Feminist Narrative Ethics

Nash, Katherine Saunders

Published by The Ohio State University Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/42051

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1639044
INTRODUCTION

1. Susan Lanser’s *Fictions of Authority* includes a chapter on what she terms “covert authoriality” in modernist novels: “the illusion of ‘effacement’ that is constructed from a suppression of narrative self-consciousness, of contact between narrator and narratee, and of explicit markers of narrative stance” (104). She argues that “[t]he convention of ‘effaced’ authoriality seems to me to have carried particular double edges for modernist women novelists. On the one hand, overtly hegemonic forms of narration such as those appropriated by George Eliot and her successors were (in part perhaps for that reason) no longer desirable as literature; women writers would have to choose, as it were, between authoriality, with its fertile ground for figuring woman’s relation to public culture, and canonicity. On the other hand, the deconstruction of realist authority—which had never been significantly feminized—opened spaces for antithegemonic representations and alternative constructions of female subjectivity. But so long as female subjectivity remained marginal, so too could the writings that represented it” (104–5). Lanser’s chapter offers a number of persuasive insights, especially into Woolf’s “pivotal and liminal” relations to both feminism and modernism. However, I take some exception to Lanser’s analysis of Woolf’s *Pargiters* and *The Years* in my chapter 3.

2. For a concise overview of several directions in which scholars are expanding the parameters of modernism, see “The New Modernist Studies” by Mao and Walkowitz.

3. This definition applies to first-wave feminism as it was understood and practiced by many in Great Britain in the early twentieth century. It accurately describes the basis for ethical argumentation about gender adopted by the four authors in this study. The definition is my own, however, marked by twenty-first-century retrospection and by more than two decades of productive intersection between feminist theory and queer theory. I
doubt any feminists of the early twentieth century would have used precisely these words to define their beliefs. It is worth noting that the word *feminism* was often used pejoratively in this period and that, like many of their contemporaries, all of the authors in this study—even the ones devoted to women’s rights—distrusted it as a term. Moreover, feminist ideals at this historical moment were considered primarily in relation to middle- and upper-class white women; gender-based constraints felt by anyone else were far less frequently addressed. This latter point is one that motivates two of the four authors considered here.


5. Two works for which I have special admiration and respect, and that have greatly helped shape my thinking in this book, are Case’s *Plotting Women* and Shaw’s *Narrating Reality*.

6. Several such questions come to mind. What makes a novel feminist? Is feminist authorial intention required? Can narrative techniques be intrinsically ethical or political? Is a novel feminist if its reader perceives feminism in it? Can tacit, conditional, or irresolute feminism still be ethically potent? How does a novel’s production and reception history help shape its gender politics?

7. Winnett and Phelan have both offered attractive methods for de-emphasizing endings in order better to appreciate middles and beginnings. See especially Winnett’s reading of *Frankenstein* in “Coming Unstrung” and Phelan’s reading of *Great Expectations* in *Reading People*, *Reading Plots*. Both analyses demonstrate shortcomings in Peter Brooks’s famous, and strikingly gendered, privileging of narrative endings in *Reading for the Plot*.

8. I borrow the term “tensions” from Phelan’s model of narrative progression. “Tensions” here refers to discourse-level imbalances “of value, belief, opinion, knowledge, expectation” that create distance between the implied author and/or narrator and the reader. Phelan contrasts tensions with “instabilities,” which are unstable relations among characters in the story (*Reading People*, 15). Phelan’s definitions pertain not to any given reader but to one who is responsive to a narrative’s rhetorical cues; a person who, consciously or not, joins what Rabinowitz has named the authorial audience. In “Truth in Fiction” (1977) Rabinowitz established this crucial term to represent the hypothetical ideal audience for whom a given implied author is writing. Recently, though, rhetorical narratologists invested in narrative ethics have recognized the value of examining the judgments that texts prompt real (not just hypothetical) audiences to make (again, see esp. Phelan, *Living to Tell about It* and “Rhetoric, Ethics, and Narrative Communication”). Accordingly, although I employ Rabinowitz’s useful concepts of authorial and narrative audiences (particularly in my chapter 3), I work to establish, in all the novels under consideration, some ethical efficacy that goes beyond the hypothetical.

9. Of course, British novelists have been coordinating art and politics since the seventeenth century; the innovation at this moment was to coordinate specifically modernist techniques with politics.

10. For an excellent account of the broad spectrum of goals and objectives within the women’s movement—the vast majority of which were subsumed by suffragist activism at a (relatively) politically opportune moment—see Kent, *Sex and Suffrage*.

11. They stand apart from most others as well in having turned these generic experiments to ethical ends. Most writers in the modernist era were less invested than these writers in narrative ethics, let alone feminist narrative ethics.

12. “Career author” is Wayne Booth’s term for the composite figure that emerges
from similarities among implied authors in a single writer’s oeuvre (Critical Understanding, 270–71).

13. This is not to say that feminist scholars have not done impressive work with the implied author concept. Few narrative theorists have thought more responsibly or cogently about the implied author than Susan Lanser. Likewise, Alison Booth, Alison Case, Melba Cuddy-Keane, Susan Fraiman, Molly Hite, Kathy Mezei, Ruth Page, Catherine Romagnolo, Robyn Warhol, and Jean Wyatt, to name a just a few distinguished feminist scholars, have all engaged with—if not invested significantly in—the concept. My hope is to contribute to the conversation they have begun, in part by offering a new way of coordinating rhetorical narratology with feminist theory.


17. Chatman, Coming to Terms, chap. 5; Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, 89.


21. Serpell, discussion during NEH seminar “Narrative Ethics.”


23. Richardson, “Implied Author,” 7. Although I describe Richardson’s summary as representative of consensus, and I agree with his assertion that the implied author cannot be located inside the text, I take exception to his claim that the implied author does not communicate. Throughout this chapter, and indeed this book, I hope to demonstrate that the implied author’s fundamental purpose is communication.


26. It is commonplace to recognize that all writers, regardless of genre, elect to present themselves in certain ways. A student explaining in writing why she wants to drop a college course mid-semester will enact a different persona when she addresses her professor as opposed to her friends or her parents. The differences in those personae can be deduced by contrasting the reasons, evidence, and warrants she relies on in each separate written account. Contemporary fiction writers readily agreed, when I casually queried them, that the figure responsible for the creation of any written work is itself a construction, a fragment of the whole writing self, a representation of the writer at the time of writing. This common assumption takes various forms in narrative theory. For example, David Herman’s CAPA model as well as the playful argument mounted by Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck proudly denounce the implied author concept, but go on to acknowledge the vital importance of “distributed intention” and an author’s “self-presentation” in any given text (see Herman, “Narrative Theory and the Intentional Stance” and Herman and Vervaeck, “Secular Excommunication”).


28. In chapter 3, I cite many of the best efforts of scholars to deduce arguments from both the telling and the told in versions of Woolf’s novel as it was finally published in Britain and the United States. I do not suggest that it is impossible to find such arguments in the isolated, published artifact; but I am convinced that all such arguments are clearer and more meaningful in the context of Woolf’s revisions.
CHAPTER 1

2. Forster, *Feminine Note*, 21. Earlier in his speech, he observes that the couple that follows the rules of chivalry “are a fine and for the moment happy couple. He has strength, she charm. But the happiness leaves no tenderness behind it, and neither the strength nor the charm will ever be touched into beauty” (17).
7. Very likely it was precisely because it was an uncomfortable topic, and he needed to figure out what he thought about it. I do not wish to pin a teleology of enlightenment on the sequence of his published novels—by which logic *Howards End* would have more progressive gender politics than, say, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and thus would prove Forster’s growth. His last published novel, *A Passage to India*, is by no means his most progressive one in its treatment of women.
9. Forster muses in his *Commonplace Book*, circa 1930, that “[i]f women ever wanted to be by themselves all would be well. But I don’t believe they ever want to be, except for reasons of advertisement, and their instinct is never to let men be by themselves. This, I begin to see, is sex-war” (60). In 1932 he added, “One can run away from women, turn them out, or give in to them. No fourth course. Men sometimes want to be without women. Ah why is the converse not equally true?” (92–93).
14. For more on the relationship between gender identity and queer politics in Forster, see especially Martin and Piggford, *Queer Forster*; and Moffat, *Unrecorded History*. For more on gender identity and feminist politics in *A Passage to India*, see especially Showalter, “Marriage Fiction” and Silver, “Periphrasis.”
15. Goldman offers a useful overview of the scholarship in general on Forster and women in her 2007 *Cambridge Companion* chapter.
16. His scrutiny of conventional constraints on masculinity in *Maurice* is palpably self-confident, but of course, *Maurice* was shared in manuscript with a few select friends, and published only posthumously. Such self-assured, overt critique of gender roles simply does not appear in his other novels. A few have argued that Forster actually does offer radical critiques of gender in his heterosexual romances by constructing his female characters as mere stand-ins for men. They have claimed that Forster’s first three novels feature a “homoerotic subtext.” See, for example, Markley, “E. M. Forster’s Reconfigured Gaze.”
17. Langland, “Gesturing toward an Open Space,” 256.
18. Martin is among several writers, including Forster’s official biographer (Furbank) and friends (for example, Virginia Woolf), who have referred in passing to Forster’s
misogyny. After careful scrutiny of primary and secondary sources, I can find no evidence of actual misogyny in Forster’s speech or action, private or public. His sporadic exasperation with women hardly constitutes hatred. Moffat addresses this question directly in Unrecorded History.

19. Martin, “Umbrella,” 267. Martin demonstrates that Howards End, a family home inherited through the generations by women, is a thematic extension of Forster’s “political project that seeks to redefine a nonpatrarchal family” (270).

20. Although Markley stresses aesthetics more than politics in “Reconfigured Gaze,” his argument in that essay comes closer to a political reading of Room with a View than most.

21. These high stakes are both interpretive (that is, crucial to the understanding of individual narratives) and theoretical. One of narratology’s most important and enduring critical disagreements, the debate over Booth’s implied author concept, appears to have been resolved through rigorous theorization of unreliable narration. In Living to Tell about It, Phelan asserts that the concept of unreliable narration necessarily entails the implied author concept. Because interpretation of certain narratives requires the concept of unreliable narration, the implied author concept is also necessary at least in those cases. See my summary of the debate in this book’s introduction.


24. Graham, Indirections, 158.

25. Graham’s chapter “The Forster Angle” is a masterful analysis of the rhetorical effects of Forster’s double turn. He does not examine distance in any detail, though he mentions in passing the idea of distance between narrator and character. Of Howards End’s famous opening line, he remarks, “The narrator’s ‘One may as well’ . . . is a gesture that creates a little leeway between him and these apparently uncontrollable and interesting events. And across that leeway, within that narrated field, characters and scenes can take on a certain independence, and can eventually be seen to cast their own shadow, while the narrator’s shadow falls at a slightly different angle—the true Forster angle” (158).


27. Furbank’s description of the flesh-and-blood author corresponds nicely to this description. “[P]eople [at Cambridge] found him hard to place and tended to think of him as someone else’s friend. He went his own way. A little later Lytton Strachey coined the name ‘the taupe’ [i.e., mole] for him, and this was apt; he was drab-coloured and unobtrusive and came up in odd places and unexpected circles. There as something flitting and discontinuous about him; one minute you were talking with him intimately, the next he had withdrawn or simply disappeared. He was freakish and demure, yet at times could be earnestly direct, as if vast issues hung upon simple truth-telling. And all the time there was something hapless or silly-simple about him” (E. M. Forster, 1:66).

28. Rabinowitz observes: “Vladimir Nabokov appears to derive an almost sadistic satisfaction from knowing that his authorial audience is intellectually well above his actual readers—although it is possible that Nabokov in fact writes for an authorial audience quite close to his actual readers but writes in order to make that authorial audience feel intellectually inadequate” (“Truth in Fiction,” 126).

29. Not only does Booth consider Forster’s irony stable, he considers Forster as an exemplary practitioner. Forster along with Fielding, Sterne, Austen, George Eliot, Beerbohm, Twain, James, Emily Dickinson, and Auden “stand behind each ironic stroke as warrantors of the continuing validity of what we are about. Once we have read a few
pages by any of these authors we have experienced so many stable ironies that the appetite for more of them becomes essential to whatever effects the works intend” (Rhetoric of Irony, 176).

30. To my knowledge, only Graham, Langland, and Martin (quoted above) have made such deductions. A large number of critics have posited certain convictions based on Forster's biography or nonfiction and then demonstrated how formal qualities of his writing parallel those convictions: they have worked from the outside in to explain formal strategies based on supposed convictions. Rhetorical narrative ethics, by contrast, works from the inside out, deducing convictions from form. As Armstrong observes, “Asking questions about how formal textual strategies seek to engage a reader’s assumptions and conventions is a specifically literary way to do the work of social, political criticism” (Preface to Play and the Politics of Reading x).

31. See my chapter 3, on the ethics of persuasion, for more on the application of rhetorical narrative ethics to nonfiction, particularly the essay genre.


33. The casual comment quoted above from his Commonplace Book, in which he distances himself from about the suffrage-era feminist—“She shall have all she wants [politically]. I can still get away from her, I thought. I grudged her nothing except my company”—echoes felicitously here.

34. Booth, Rhetoric of Irony, 189.
35. Booth, Rhetoric of Irony, 176.

36. Booth deems Forster and Fielding to be two of the “great personal essayists” who “provide subtle mixtures that require us to shift gears constantly and skillfully. They do not invent a radically distinct mask and offer every word in his tone of voice; rather they develop a tone which becomes known as their true style and which includes frequent stable ironies” (Rhetoric of Irony, 185). Here Booth refers to Forster’s nonfiction. I do not think it may be applied to his prose fiction, however. In the latter, Forster’s narrators are not “radically distinct mask[s].” But I don’t believe it follows that, in the absence of radical, systematic difference between narrator and implied author, we should accept that the narrator’s style simply “becomes known” as the implied author’s style.

37. Martin and Piggford, Introduction to Queer Forster, 4.
38. Forster, Room with a View, chapter 1, passim.

39. Goodlad argues that Forster is practicing Young’s kind of ethics, enacting the “moral humility” of one who “starts with the assumption that one cannot see things from the other person’s perspective and waits to learn” (Young, “Asymmetrical Reciprocity” 49). In the context of analyzing Where Angels Fear to Tread, Goodlad argues of all Forster’s novels that, “Although the Forsterian narrator puts several viewpoints into play, subjecting each to varying modes of irony and assessment, such irredubibly different perspectives cannot, finally, be synthesized, balanced, or reconciled” (“Where Liberals Fear to Tread” 321). My idea of the parallax makes the opposite argument: Forster represents both positions in order to prompt the reader’s engagement with both sides simultaneously, and the onus to make an ethical assessment is the rhetorical reader’s.

40. Armstrong borrows Richard Rorty’s notion of ironic liberalism to make his case. See Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.

41. Armstrong, Play and the Politics of Reading, 110, 125.
42. Armstrong, Play and the Politics of Reading, 127, 129n2.

43. See Kettle, Introduction to the English Novel: “[T]he tentativeness, the humility of Forster’s attitude is not something to undervalue. The ‘perhapses’ that lie at the core of his novels, constantly pricking the facile generalization, hinting at the unpredictable
element in the most fully analyzed relationship, cannot be brushed aside as mere liberal pusillanimity. He seems to me a writer of scrupulous intelligence, of tough and abiding insights, who has never been afraid of the big issues or the difficult ones and has scorned to hide his doubts and weaknesses behind a façade of wordiness and self-protective conformity” (163).

44. Walsh, *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, chapter 4, esp. pages 70–78.

45. Walsh’s approach is influenced by the work of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, especially “Rhetoric and Relevance” and *Relevance*.

46. Walsh would likely respond to me that Forster’s narrator is simply the author narrating multiple, inconsistent perspectives. Of course, if we conflate implied author with narrator and posit one figure, we risk mistaking that figure’s provocative and productive inconsistency for unreliability. This would be a serious mistake, since Forster’s rhetorical purpose depends on the reliability of his narrator. But even if we were to conscientiously rule out such an interpretive mistake, agreeing to the reliability of the narrating figure, I believe Walsh’s elimination of the narrator concept makes a distinction where there is no difference. Walsh’s “narrating author” and my “narrator” are the same figure. What matters more than terminology is how this writer employs the resources at his disposal, and I contend that the figures who narrate Forster’s fiction and nonfiction alike are his indispensable resource for communicating complex, sometimes contradictory ideas.

47. Whereas my reading of Forster through his narrator focuses on gender politics, Armstrong’s focuses on sexual politics. He refers to both narrator and implied author as “closeted,” treating Forster’s real-life attraction to men as the linchpin. “Attuned to the closet’s double game of conforming while rebelling . . . a reader can understand the contradictions in the narrator’s performance as a provocation to reflect about the functions [of narrative realism] they disrupt rather than a failure to execute them” (*Play and the Politics of Reading*, 112). He notes, however, that “[w]ithout the biographical context of Forster’s closeted homosexuality and the guidance of the theory of the closet, the pattern I am describing would be invisible” (112n2). Particularly in his reading of *A Passage to India*, Armstrong makes a persuasive case that Forster concealed certain queer dimensions of his writing. On the subject of feminism, however—a topic from which Forster evidently had more personal and philosophical, formal and ethical distance—I contend that Forster’s patterns are both visible and meaningful independent of biographical context.

48. Emerson’s position echoes that of Edward Carpenter’s argument in his 1896 book *Love’s Coming-of-Age*. Tony Brown summarizes Carpenter’s argument: “[R]elations between the sexes will not improve until physical sexuality is seen as ‘pure and beautiful’ (*LCA*, 19), part of a tender relationship between two human individuals. This, however, will not be possible until woman is granted ‘the freedom to face man on an equality; to find, self-balanced, her natural relation to him; and to dispose of herself and of her sex perfectly freely, and not as a thrall must do’ (*LCA* 53)” (“Edward Carpenter,” 282). Brown illustrates the influence of Carpenter’s ideas on Forster’s drastic revision of *Room with a View* in manuscript (see esp. 285).


55. Rosecrance, *Forster's Narrative Vision*, 134. Not surprisingly, Armstrong cites this very passage by Rosecrance in making his case for Forster’s ironic liberalism. He applauds her recognition of the “narrator’s duplicity” but believes she “does not understand the contradictions of his closeted position, attempting to pass for normal even while secretly rebelling against the normative” (*Play and the Politics of Reading*, 112). I find both Armstrong’s conflation of narrator and implied author with the term *closeted* and his contention about sexual politics unpersuasive; see my note 47.

56. I am grateful to Steve Arata for helping me think through this extended passage. Along with his more serious insights, he observed that, under such counterfactual circumstances, Henry could conceivably inspire an equivalent dose of familial rage. If he were to bequeath Howards End to, say, a mistress or illegitimate child, to the National Trust, the Temperance Society, or a charity for fallen women, Henry’s status as patriarch would not protect him from the ensuing vitriol. As appealing as this scenario is, though, the fact remains that Forster and his narrator both resent the Wilcoxes’ normative denigration of their mother.


58. Although that is pure speculation, I have not read any essay or book that mentions Leonard Bast, even in passing, without trying somehow to account for this passage.

59. Margaret thinks to herself: “How wide the gulf between Henry as he was and Henry as Helen thought he ought to be! And she herself—hovering as usual between the two, now accepting men as they are, now yearning with her sister for Truth. Love and Truth—their warfare seems eternal” (227).

60. Dorrit Cohn’s felicitous phrase echoes here: “By leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent, the narrated monologue [free indirect discourse] casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation” (*Transparent Minds*, 103). Alan Palmer has sensibly observed that, in truth, narratology’s speech category bias lends a misleading glamour to free indirect discourse; he makes a convincing case against anything “peculiarly penumbral” about representations of latent mental functioning (*Fictional Minds*, 72–73). Forster’s free indirect discourse, however, articulates such a range of political positions that it deserves to be called both peculiar and penumbral.

61. “Kind” as a misnomer for “domineering” appears in the passage just quoted—“unweeded kindness”—as well as earlier in the novel, in a different context. Margaret’s aunt Mrs. Munt meets Charles Wilcox at the train station and asks him to drive her to Howards End. Before they depart, he shouts rudely at a clerk, muttering to Mrs. Munt that, “if I had my way, the whole lot of ’em should get the sack.” Then he asks, “May I help you in?” She accepts his offer. “She was more civil than she had intended, but really this young man was very kind. Moreover, she was a little afraid of him: his self-possession was extraordinary” (14).


**CHAPTER 2**


2. An example of unfair play can illustrate how seriously this responsibility was taken. One very famous example is Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), in which (spoiler alert) the character-narrator does not reveal to the reader that
he is the murderer until he is unmasked by the detective, Poirot, at the end of the novel. It is also, therefore, an equally famous example of unreliable narration. It is indicative of the strong feelings inspired by perceived unfair play that outrage is still felt over eighty-five years after its publication. Interestingly, and less well known, Christie was not deterred by the controversy and repeated the trick forty years later in *Endless Night* (1967).


4. Focalization takes a number of different forms. Internal focalization obtains when the act of narration is informed by—and restricted to—the private, inner thoughts of a focalizer. In external focalization, the point of view resides outside of the characters and events being narrated, and thus is restricted to what those characters and events look like on the outside. But many acts of focalization are not purely internal or external. To be psychologically realistic, for instance, a character-narrator should not be able to access a fellow character’s inner thoughts. However, one can easily find examples of internal and external focalization breaking that rule, presenting other characters’ inside views. Rimmon-Kenan proposes a useful distinction, applicable to both internal and external, between *focalization from within* and *focalization from without* (*Narrative Fiction*, 77–78, 82). Focalization from within benefits from the inside views of characters other than the focalizer; focalization from without is restricted exclusively to the external appearance of those characters. In the current chapter as well as chapter 4 of this book, I depend on Rimmon-Kenan’s fine distinctions to explicate several complex acts of telling by Sayers and Powys.

5. A more detailed account of Sayers’s use of focalization follows later in this chapter. In short: before 1932’s *Have His Carcase*, the majority of scenes in Sayers’s novels, including many entire chapters, feature external focalization by an extradiegetic narrator who selectively presents Peter’s perceptual point of view (what he sees: external focalization from without) and occasionally his conceptual point of view (what he deduces: external focalization from within). I describe him as focalizer here, not to disregard the importance of the extradiegetic narrator, but because fair play in the novels depends on the external focalization of Peter’s perceptions and deductions. Internal focalization by Peter or any other character is rare before *Have His Carcase*.

6. In his taxonomy of friendships between implied authors and implied readers in *The Company We Keep*, Booth observes, “Authors of murder mysteries often testify to immense labor designed to deceive us: weeks and months spent building a puzzle that we will never spend longer than a few hours on, as we follow, more or less energetically while the knots are tied and untied. It is as if they were our servants, hired to entertain us for an hour, with no expectation that we would ever invite them to come live with us and be our loves” (186). I contend that in the Harriet Vane novels Sayers resists and corrects the imbalance between servant and employer. Her implied author offers its authorial audience an extended opportunity for “living in friendship” based on a feminist ethos.


11. Sayers comments on the perceived pressure of real time in a 1931 essay: “A year or two ago, it was confidently predicted that the detective-story was going to slump heavily. It was pointed out that all the possible combinations and permutations would shortly be exhausted. . . . So far, however, publishers’ sales do not support this rather depressing theory. In spite of unfavourable world-conditions, they show, in this country at any rate, a solid and satisfying steadiness, and this is a healthy sign. . . . [But] so hard have detective-writers worked in the last half-century, that there are now remarkably few tricks the reader does not know.” Introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, 2: 12, 19.

12. Chesterton, “Errors about Detective Stories,” 69. This essay was originally published in the *Illustrated London News* on 28 August 1920.

13. In a memorable but not especially flattering analogy, Sayers describes her ideal reader: “His co-operation is all-important. He must—and, to do him justice, he nearly always does—come to his reading with an alert and amiable mind. The reader we mystery-mongers really like to lead for our little walk up the garden comes out like an intelligent terrier, ears cocked and tail wagging, ready to run after what is thrown to him and to root cheerfully among the shrubbery till he finds it.” Introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, 2:22.


15. Her introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* (1928) was published in the United States in 1929 as the introduction to *The Omnibus of Crime*.


23. Chesterton, “How to Write a Detective Story,” 20. This essay was originally published in *Hearst’s International* in November 1921.


26. For definitions and more examples of external and internal focalization, both of which may be from within or from without, see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 75–78.


29. For more on Peter’s employment of “superfluous” women, see Kenney, “Detecting a Novel Use for Spinsters”; and Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers, esp. 200–201.

30. If Peter’s social class were the only determining factor in his methodology, critics such as Q. D. Leavis, Julian Symons, and Colin Watson, who decry Sayers as a “vulgar admirer of the aristocracy,” might have more substance for their accusations. The genre convention that a detective’s methodology is a window onto that of the implied author leads some readers to treat everything in the detective’s mind as little more than an indi-
cator of his creator’s thoughts. As Sayers’s series develops, however, she transforms him from a fantastic superman into a character with certain habits of mind and characteristic reasoning skills.

31. Citing Sayers’s disappointments in several personal relationships with men, critics have sometimes disparaged her by claiming that she created Wimsey merely to satisfy her own romantic fantasies. This seems to me a rather reductive, sexist application of biographical detail. Other critics, with an eye more on genre convention than biography, suggest that the real Sayers must have been in love with Wimsey because, as an implied author, she repeatedly prompts the reader’s admiration and affection for him. Although such an inference about the flesh-and-blood author can never be definitively disproven, I find no evidence that the implied author of the Wimsey series is in love with the protagonist.

32. Previous scholarship on Harriet tends to divide into two camps. The first, larger camp consists of arguments that focus primarily on the emotional impact of her focalization. Such studies typically approach Harriet’s viewpoint mainly as an opportunity for seeing Peter through new eyes: as a chance for Sayers to endow her protagonist with humane complexity, and an occasion for the reader’s appreciation of a new, romantic side of Peter’s ever-more-endearing character. This camp offers perceptions that are good as far as they go, but they don’t go far enough; they overemphasize her role as love interest, to the detriment of her richness as a character-focalizer. The other camp stresses her role as detective, comparing her methodology with Peter’s. These arguments tend to overlook all the evidence that Harriet is not, and does not want to be, a detective.


34. Many scholars take at face value Sayers’s claim that although Peter was a source of “monstrous weariness” to her, her “puppets” had resisted her original “infanticidal” intention to end the series with Strong Poison. But biographer and scholar Barbara Reynolds sensibly points out that Sayers, “who rather enjoyed pulling the wool over her readers’ eyes,” might be embellishing a bit in this account of her creative process. She had just signed a contract with her publisher for a book per year; even if the contract did not mandate that she write Peter Wimsey books, presumably (as Reynolds observes) the publisher would have been dismayed to find the lucrative protagonist retired by year’s end (Dorothy L. Sayers, 229–30).

35. Obviously, it is possible that earlier drafts of the manuscript once existed or have not yet been found. The extant manuscript, held at the Wade Center, is believed to be the first and only draft she composed, and Sayers typically wrote very clean first drafts, but it is always possible she made an exception in this case. Because she wrote in notebooks with detachable pages, it would have been easy for her to rewrite and replace individual pages that bore too many revisions, without leaving any trace of having done so. Sayers scholar Laura Simmons attests that, having read a large number of manuscripts of Sayers’s theological nonfiction “in which we have a handwritten draft and a typed draft, . . . there’s usually little difference between them. Her rewrites of handwritten documents might involve a few sentences or at most a paragraph, but I remember very little where there were wholesale changes of the sort Dr. Nash is exploring.” E-mail communication, 16 June 2010.

36. Sayers, holograph MS of “Strong Poison,” 175.


39. The murder weapon’s meaning is obscured by Harriet’s focalization: “Beyond a very slight crack on the ivory handle, it showed no very striking peculiarities” (51).
Similarly, evidence given by Farmer Newcombe, rendered in indirect discourse and focalized by Harriet, appears as follows: “No, he never mowed that meadow on account of the (agricultural and botanical detail of which Harriet did not grasp the significance). No, Mr. Newcombe wouldn’t be about in that meadow much, no, nor yet the men, on account of its lying a long way from the rest of his land (interminable historical detail dealing with the distribution of tenancies and glebe round about that district, in which Harriet became completely lost), nor they wouldn’t need to . . . ” (212).

40. Miss Climpson and Miss Murchison are employed at Peter’s Cattery, a typing bureau front for covert detective work (Strong Poison, 49–50; for more on the Cattery, see Kenney, “Detecting a Novel Use for Spinsters”). Marjorie, Sylvia, and Eiluned have inside information about Harriet because, as artists, they are professionally connected to the writers Philip Boyes and Harriet (Strong Poison, 80, 89, 92–95). Mrs. Pettican and Hannah Westlock are household employees of Boyes’s cousin, Mr. Urquhart, and key witnesses to Boyes’s last dinner (Strong Poison, 97–105).

41. Sayers’s technique is an instance of Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia (see “Discourse in the Novel,” esp. 280–85 and 324–31).

42. See Sayers, Introduction to Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror, 1:39. Reynolds writes of Harriet and Peter in Gaudy Night: “As readers we are involved in their problem and want it to be resolved, as we are involved in Philip Trent’s love for Mrs Manderson in E. C. Bentley’s Trent’s Last Case. There had always been a number of similarities, especially in mannerisms, between Trent and Wimsey. Dorothy confessed to E. C. Bentley how ashamed she was to think how much her ‘poor Peter’ owed to his Trent” (Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers, 257).

43. Although Kermode irritably objects to the phrase “‘the world we know,’ which suggests that our reading is always going to be the one prescribed by the narrator,” and exhorts us not to be the kind of “docile” reader who submits willingly to such conscription, I propose that neither Bentley nor Sayers is guilty of conflating the authorial audience with “the world” (Kermode, Novel and Narrative, 11).

44. See Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds’s dire pronouncements about same-sex communities in Sexual Inversion (1897).


CHAPTER 3

1. Woolf, The Years, 162.

2. As many Woolf scholars have been quick to point out, her choice to privilege fact over vision is striking in an author who had famously criticized Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy for overemphasizing material details in their novels. See esp. Woolf’s essays “Modern Novels” (1919) and “Character in Fiction” (1924) in Essays.


4. Margaret Comstock remarks that “The way the novel is written discourages a reader’s inclination to ‘march in step after a leader’—a phrase central to The Years. There is no character whose life is captivating; the author’s voice is unusually unobtrusive; there is not even any “beautiful prose.” The novel is made up largely of people talking to one another, and not very articulately at that. Out of these materials Woolf creates for her readers the opportunity available to some of her characters: the chance
to achieve meaning in a fragmentary world and join the attempt to fill “the present moment . . . fuller and fuller, with the past, the present, and the future, until it shown, whole, bright, deep with understanding” (Years, 406). . . . People who experience their own lives in this way are not the sort who will stand waiting to see the king” (Comstock, “Loudspeaker and the Human Voice,” 254).


6. Woolf’s usual practice was to write longhand in the mornings and then type her morning’s work in the afternoons. Between October 1932 and January 1936 she filled eight holograph notebooks and produced a concurrent typescript. It is impossible to compare holograph with typescript since only eight pages of her typescript are known still to exist (Radin, Virginia Woolf’s The Years, 111). Her first galleys, set in March 1936, much more closely resemble the novel than the holograph (116), though the galleys number 600 pages and the first published British edition is only 472. For more on the typescripts, see Susan Squier, “A Track of Our Own.” For more on the relationship between galleys and the first U.S. edition, see Radin, “Two Enormous Chunks” and Virginia Woolf’s The Years, chapters 7–8.

7. The most reasonable among these explanations is that Woolf would have feared losing her audience, through an unfamiliar genre, through objectionable politics, or both.

8. The editor of the only published transcription, which includes just two of the eight holograph volumes, makes strong claims about Woolf’s intentionality in the act of revision, but bases them on discredited psychoanalytic speculation (Leaska, Introduction to The Pargiters, esp. xiii–xx).

9. Radin, Virginia Woolf’s The Years, xxi.

10. Radin speculates a good bit about Woolf’s private intentions and beliefs, though she does not always supply firm textual evidence (from either novel or personal papers) to support her claims. For example: “It must have become increasingly obvious to her that [the essays] were a clumsy device that impeded the narrative flow of the novel,” she states. “What their presence in the early chapters does indicate is the extent to which Woolf felt the creative and analytic functions of the brain to be essentially separate” (Virginia Woolf’s The Years, 33–34). Later, she speculates about why, in revision, Woolf diminished the role of the character Elvira. “Perhaps Woolf feared that Elvira might take over the novel because she sensed that this character expressed something in herself that could get out of control. . . . Elvira acts as a mouthpiece for Woolf’s attempts to deal with her material, a way of talking to herself as she goes along” (40, 46). “It was Woolf’s deepest belief that . . . ” (35) “It is possible to conjecture that . . . ” (54) “It had been her intention to. . . . ” (55).


12. For more on Leaska’s argument about pargeting, see his introduction to The Pargiters as well as his more forceful essay “Virginia Woolf, the Pargeter.”

13. See in particular McGann, A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism: “This training, or contamination, begins with the author’s first revisions and editorial corrections, and it continues through the proof stage, the publication, and the subsequent reprintings both during and after the poet’s lifetime. Many persons besides the author are engaged in these events, and the entire process constitutes the life of an important social institution at the center of which is the literary work itself (the ‘work’ being a series of specific ‘texts,’ a series of specific acts of production, and the entire process which both of these series constitute). For the textual critic, all phases and aspects of these matters are relevant” (52–53). See also McGann, Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation: “[W]e shall not be able to understand the significance of these literary acts—the meaning of
their meanings—unless we are able to situate them in the larger sociohistorical field that sanctions their operations. ‘Meaning,’ in life as well as in its processes of reflection and self-reflection (including literature), is a social event, a complex engagement between various people and groups” (viii–ix).

14. This fallacy is what S. M. Parrish has called the “Whig interpretation of literature.” He argues that overreliance on “authorial intention” leads textual critics to treat “discarded variants, abandoned versions” as “false starts, misjudgments, or lapses of taste on the part of the [author]” that are “happily rectified as the work, by obedience to some inner logic, reaches final form” (“Whig,” 344–45). Parrish argues instead that “the language of early versions, especially when those versions are complete, [should] be valued not for what it contributed to the late versions, not as a step in an inevitably evolving design, but for its own sake, as an achievement separate from the later history of the text” (345).


17. Lanser’s violent word “sacrificed” corresponds to other prominent Woolf critics on the same subject: Hermione Lee laments Woolf’s “killing of the novel that lies buried underneath The Years,” (Lee, “Introduction,” xvi); Eleanor McNees puts it that Woolf “broke the structural backbone of the novel” through her “torturous” revision process (“Introduction,” xli). In a comic twist of Woolf’s own words, Mark Spilka describes his revulsion at reading this “murky and tedious” novel by asking how much “dank rice pudding we can ourselves stomach without ourselves exploding” (“New Life in the Works,” 179, 183).

18. As textual scholars Julia Briggs, D. F. McKenzie, and Brenda Silver have observed, Woolf’s published texts are not self-identical, either. Silver notes that Woolf often consciously introduced variants in her published texts “as she corrected two sets of identical page proofs, one for the Hogarth Press and one for her American publishers. . . . Woolf did not seem to care about ‘final authorial intention’ or a stable text. She knowingly set out different versions, different texts” (“Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice,” 196). Briggs and McKenzie assert that “surprisingly little attention has been paid to her practice as a reviser of her own work” and that “despite ample evidence of Woolf’s extensive revision of her work before publication, there has been a reluctance to admit that the process of revision also extended beyond initial publication. . . . Woolf created two distinct lines of textual transmission . . . so that, in effect, her British and American readers encounter different novels” (“Between the Texts,” 144, 147, 152). They do note, however, that the American and British versions of The Years are more similar to one another than are most of the earlier novels (156).


20. Phelan, Living to Tell about It, 45.


22. Cuddy-Keane notes that Woolf’s theory and practice preceded by a number of years Mikhail Bakhtin’s canonized establishment of the same concept in “Discourse Typology in Prose.” For more on the relationship between Bakhtin’s and Woolf’s approaches to dialogism, see “The Rhetoric of Feminist Conversation,” pp. 137–39.

23. This ethical conviction is consonant, of course, with historically specific generic conventions, as I explore further in this book’s introduction. In particular, Woolf’s approach matches the modernist proclivity for impersonal narration. It is worth noting, though, that her emphasis on decentered impersonality is more pronounced and experimental than most modernists.
25. Woolf, A Writer’s Diary, 16 August 1933.
26. A number of critics have commented on the repetition of motifs in this novel, though none of them to my knowledge has examined the ethical dimension of repetition. Grace Radin observes that the novel’s “reverberative structure” does not exist in the manuscript. She describes Woolf as superimposing it on her narrative only after reaching the galleys stage. Radin further claims that repetition lends the novel a “unity” that is missing in the manuscript (“‘Two Enormous Chunks,’” xxii). See also Robert Caserio’s work on “tychism” and the recurrent trope of missed opportunities (Novel in England, 68–79).
29. Lanser, Fictions of Authority, 104.
31. This is my transcription from Woolf’s holograph MS of [The Years], vol. 3, pp. 80–81 (cased M42, dated 11 October 1932–15 November 1934, held at the Berg Collection). All subsequent quotations employed in this chapter appear in the first two volumes of the manuscript, which was officially transcribed and published by Mitchell Leaska in The Pargiters in 1977. Page citations are provided first of the manuscript and then, in brackets, of Leaska’s transcription.
32. This, of course, is the explicit and central claim of Woolf’s next book, Three Guineas: that patriarchal violence worldwide may be traced to the way fathers treat their daughters and husbands treat their wives.
33. Like A Room of One’s Own, this project began as a lecture. And like Room, its audience was young, upwardly mobile women. The lecture that was later revised and published as “Professions for Women” was delivered to the Junior Council of the London and National Society for Women’s Service on 21 January 1931. The Junior Council was largely comprised of young, professional women (Doughan and Gordon, Women, Clubs and Associations in Britain, 58). In her diary entry on the previous day, Woolf noted, “I have this moment, while having my bath, conceived an entire new book—a sequel to A Room of One’s Own—about the sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps—Lord how exciting! This sprang out of my paper to be read on Wednesday to Pippa’s society (Writer’s Diary, 20 January 1931).
34. See Rabinowitz, “Truth in Fiction,” 127. We find a comparable rhetorical relationship in both A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas. In both cases the narrative audience “overhears” a nonfictional address, in the former through lecture and in the latter as a series of letters. Our rhetorical models aren’t very subtle for dealing with pretended “real” address.
35. By definition, authorial audiences read self-consciously. Unlike narrative audiences, which lose themselves in narration, believing that the narrator and story are real, authorial audiences know they are reading books.
36. Moreover, one must recognize that the death of the mother will not in itself end Victorian gender conventions. Their confinement isn’t going to end when the mother dies; this isn’t an instability between mother and daughters; it’s a societal problem that is represented self-consciously by an artist highlighting the thematic functions of her characters.
38. It has frequently been noted that Woolf granted her characters lengthy speeches
and internal monologues in manuscript, but revised by interrupting, abbreviating, or altogether silencing those characters’ self-expression in the novel. But chapter 2 of the manuscript provides a good example of two characters, Rose and Bobby, whose speech is already interrupted and truncated. Focalized through Rose, only snippets of the nurse’s conversation are overheard; Bobby prevents Rose from forming her question; his own speech breaks off with a dash; Rose’s conversations with the shopkeeper, her nurse, and Eleanor all falter through her self-censorship. In this unusual case, silence operates in the manuscript as a resource for prompting ethical reading.

39. The ethics of the told, consisting in the drama of assault, depicts an obvious harm to women. But the subtler gender hierarchy that turns Bobby into a misogynist is the greater harm, and this is rendered largely through the ethics of the telling. Thus the “story” of Woolf’s persuasion of her authorial audience is not itself a narrative and yet it does contribute to her narrative ethics as well as the narrativity of the draft.

40. Radin proposes that Woolf made two sea changes: “Woolf’s new scheme [dated 25 April 1933 in the diary] is ambitious; she will try to combine fact and vision, to write a novel that is as objective as Night and Day and as introspective as The Waves. Thus the progress of the novel is a kind of dialectic; first she swings entirely to fact, excluding vision; then [after 2 February 1933] she is tempted to poetry or vision (they are nearly synonymous here) and finally to an idea for fusion, with both modes going on at once” (Virginia Woolf’s The Years, 40). Radin claims that the first two volumes of holograph are “entirely” devoted to fact; that Woolf’s development in the next volumes of her character Elvira represents experimentation with vision; and that, by the time Woolf revised Elvira into the novel’s character Sara, she had established “fusion.”

CHAPTER 4

1. Powys, A Glastonbury Romance, 888, 323.
2. Powys was one of only two defense witnesses in this trial. For a superb account and analysis of the Ulysses trials of 1921 and 1933, see Vanderham, James Joyce and Censorship.
3. For more on these strategies, see in particular Flint, Woman Reader; Golden, Images of the Woman Reader; and Phegley, Educating the Proper Woman Reader.
4. Flint, Woman Reader, 266.
5. Flint, Woman Reader, 15.
7. Stewart, Dear Reader, 344.
8. I borrow the term “intermental” from Alan Palmer, whose studies Fictional Minds and Social Minds in the Novel apply cognitive science to narratology in order to examine the effect fictional figures’ minds have upon one another. See this chapter’s note 19.
11. In addition to the works by Susan Winnett and Peter Brooks discussed at length in this essay, see particularly Judith Roof, Come As You Are; Joseph Allen Boone, Libidinal Currents; and Ross Chambers, Story and Situation.
12. As Roof and Winnett, among others, have observed, this formulation betrays a powerful heterosexual bias.
14. “I would like to explore what would happen if, having recognized the Master-plot’s reliance on male morphology and male experience, we retained the general narrative pattern of tension and resolution (‘tumescence and detumescence,’ ‘arousal and significant discharge’) and simply substituted for the male experience an analogously representable female one” (Winnett, “Coming Unstrung,” 508).

15. Powys’s reception history is so fraught with the regrettable conflation of the flesh-and-blood Powys with his narrators that a strong argument for his implied author may serve as a corrective to earlier scholarship. Such conflation, of course, underestimates differences of expression, perspective, and diegetic agenda that Powys’s narrators contribute to the novels. Scholars who insist on finding Powys the man in his narratives tend also to assume that Powys lacked control over his craft as a novelist. This single error of conflation has exacerbated the critical undervaluation of Powys’s oeuvre.

16. For Glastonbury as a palimpsest, see the description of Number Two’s cluttered antiques shop as a miniature representation of the town’s history: “Glastonbury here, layer by layer through the centuries, was revealed in certain significant petrifications, certain frozen gestures of the flowing spirit of life” (345). With its basement full of books, and its management under the alternating control of the hapless Bartholomew Jones and the sadistic bookworm Owen Evans, the shop serves as a mise en abyme of the town. Glastonbury’s personality and vivacity are remarked upon at pages 694 (“They both felt as if Glastonbury, at least, in her sleep, were an actual, living Creature!”), 795 (“Where the guide books make their great mistake . . . is in treating Glastonbury as a fragment of history, instead of something that’s making history”), 801–2 (“Glastonbury will be a living entity again”), and 998–99 (“Glastonbury a person? . . . These old, obstinate, irrational indigenes of the place understood this wayward and mysterious Personality better than any philosophical triumvirate could do, and had expressed their feeling through the mouth of this wide-eyed child!”). In the last passage, the wide-eyed child is, of course, a young girl—a fact whose significance will be evident later in my argument.

17. The insistence on narrative closure, so prominent in Brooks, is less conspicuous in Gerald Prince’s definition of narrativity as “[t]he set of properties characterizing narrative and distinguishing it from nonnarrative. . . . The degree of narrativity of a given narrative depends partly on the extent to which that narrative fulfills a receiver’s desire by representing oriented temporal wholes (prospectively from beginning to end and retrospectively from end to beginning), involving a conflict, consisting of discrete, specific, and positive situations of a human(ized) project and world” (Dictionary of Narratology, 65).

18. Although it is hard to imagine two authors more dissimilar than Virginia Woolf and John Cowper Powys, it is worth noting that The Years, like Glastonbury, refuses to focus on any one character and is characterized by anticlimax and dispersed (as opposed to totalizing) meaning.

19. In Fictional Minds, Palmer argues that groups of two or more people—real and fictional alike—can carry out mental functions such as assessment, problem-solving, emotion, response to social norms, and decision-making on an intermental plane (see esp. 208–9, 218–30). Drawing on the fields of cognitive science, psychology, and psycholinguistics, Palmer’s study develops the notion of socially extended cognition, or intersubjectivity, in conjunction with what he terms situated identity. Intersubjectivity is defined as “the process in which mental activity—including conscious awareness, motives and intentions, cognitions, and emotions—is transferred between minds . . . [it] manifests itself as an immediate sympathetic awareness of feelings and conscious, purposeful intelligence in others” (Clark and Chalmers, “The Extended Mind,” 415–16). Situated
identity is the notion that an individual’s mind is constituted in part by other persons, settings, and circumstances. Intermental thinking in Glastonbury occurs with such frequency and suggestive significance that Powys’s use of it warrants further study. For an excellent application of this concept, see Palmer’s extended reading of the Middlemarch mind in Social Minds in the Novel.

20. I am grateful to Robert Caserio for suggesting this pun to me in conversation at the Narrative Conference.

21. Here is the full quotation: “Mr. Geard was not good at concentrated thinking. His deepest thoughts always came to him, as the author of Faust declared his did, crying, like happy children, ‘Here we are!’ and the result of this was that a brief half an hour spent in composing his speech for that night exhausted him far more than the most protracted physical exhaustion would have done. He found himself caught and, as it were, pilloried, in the repetition of certain particular phrases. This happened to him every time he desisted his vague, rich, semi-erotic feelings and tried to condense his scheme into a rational statement, and it became really troublesome when, with his eyes tightly closed, he set himself to call up that audience of people and to imagine their response to what he said” (332).


23. The reading of identities does not in any way suggest deep, profound, or lasting understanding. The connection between Nell and Sam is narrated with emphatic emphasis on how satisfying their union is for both of them. But this connection does not last long. Nell’s “sublime realism” about Sam and their romantic union ends soon after they get out of bed (310).

24. The narrator remarks that even a casual, outside observer—a person conspicuously unlike the reader, who is unlikely to be casual or outside the story-world this far into the novel—would find this tableau of the rapt audience noteworthy: to such an outsider “it would have been of fascinating interest to note the varieties of human types gathered so close together” (557).

25. For more on wandering attention and the rhythms of reading, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, Boredom, and Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (262–64).

26. At a crucial moment just before the novel’s crisis, the Watchers surface again in the discourse: “The invisible watchers—those scientific collectors of interesting human experiences in this ancient town—communicated to one another the conclusion that certain essences and revelations are caught and appropriated by an old maiden lady, like Miss Crow, which are never touched by turbulent, tormented lives like those of Mr. Evans and Codfin” (991). Here, at a crucial moment in the text, the Watchers do nothing more than espouse a central tenet of Powys’s narrative: that girls and women (particularly unmarried ones) have a special capacity for receptivity. By this point not only is the reader well aware of this notion, but the implied reading experience has been largely determined by it. The Watchers, however, appear to be making the discovery for the first time, which calls attention to the fact that the reader has surpassed the Watchers in interpreting Glastonbury. The Watchers’ exclusive interest in the appearances of things prevents their making profound inferences, and even a fairly simple deduction on the reader’s part goes beyond the Watchers’ understanding. Through the Watchers, Powys may be revealing an anxiety about how closely readers will attend to the overabundance of details at his novel’s surface.

27. Here is Sam Dekker: “[W]ithout being in the least conscious of the importance for humanity of the psychic law he had blundered upon or of its rarity in the world, Sam had found out that when a person is liberated from possessiveness, from ambition, from
the exigencies of desire, from domestic claims, from every sort of authority over others, he can enjoy sideways and incidentally, as he follows any sort of labour or quest the most exquisite trances of absorption into the mysterious essence of any patch of earth-mould, or any fragment of gravel, or any slab of paving-stone, or any tangle of weeds, or any lump of turf that he may come upon as he goes along” (927). As a romance, of course, A Glastonbury Romance may be expected to be modeled on a quest plot. Sam’s spiritual journey throughout the text bears resemblance to a quest, but notably it does not culminate in his dramatic vision of the Grail, which occurs midway through the novel, but rather in his anticlimactic homecoming toward novel’s end, where he discovers that Nell, having finally given up on waiting for him, has left.

28. Mad Bet’s snake-nerve is described on pp. 1047–49; Owen Evans’s is described most vividly and directly on pp. 1004, 1012, 1020f, and 1054.


30. See, for example, G. Wilson Knight, “Powys and the Kundalini Serpent”; and Brebner, The Demon Within.


32. The flesh-and-blood Powys had a horror of heterosexual coitus, and his early work makes clear the connection he saw between mental influence (particularly what I term as “intermental penetration”) and physical violence. His stance on homoeroticism, however, is less well defined. In his collected Letters to Henry Miller, for example, Powys refers at one point to his “twice inverted lesbianism” (19) but later asserts that “I have not got the faintest touch of homo-sexuality in me” (96). Caserio gives a smart reading of the anal eroticism of Sam’s Grail vision, arguing for the centrality of anal eroticism and homoeroticism in the novel, and asserting that the “penetrative counter-aggression of the Grail appears to release Sam from his sadism” (“Politics and Sex,” 99). Caserio does not characterize this counter-aggression as sadistic. He asserts convincingly that Powys does not seek to redeem either anal eroticism or sadism in the novel, but we should note that the counter-penetration that redeems Sam would be conspicuously unlikely in a heterosexual union with his beloved Nell.

CONCLUSION

1. As Spacks has observed, Evelina manages to prevent Mr. Macartney’s suicide attempt by collapsing four times: she saves his life, but as passively as possible (discussion, April 3, 2001).

2. Spacks, Desire and Truth, 143.