narrator describes pottery manufacture as "merely an episode in the unending warfare of man and nature" (*Anna* 25), a phrase which should be understood in terms of the evolutionary struggle for survival in which the exigencies of 'nature' determine who lives and dies, rather than as the assertion of man's will over a mute material realm. The novel's descriptions of Bursley alternate between contempt for its filth

and squalor, and awe at the immense scale on which humans have re-shaped their surroundings. Where protagonist Anna Tellwright sees "nothing […] save the repulsive evidences of manufacture" (*Anna* 73), the narrator rapturously details a "romantic scene" in which "[t]he entire landscape was illuminated and transformed by these unique pyrotechnics of labour atoning for its grime, and dull, weird sounds, as of the breathings and sighings of gigantic nocturnal creatures" (*Anna* 73).

Darwin's theory of natural selection animates the seemingly inert material world, requiring readers to acknowledge their dependence on, and vulnerability to, their environment; to acknowledge that "Life is the growing accommodation of matter, the adaptation of the needs of life to the exigencies of matter" (Grosz 125). In Bennett's writing, this 'matter' is most often clay. Clay is central to the lives of Bennett's characters—each man of the region "exists in it and by it; it fills his lungs and blanches his cheek; it keeps him alive and it kills him" (*Anna* 115). Clay is the literal raw material of the region's labour, as well as the foundation of its central industry around which social and domestic life is organized. This complex relationship between human subjects and material objects is visible most clearly in passages in which Bennett describes the work of the pottery factories. In one of the most striking passages of the novel, Bennett's narrator follows the transformation of raw clay as it is passed from hand to hand in a potbank in which Anna has a financial stake. The potter's craft, according to the narrator, exists in "unique and intimate relation to human life" (*Anna* 114):

If no other relic of an immemorial past is to be seen in these modernised

sordid streets, there is at least the living legacy of that extraordinary kinship between workman and work, that instinctive mastery of clay which the past has bestowed upon the present. The horse is less to the Arab than clay is to the Bursley man. He exists in it and by it; it fills his lungs and blanches his cheek; it keeps him alive and it kills him. His fingers close round it as round the hand of a friend. He knows all its tricks and aptitudes; when to coax and when to force it, when to rely on it and when to distrust it. (*Anna* 115)

Echoes of Herbert Spencer resonate in the narrator's observation that "the ware in which six men formerly collaborated is now produced by sixty; and thus, in one sense, the touch of finger on clay is more pervasive than ever before" (*Anna* 115). Increasing industrial activity, in *Anna of the Five Towns*, does not detach workers from the material world, but rather knits them all the more intimately together with their companions and with the matter on which they collectively work.

Yet Bennett is also deeply critical of the negative consequences of manufacture. Critic Kurt Koenigsberger recognizes Bennett's awareness of the Pottery District's participation in networks of production and consumption, arguing that despite Bennett's reputation as a narrow 'provincial' writer, his fiction "imaginatively maps provincialism's relation to the cosmopolitan" and explores "irruption[s] of the imperial" in the Five Towns (Koenigsberger 132). While Koenigsberger sees this dynamic in the circulation of exotic goods and animals through the Five Towns, I argue that Bennett also explores the consequences of the region's role in global systems of exchange through his

depictions of the static, material elements of the area's landscape. In a time when the global circulation of goods and people meant that the wasted lives produced by the factory system could be expelled from the region almost as easily as its crockeries could be exported abroad, Bennett foregrounds the permanent material alterations in the landscape of the Five Towns resulting from industrial excess as a means of counteracting the tendency to disavow the negative impacts of pottery manufacture.

One key example of these material alterations is the abandoned pit shafts scattered across the region. Coal mining is second only to pottery manufacture in the economy of the Five Towns, and it was the close proximity of coal and clay which established the pottery manufacture in the region in the first place. The abandoned shafts are scattered through various towns, appearing in unlikely places including railroad stations and gardens. No attempt has been made to cover, fill, or camouflage them—they are simply mundane, permanent elements of the landscape. Yet characters tend to view them with dread. The pit shafts conjure "dreadful images of ghosts of miners wandering for ever in subterranean passages far, far beneath" and remind onlookers of "the secret terrors of the earth" to such an extent that one viewer can "scarcely even look at the wall without a spasm of fear" (*Old Wives' Tale* 149). The shafts remind inhabitants of the human cost of prosperity in the district, the raw materials which feed its manufactories, and the vast conflict with nature which Bennett sees in industrialisation. In *Anna of the Five Towns,* one shaft literally becomes a grave. The titular Anna, having inherited potbanks from her father, is pursued by two suitors—the thriving industrialist

Henry Mynors, and the failing manufacturer Willie Price. Anna, at the urging of her father, sweats Willie's father for back rent owed to her, resulting indirectly in his suicide following his financial ruin. Due to the Price's disgrace, Anna ends up engaged to Henry, rather than Willie. The new couple literally move into the house of the man they drove to suicide, the grounds of which contain "a few abandoned pit-shafts" in the "sterile and withered" orchard (*Anna* 215). Anna is reminded of the miners who spent their days in the shafts: "These shafts, imperfectly protected by ruinous masonry, presented an appearance strangely sinister and forlorn, raising visions in the mind of dark and mysterious depths peopled with miserable ghosts of those who had toiled there in the days when to be a miner was to be a slave" (*Anna* 215). The entire district is haunted by the exploitation and misery of its labourers.

The novel closes on another image of a pit shaft, this time as the final resting place of Willie Price. After his father's suicide and the discovery of the forgery and embezzlement which had kept their dilapidated potbank running, Willie is no longer welcome in the Five Towns and plans to emigrate to Australia. Rather than leave, he commits suicide by throwing himself down an abandoned pit shaft near Priory House. His method of suicide is significant for a number of reasons. Primarily, it ties his death to the economic activity of the Five Towns. Although Willie was relatively prosperous as the son of a potbank owner and his labour as a manager and accountant was mental rather than physical, he, like the miners, lives a circumscribed and miserable existence, tied to the dilapidated potbank through debt as the miners were indentured to their labour. Like the

miners, he is a victim of the capitalist exploitation. His ruin is the result of his father's suicide, which in turn was caused by financial hardship, including pressure from Anna to pay their back rent. He will join the ghosts haunting the area, as his memory haunts the house that Anna inhabits with her new husband.

Willie's suicide also makes him a permanent feature of the Bursley landscape. His expulsion to Australia would have neatly removed a human reminder of cruel social practices from the region, allowing its inhabitants to proceed with their economic activity without guilt. While Willie is forgotten by his neighbours—"the abandoned pit shaft does not deliver up its secret" (*Anna* 235)—his body remains in the abandoned shaft and is incorporated into the material reality of the Five Towns. The region, Bennett implies, cannot divest itself of the results of its social and economic practices. Price's body belongs to Bursley, since his death was caused by its inhabitants. Before Willie kills himself, Anna gives him an envelope which, unbeknownst to him, contains a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds. Because the note is never cashed, the Bank profits from Willie's death: "And so—the Bank of England is the richer by a hundred pounds unclaimed, and the world the poorer by a simple and meek soul stung to revolt only in its last hour" (*Anna* 236). Instead of using the colonies as a dumping ground for the human 'waste' of the Five Towns, Bennett makes Willie's corpse a permanent (if unseen) fixture of the local landscape, incorporating his body into the violent history of the Five Towns. The bank note that, while unable to circulate or be redeemed, is still converted into profit by the Bank of England, prevents the readers from interpreting Willie's death as a successful, if tragic,

escape from the economic pressures that lead to his family's downfall. Willie may remove himself and the bank note he carries from circulation, but he cannot stop the Bank of England from re-appropriating and re-circulating the value of the note. The economy moves along, undisturbed by Willie's death. Bennett does not allow his readers the same forgetfulness.

Freedgood argues that Bennett's materialism is regionally limited. Rather than reading this regional focus as a limitation, I argue that it enables his powerful commentary on the region's industrial activity. Because Willie's body is a permanent feature of the Five Towns, because the mines which fueled the development of potteries in the region still haunt the landscape, because the majority of the region's inhabitants will not leave the Five Towns and therefore must live with the material remainders of the activity of previous generations— any given action takes on increasing significance because its effects will be felt for years to come. The permanence of alterations to the landscape stands in stark contrast with the short life span of the products produced in local potbanks. By repeatedly returning to the Five Towns as a setting for his fiction, Bennett is able to record the complex interplay between the region and its inhabitants. The physical landscape of the area both enables life, and poses a profound challenge to it. It shapes the lives of the area's inhabitants, and records the consequences of the industrial system that it supports. Bennett's regional and material focus is, then, politically and narratively enabling rather than disabling, and his representation of the landscape of the Five Towns constitutes a key site for his exploration of the reciprocal cycles of influence between material environments and their

inhabitants.

Methodological Consequences

These case studies collectively demonstrate the limitations of methodological approaches which focus primarily on circuits of commodity exchange as sites for material investigation. My goal is not to invalidate the results produced by these approaches—after all, Tono-Bungay can still be read productively as a fetishized commodity, as can the pottery produced in Bennett's Five Towns, and the consumer goods in Galsworthy's early Forsyte novels. Yet if we fail to contextualize these consumer goods within a complex web of material elements which includes non-commodified objects, raw materials, and large-scale physical environments, we truncate the material networks laid out by Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. Consumer goods constitute only one small subset of the material worlds of their novels, and often appear as superficial distractions from more pressing concerns of how environmental forces are profoundly shaping the direction of human life both in England and on a global scale. These authors present environmental pressures exerted by industrial landscapes, geological formations, farmers' fields, colonial environments, slums, and the fundamental isolation of the habitable earth in space and time. Any attempt to critically explore the role of materiality in their work must acknowledge their location in a Darwinian intellectual tradition, and the active role played by environments in their works as a result.

As I argue above, Grosz's articulation of an alternative intellectual history

of 'the thing' which grows out of Darwin's ideas rather than those of Marx marks a key shift in perspective which enables a fuller understanding of materiality in Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. Latour's work on object-oriented democracy provides the second key shift, in its acknowledgment of the political potency of heterogeneous collections of objects which range beyond the commodities which populate circuits of economic exchange. Both of these critical shifts are required by the primary material. As demonstrated in chapter one, middlebrow writing at the beginning of the twentieth century was deeply invested in the popularization of evolutionary theory. This investment must be taken seriously in order to provide a full account of middlebrow materiality. Thing theoretical accounts which grow out of a Marxist tradition of cultural materialism often modify and criticize Marx, but they remain hampered to greater or lesser degrees by his influence. A more accommodating form of material criticism, informed by Darwin and his popularisers, is required to respond to the specific historical circumstances which shaped middlebrow writing.

Re-framing Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy as advocates of object-oriented democracy in Latour's terms advances scholarship on these authors in two specific ways. It integrates Wells more fully into his middlebrow context in direct contrast to criticism which presents him as a prophet in the wilderness, arguing that his idiosyncratic collection of political beliefs are typical of middlebrow culture insofar as they develop in response to specific environmental pressures. In addition, it opens new possibilities for reading Bennett and Galsworthy as politically relevant and engaged in ways which current scholarship

overlooks. Although Woolf objects to the incompleteness of the novels written by all three on the grounds that they require the reader to engage in political action to feel as though he or she has completed the text, critical evaluation of what exactly this means for Bennett and Galsworthy has lagged behind similar evaluations of Wells. Comparing the three through the critical models provided by Grosz and Latour allows us to see that Wells was more typical of his peer group than previously assumed, and that the work of Bennett and Galsworthy contains more sophisticated political arguments than they are generally given credit for.

Conclusion

My application of material-culture criticism to the middlebrow writing of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy contributes both to historicist accounts of English middlebrow culture and the continued development of material methodologies. As Teresa Mangum argues, middlebrow culture in England is historically determined by an increase in education ushered in by the 1870 Education Act. By identifying evolutionary theory as one key sub-set of scientific knowledge which middlebrow writing popularised in the early twentieth century, I have discovered an especially productive critical framework for interpreting representations of the material world in the works of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. Because their depictions of characters' environments are strongly informed by the theories of Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley, these depictions are ripe for analysis. Physical environments are not simply window dressing for my chosen authors—they are important components of large-scale material systems which wield profound influence over their inhabitants. While the careful attention Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy pay to environmental influence suggests that a critical model which also focuses on the material world is an apt approach, dominant models of thing theory and material-culture criticism are, as I have established, insufficient to the task of interpreting these authors. The primary material requires the development of a critical approach drawing primarily on Darwinian, rather than Marxian, understandings of the material world. Elizabeth Grosz has already produced compelling work along these lines; my work in this dissertation furthers her initial groundwork by applying it to a particular set of

texts. My analysis of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy serves as a reminder that methodological approaches must always be adapted in order to suit the primary material. The pairing of material methodologies and English middlebrow writing proves fruitful for both our historical understanding of the middlebrow and our critical approaches to materiality.

In early-twentieth-century England, materiality was not a niche concern. Middlebrow and highbrow authors alike self-consciously leveraged their particular approaches to narrating the material world in order to define their particular style of writing. The discourses of materiality that appear in the early-twentieth-century 'Battle of the Brows' are also highly gendered. Male middlebrow writers associated their own writing with pragmatic, scientific models of materiality, while attributing an obsession with trivial aesthetic objects to women and participants in highbrow culture. In doing so, male writers used discourses of materiality to differentiate themselves from both their female middlebrow peers and their highbrow opponents. Although I focus on my writers' shared interest in evolutionary theory, my exploration of the intersection between materiality, gendered discourse, and the 'Battle of the Brows' demonstrates that evolutionary theory is far from the only topic that inspired materially-informed responses. Rather, questions of how people relate to larger material systems and what style of writing best captures that relationship remained active matters of debate from the turn of the century through the 1920s and 30s. As I demonstrate in my chapters on my authors' responses to World War One and their materially-engaged politics, Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy actively participated in cultural

debates throughout their long careers. While Woolf's characterization of the three men as old-fashioned 'Edwardians' has had a surprisingly long-lasting influence on their critical reception, I argue that their engagement with materiality actually ensured their relevance far beyond the Edwardian decade.

In addition to recuperating Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy's reputations as public figures through the First World War and beyond by taking their mid- and late-career writings more seriously than many critics, this dissertation seeks to alter how we understand the three men by considering them in comparison to each other. Comparing the three authors provides a necessary corrective to criticism on Wells by revealing ways in which his writing participated in mainstream conversations about environmental influence, as well as justifying further work on Bennett and Galsworthy on the grounds that their thematic complexity and political sophistication compares favourably to those of Wells. Although they are often listed together as typical 'Edwardians' or typical 'middlebrows', Wells Bennett and Galsworthy have not been analyzed as a group with the exception of a flawed study by William Bellamy which anachronistically applies psychoanalytic concepts to their writing. While my critical approach was also developed long after the death of my chosen authors, the primary texts supports a robust reading of materiality that is much more historically accurate than Bellamy's study. My exploration of the role played by environmental influence in the writing of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy is strongly determined by the national and historical circumstances in which their careers developed. Their initial interest in materiality was spurred by the popularization of evolutionary

theory following increased access to high school education in England, while their continued exploration of material systems largely took the physical constituents of England as its object of investigation.

The English middlebrow is, of course, only one strand of middlebrow writing. One possible direction for future research is to ask how the role of materiality in middlebrow culture works differently in different national contexts, particularly in the American middlebrow. While a similar interest in evolutionary theory is apparent in the works of American middlebrow authors such as Edith Wharton, Theodore Dreiser, and Upton Sinclair, there is a marked difference in their attitudes towards their physical surroundings due to America's relative youth, colonial background, and expansive landscape. Many of the middlebrow concerns that I identify in this dissertation—the interest in suburban development due to the long-established nature of English cities; the vulnerability of England to air attack as a small island—clearly cannot appear in the same form in the American context. This dissertation establishes that materiality is a viable critical framework for examining middlebrow literature, prompting further work on different sub-sets of middlebrow writing which engage with different kinds of environments, and are declared middlebrow for different purposes, by different agents, according to different hierarchies of value.

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