

Reading Matter: Modernism and the Book

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Abstract

The library is an obsessional site in literary modernism. From the incendiary impulses of F. T. Marinetti to Walter Benjamin's sedate unpacking of his library, modernists characterize the library as a repository of the material past. In particular, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and E. M. Forster demonstrate a striking attunement to the materiality of books, archives, and libraries in their fiction. In *The House of Mirth*, books are aesthetic objects as well as commodities that advertise cultural capital. The contents of a private archive threaten public scandal in *The Aspern Papers*. Private libraries display cultural taste in *Howards End* and *The Age of Innocence*. With the rise of the public library movement, the obsolescence of the nineteenth-century private library, and the burning and blasting of books during warfare, these texts offered a renewed recognition that libraries and books, as metonyms of culture, are disputed objects. Modernist novels reflect a crisis in which bibliophilia encounters biblioclasm. A genuine appreciation of the past, embodied in the compulsions of reading, writing, editing, and collecting books, belies the desire to be unburdened of material relics.

Profound engagement with the past marks modern fiction. James, Wharton, and Forster, as well as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Evelyn Waugh, figure the reading of classics as a prerequisite to writing them. The bibliophilia that grips characters manifests the modernists' preoccupation with cultural heritage. Thus the past intrudes on libraries, sometimes in violent ways. Falling books crush Leonard Bast in *Howards End*. In Woolf's *Orlando*, books

flood the front hall of a bibliophile who orders “the whole of Victorian literature” from a London bookseller. Reading is an enthralling but potentially dangerous activity. Confronted by rows of ageless classics, the modern writer is haunted by the spectre of literary influence in the library. In this regard, James, Wharton, and Forster revive Swift’s “battle of the books.” The modernists’ jealous custody of the past and their keen sense of property contradict their resentment about guardianship and their desire to be dispossessed of the past.

Résumé

Dans la littérature moderniste, la bibliothèque est un lieu d'obsessions. Des pulsions incendiaires de F.T. Marinetti au déballage discret de la bibliothèque de Walter Benjamin, les modernistes considèrent la bibliothèque comme un lieu où s'accumulent les mémoires du passé. Dans leur œuvre de fiction, des auteurs comme Henry James, Edith Wharton et E. M. Forster témoignent d'une harmonie profonde avec les livres, les archives et les bibliothèques. Dans *The House of Mirth*, les livres sont non seulement des objets esthétiques, mais ils sont également les reflets d'une culture. Dans *The Aspern Papers*, le contenu d'une archive privée risque de créer un scandale public. Dans *Howards End* et *The Age of Innocence*, les bibliothèques privées sont une vitrine des goûts culturels. Avec l'implantation des bibliothèques publiques, la désuétude de la bibliothèque privée du XIX^e siècle ainsi que les incendies et les destructions de livres qui ont eu lieu pendant la guerre, ces œuvres ont permis de reconnaître à nouveau que les bibliothèques et les livres, en tant que métissage des cultures, sont des objets de convoitise. Les romans modernistes reflètent cette crise où s'affrontent d'un côté les collectionneurs de livres et de l'autre, ceux qui veulent les détruire. Une réelle appréciation du passé, réunissant les compulsions de la lecture, de l'écriture, de l'édition et de l'art de collectionner les livres, fait mentir le désir moderniste de se débarrasser des reliques matérielles.

La fiction moderne est marquée par un profond engagement envers le passé. En effet, James, Wharton, et Forster tout autant que Virginia Woolf, James Joyce et Evelyn Waugh croient que pour écrire un classique, il faut les avoir lus.

L'amour des livres qui empoigne les personnages témoigne de la préoccupation des modernistes avec leur héritage culturel. Ainsi, le passé s'introduit dans les bibliothèques de façon parfois fort violente. Dans *Howards End*, Leonard Bast est écrasé sous une chute de livres. Dans *Orlando* de Woolf, les livres inondent le hall d'entrée d'un bibliophile qui commande d'un libraire londonien l'intégralité des œuvres de la littérature victorienne. La lecture est une activité passionnante, mais potentiellement dangereuse. Dépassé par les vertigineuses rangées de classiques éternels, l'auteur moderniste est hanté dans sa bibliothèque par le spectre de l'influence littéraire. La pulsion de préserver les archives compense celle qui veut les détruire. Ainsi, James, Wharton et Forster font revivre la *Bataille des livres* de Swift. La garde jalouse que les modernistes exercent sur le passé et leur sens aigu de la propriété entrent en contradiction avec leur ressentiment sur la tutelle et leur volonté de se libérer du passé.

Introduction

Unpacking the Modern Library

Books beguile. “Read me,” they seem to say. The book, like other objects, waits to be picked up and held in hand. And yet this human act, as Georges Poulet describes it in “Phenomenology of Reading,” transforms a book from an object among objects to a cabinet of wonders, a source of potentially infinite signification. A collection of books is not like a collection of stamps or Sèvres china for the simple reason that books, unlike other objects, can be read. The book, a material object, quickens in the act of reading, as Holbrook Jackson suggests in *The Anatomy of Bibliomania*: “Physically disposed, a book is an amalgam of paper, ink, and type; but mingled with these ingredients there is that which we call ‘the author,’ and he in turn is mind, emotion, imagination, filtered through the senses and distilled into words and sentences, which only come fully to life at the magic touch of the reader, who must himself supply the forms, colours, sentiments, to which the writer’s symbols correspond” (65). Unlike other objects, the book combines material and non-material elements: paper, glue, and ink mingle with words, thoughts, and feelings. The bound world of the book opens onto the unbound world of imagination.

Books contain and retain knowledge. “Of all the inanimate objects,” writes Joseph Conrad, “books are the nearest to us, for they contain our very thought” (qtd. in Jackson 28). In *Paper Machine*, Jacques Derrida calls the book an “encyclopedia” (16) because it “contains what it can’t contain, it is both bigger and smaller than what it is, like any library in fact” (14). As Derrida implies, part of the infinitude of books has to do with their relational status: books refer to other books. The book, according to Jorge Luis Borges, “is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable

relationships” (“Note” 214). In this sense, a book is a miniature library. Literature “*comes out of the book*” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 54). The materiality of the book is thus linked to its capacity for wonder, as Thomas Wharton shows in his novel *Salamander*: “On the shelf or just opened, a book was all possibility, a wondrous box of paper that could contain anything” (305). Books, like bodies, have insides; they open.

Inside books, characters talk about libraries. Inside fictional libraries, characters read, think, and talk about books. The modernist fiction of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and E. M. Forster demonstrates a preoccupation with reading matter—with the materiality of books, libraries, and archives—as well as with reading spaces and practices. In libraries and archives, characters encounter the past accumulated in books and paper. Books take up space in libraries; like furniture, books are “solid objects” (Mao 25). Libraries also display cultural taste. Because a library is always a selection, books narrate selfhood. As Alberto Manguel intimates in *The Library at Night*, the private library is a self-portrait (324). The exteriors of books reveal the interiority of readers. Similarly, archives incite intrigue and leak secrets. As an accumulation of private papers, the disorderly mess of an archive embodies the flux, fragmentation, and anxiety that characterize the modernist experience.

By examining the fictional tropes of the book, the library, and the archive, this study calls attention to a particular attitude towards reading and cultural heritage that marks modern literature. In their sensitivity to the material aspects of books, the modernists exhibit a canny, and at times an uncanny, awareness that culture is a serial or nodal phenomenon. Old books haunt new books; the library is therefore a site of textual intersections or connectivity. Great works of literature, as Nicholas Royle suggests,

uncannily recur: “What makes a work canonical or ‘great’ is its uncanniness” (*Uncanny* 14). The modernists were keenly conscious of their literary precursors as well as their relation to them. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), T. S. Eliot avers that no artist “has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists [...]. The existing monuments [of art] form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them” (*Selected* 38). By setting key scenes in libraries and other book-filled spaces, and by figuring the library and the archive as sites of crisis, intrusion, or epiphany, modernist authors dramatize their literary indebtedness to (as well as their resentment of) the classics. Books, they know, outlive authors.

Increasingly, literary critics regard the study of material culture, and particularly the history of the book, as viable and indeed invaluable ways to understand culture and cultural practices. In a special issue of the *PMLA*, published in January 2006 and entitled “The History of the Book and the Idea of Literature,” Leah Price and Seth Lerer situate the book in the foreground of literary studies as a way to determine the relationship between “the book as artifact and the aesthetics of the literary imagination” (Lerer 230). They do so by asking a number of critical questions: “How can the history of reading be recovered from the traces on the text? How do books mediate relations between the public self and the private? And, in the end, is the modern conception of literature inseparable from the conception of the book as the physical, commercial artifact we know?” (Lerer 230). As my readings of the work of James, Wharton, and Forster suggest, the answer to Lerer’s final question is a resounding yes: a private archive is burned in *The Aspern Papers*; books are commodities in *The House of Mirth*; and in *Howards End*, books make a

greater impact on characters as furniture than as cultural entities. Price and Lerer argue that this approach to literary studies is still relatively unexplored, in part thanks to the long wake of poststructuralism, which emphasized the relation between work and text. Studies of intertextuality often ignore the material aspects of books, the sense that literary works are bound to the physical objects that house them. As an alternative to intertextuality, Price refers to “interbibliography,” which she defines as “the network linking one book-object to another” (“Introduction” 13).

By considering the nature and function of the book as a material object in relation to textuality, this dissertation offers a response to Price’s call “to situate the study of material culture as a player in theoretical debates rather than as a bolt-hole from which to wait them out” (“Introduction” 15). I argue that the library is not only a metaphor for literary history, but a physical site where cultural, metaphysical, and interpersonal disputes are played out. The modernists challenge the function of the book and the library at a time when industrialization and the public library movement were altering the nature and spaces of reading. In its liberal use of literary allusion, the modernist novel strains against the bounds of the book-object. Modernists such as James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Virginia Woolf fashion their works as encyclopaedias or miniature libraries—repositories of literary inheritance. At its extreme, the modern novel is thus an antinovel of sorts. As a collection, it emphasizes at once the breakdown of coherence or cohesion, as well as the virtue of an open or boundless form. Moreover, the allusiveness of these works, which their authors blithely advertise as textual pilfering or book-theft, identifies them as the product of reading. In this regard, reading and writing epitomize accumulation.

Modernism is an acquisitive phenomenon, as the extensive and well-documented reading practices of modern authors suggest. Modernists fashion themselves as autodidacts

and ideal (because historical) readers: Wharton and Woolf read their way through their father's libraries; Joyce, as his brother Stanislaus recalls, was considered an "unorthodox reader" even as a boy (*Brother's* 89). Similarly, Forster's Leonard Bast, like Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*, receives no university education yet tries to raise himself by reading. As products of self-directed reading rather than schooling, modernist novels reflect the books in an author's library. Literary taste or connoisseurship is thus a modernist fixation. By associating their reading with their writing, and by characterizing their books as libraries or archives, modernist writers style their works as portable modern classics. They canonize themselves by claiming library space and materials. "Canonization," according to Lerer, "is as much a process of selecting space as of selecting value. How can we fit the range of literature on the shelf? The physical, artifactual nature of the book has made the canonizing of the literary work into an act of space management" (232). Just as the modern library is "a product of modernism" (E. Lee 95), so too is modernism a product of the library. Modernist literature exemplifies the notion that to read a book or to write a book is to unpack a library.

A scene that Evelyn Waugh describes in an article written in 1937, entitled "General Conversation: Myself," epitomizes the modernist attitude towards the material past housed in libraries. Portraying himself as a leisurely man of letters writing in a sumptuous library, Waugh aligns himself with his literary forefathers:

A winter morning; a sombre and secluded library; leather bound [sic] unread, unreadable books lining the walls; below the window, subdued, barely perceptible, like the hum of a mowing machine in summer on distant lawns, the sound of London traffic; overhead, in blue and white

plaster, an elegant Adam ceiling; a huge heap of glowing coal in the marble fireplace; a leather topped, mahogany writing-table; the pen poised indecisively above the foolscap – what more is needed to complete the picture of a leisured literateur embarking upon his delicate labour?

Alas! too much. An elderly man has just entered, picked up a French novel and glanced at me resentfully. This is not my library. Nor, in the words of a French exercise, are these my pens, ink or paper. I am in my Club, in the room set aside for silence and heavy after-luncheon sleep. It is three days past the date on which I promised delivery of copy. Leisured litterateur my foot. (*Little* 26-7)

Waugh's ironic self-portrayal raises several important points about modernism. First, not only is the idyllic scene he describes purposefully misleading since the library he depicts is not his own, but the "leisured literateur" he portrays is a figure for whom he holds a certain ambivalence. Waugh pursued careers in painting and teaching before turning to journalism. His "delicate labour" is a ruse, since writing is "work" for Waugh. The "indecisive" nature of his pen has caused him to miss his deadline. The article we read is the belated "copy," proof that Waugh's early career as a man of letters was directed at "earning my living" rather than making a contribution to "Literature" (*Little* 29). Indeed, Waugh resisted the writing life precisely because it was "the family business": "My father is a literary critic and publisher. I think he can claim to have more books dedicated to him than any living man" (*Little* 26). Reading and writing are inherited activities, Waugh implies. Moreover, they are cumulative. Books generate books, as his father's vast library testifies: "They used to stand together on his shelves, among hundreds of

inscribed copies from almost every English writer of eminence, until on one of my rather rare, recent visits to my home, I inadvertently set the house on fire, destroying the carefully garnered fruits of a lifetime of literary friendships” (*Little* 26-7).

A book, as a material object, risks destruction. In the nonchalant, impersonal tone of the journalist, Waugh admits to setting fire in 1935 to his childhood home, Highgate, which effectively destroyed his father’s vast and valuable library of books. This library had provided Waugh with his earliest education, and furnished his lifelong love of books and book collecting. Waugh’s careless, indifferent treatment of his father’s property—“this is not *my* library,” he seems to say—betrays a profound resentment about his “enslave[ment]” to the writing life. “I still have dreams of shaking off the chains of creative endeavour” (*Little* 29), he confesses. His setting fire to the library also expresses a deep-seated antagonism towards his father and the literary achievements of the elder Waugh’s generation. Waugh recalls “the Saturday morning hush over the home, when [his father] was at work on his weekly article,” and the “numerous patronising literary elders who frequented our table” (*Little* 27). By burning the books of his forefathers, Waugh disinherits himself. Literally and figuratively, he frees himself from the burden of his father’s literary legacy. He also escapes his fate as a stuffy “litterateur” in a “sombre and secluded” library filled with unread or unreadable books. “Perhaps,” Waugh writes at the end of the article, “there is a chance of freedom” (29). Freedom, in this case, resides outside of the library.

House Arrest: A Politics of the Archive

This “father-son atrocity,” as Waugh’s grandson, Alexander, describes it (Waugh,

Fathers 230), is a striking example of what Jacques Derrida calls the “*trouble de l’archive*,” or archive trouble (*Archive* 90). As he writes in *Archive Fever*, “Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive.’ [...] Nothing is more troubled and more troubling” (90). The “trouble” of archives is the trouble “of secrets, of plots, of clandestineness, of half-private, half-public conjurations, always at the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself” (*Archive* 90). Derrida implies that the archive metonymically denotes inheritance, and is thus a liminal or “unstable” phenomenon. The trouble with archives is that they disturb or disrupt the present by gesturing to other times. By preserving, guarding, and venerating the past, the archive fosters a sense of rivalry or antagonism in those who “come second”: “The question of the archive remains the same: What comes first? Even better: Who comes first? And second?” (*Archive* 37). As Waugh intimates, the father’s library is never the son’s, even if he inherits it.

Similarly, in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the ninth episode, “Scylla and Charybdis,” takes place entirely within the National Library in Dublin, and is characterized by talk of fathers and sons, authors and inheritance. Fathers, Stephen Dedalus argues, are the world’s begetters. As a begetter, the father initiates succession; he is the founder of a new series. For this reason, Stephen implies, he is a necessary evil: a father comes first. To talk of fathers is to raise questions about origins and allegiances. For Joyce, as for Waugh, fathers—literal or literary—arouse anxiety because they provoke comparison, demand filial obligation, and stir up controversy. Not coincidentally, Stephen makes his notorious speech about Shakespeare and fathers in the library, and the debate that erupts

between Stephen and his friends about fatherhood and authorship takes place in the company of the “quaker” librarian and other bookish types. For Joyce, paternity—that “legal fiction” (*Ulysses* 266)—is a fitting metaphor for literary creation and authorial inheritance. The library in *Ulysses* is a “limbo patrum” (241), the turbulent or uneasy resting place of the father. In the library, one’s mind turns to “thoughts of the father” (Derrida, *Archive* 21), or thoughts of precursors. As both Waugh and Joyce intimate, the trope of the father’s library is a persistent—and troubling—modernist motif. Wharton and Woolf were both educated in their father’s private libraries. While both writers remember these quiet, book-filled rooms as oases of introspection and instruction, as well as rich sources for their writing, they also acknowledge the dearth of private spaces for women readers in this period. The nineteenth-century gentleman’s library embodied male space and authority.

The library is, therefore, the place where successors mark out their difference from the traditions and authority of their precursors. “There can be no reconciliation,” declares Stephen, “if there has not been a sundering” (*Ulysses* 249). Despite the modernist desire to break free from the past, Joyce implies in his library scene that books and libraries, as well as their custodians, strongly influence the modern writer. The best writer, Joyce suggests, possesses some of the librarian’s characteristic traits. Like Joyce’s “quaker” librarian, who is modelled after T. W. Lyster, the Director of the National Library when Joyce was a student, the modern writer should be “myriadminded” (*Ulysses* 263), “zealous” (235), and “assiduous” (243). In fact, Joyce himself aspired to be a librarian at one time, according to Richard Ellmann. Between 1903 and 1904, when he ran into financial difficulties, one of Joyce’s solutions was to call on Professor Edward

Dowden of Trinity College to ask his support for a position as librarian at the National Library. Not surprisingly, Dowden found Joyce “extraordinary” and “quite unsuitable” as a librarian (qtd. in Ellmann 140). The librarian’s unrestricted access to books, as well as his learnedness, appealed to modernists such as Joyce. In this regard, modernist authors not only conceived of their books as miniature libraries, but fashioned themselves as librarians in a bid to control or direct the reading of their works. Joyce’s carefully schematized structure for *Ulysses* and Eliot’s extensive notes to *The Waste Land* exemplify this disciplinary approach to reading.

The modernists thus aspired to write books that reconciled or appropriated the classics yet rejected or broke free of the past. In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster offers a solution to the modernists’ uneasy relationship to the masters by conceiving of the library as a communal space. “We are to visualize,” he writes, “the English novelists [...] seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room – all writing their novels simultaneously” (16). Forster wants to do away with chronology and classification; instead, he envisions an alternative, ideal library that provides a space for all books and authors and encourages cultural conversation and exchange. This study takes up Forster’s vision and conceives of the modernists, like Stephen Dedalus and friends, engaged in ardent “booktalk” with each other and with their literary precursors in a domed reading-room (*Ulysses* 276). Their “booktalk” encompasses not only literary discussion of the contents of books but also the larger domain or discourse of book culture. Persistent questions animate discussion: What is a book? Who controls the library? Are archives public or private property? How should one read a book?

Two theories lie at the heart of this study and help to elucidate the modernists’

response to these questions: Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence," and Jacques Derrida's "archive fever" (*le mal d'archive*). These theories, which have a great deal in common, provide a context for the modernists' ambivalent relationship to the library and the literary tradition it preserves. Despite its claims of newness, modernism is *de facto* a phenomenon of succession. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf testifies to a sense of simultaneous awe and dread while contemplating the vast "avalanche of books" (28) piled on the desk before her in the British Museum Reading Room. She revisits this sentiment in *Jacob's Room* when Jacob Flanders ventures to this same "conglomeration of knowledge" (120) to transcribe passages from Marlowe. Joyce's satirical portrayal of the "quaker librarian" in *Ulysses* speaks to his own uneasiness about the authority wielded by library officials, yet his librarian is "friendly and earnest" (245), more book-crazed zealot than tyrant.

The modern library is at once a sacred haven of the past and a cemetery of dead ideas and dusty books. Archive fever stems from the dialectical tension between the impulse to preserve material artifacts and the drive towards their destruction. Derrida argues that there would be no archive, no library, no book without the threat of their extinction; the fear of our own forgetfulness or cultural amnesia spurs the preservation of artifacts. In this regard, archive fever is both an abstract or universal response to history as well as a profoundly personal ambivalence to material objects. Bloom's anxiety of influence works in a similar way, signifying both the writer's individual response to precursors and a more general feeling of apprehension when faced with the accretions of literary history. The modern writer is first and foremost a reader. In the library, modern readers encounter all the books that they have not read. The library reminds them,

moreover, of all the books that they have not written: Homer, Shakespeare, Goethe, Dickens, Austen. Precursors haunt libraries; classics are conspicuous.

Modernist fiction is thus metafictional in the sense that it “self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, *Metafiction* 2). Metafictional writers are “highly conscious of the problems of artistic legitimacy” (Waugh 10). By setting their fiction inside libraries, modernist authors deliberately raise questions of cultural legitimacy as well as related matters of cultural taste and value, class, gender, and education. Moreover, these fictions employ the metaphor of the world and the self as a book to contend with distinctively modern problems of inheritance, succession, fragmentation, and impermanency. Metafictional writing, asserts Patricia Waugh, “is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures. The materialist, positivist and empiricist world-view on which realistic fiction is premised no longer exists” (7). As repositories of the past, books, archives, and libraries simultaneously hold out the promise of permanency and comprehensiveness while signalling their susceptibility to destruction.

As an emblem of cultural confabulation and dispute, the archive reflects the modernist experience. Archives, according to Derrida, contain within them the seeds of their own ruin. Derrida calls this the “violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival violence*” (*Archive* 7). This anarchic drive or instinct for destruction “works to *destroy the archive*” with a view to “effacing” its own “proper” traces (10). The impulse for aggression aims at annihilating memory and inciting “forgetfulness” or “amnesia”

(11). While the constitution or logic of the archive encourages its own destruction, this inherent violence is, paradoxically, the source of “archive fever”—the nostalgic or “painful” desire for a “return to the authentic and singular origin” (85). The “trouble” of archives thus stems from archive fever. We are, writes Derrida, “*en mal d’archive*: in need of archives” (91). To suffer from archive fever is to “burn with a passion”:

It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. (91)

This “homesickness” or “repetition compulsion” (12) helps to explain Evelyn Waugh’s avid collecting and bibliophilia after the loss of his father’s library. Now housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Waugh’s 3,500-volume library testifies to his “fondness for Victoriana and the grotesque, as well as its highly opinionated owner’s personal tastes and prejudices in modern literature. It also reflects his lifelong love affair with the book arts, and ornamented bindings, calligraphy, and illustration in particular” (Oram 1). Waugh’s love of books as historical artifacts and as objects of beauty evinces an enduring and “irrepressible” archive fever, one that grew out of his early encounters with his father’s and his grandfather’s famous libraries. His own library at Piers Court was “the finest room” in the house (qtd. in Oram 6), and functioned as both private sanctuary and dwelling-place for the old books that he prized. As Waugh’s story

compellingly illustrates, archive fever pertains to both the desire for and the flight from material culture.

The etymology of the word “archive” underscores its relationship to origins and authority. “*Arkhe*,” writes Derrida,

names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence*—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given—nomological principle.

(*Archive 1*)

The archive is both the place where things begin, the originary place, and the place of law or authority, of order and “privilege” (*Archive 3*). The English or French word “archive” finds its roots in the Greek *arkheion* and the Latin *archivum* or *archium*. Initially, an archive was “a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded” (*Archive 2*). Because the first archives were housed in the private domiciles of citizens who held political power, the owners of the house served as public “archons” or archivists: “On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house [...] that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents’ guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives” (*Archive 2*). Historically, these documents required both a “guardian and a

localization,” so they came to be archived in a process Derrida calls “*domiciliation*,” a kind of “house arrest” (2). The house in which they dwelled permanently thus served as an early form of the library, a place that marked the “institutional passage from the private to the public” (*Archive* 2). Since the archons alone had the right to interpret the archives and were therefore the law-makers, the archive became synonymous with political authority or power. The archived documents “speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law” (2). Archives thus have “the force of law, of a law which is the law of the house (*oikos*), of the house as place, as domicile, family, lineage, or institution” (7).

In “Towards a Poetics of the Archive,” Paul J. Voss and Marta L. Werner take up Derrida’s notion of “a politics of the archive” (*Archive* 4). They examine not only the history of the archive but what they describe as the paradoxical nature of its “architecture” or ontological design:

An account of the archive cannot fail to acknowledge the paradoxical logic by which it runs. The archive preserves and reserves, protects and patrols, regulates and represses. The architecture of the archive and the sentinels who control access to its interior suggest that the conservation and transmission of knowledge has been, at least historically, the prerogative of a few chosen agents, of a coterie of privileged insiders. [...] Yet this architecture may also be a reminder of the archive’s susceptibility to both external and internal forces of wastage. The history of the archive, on the one hand a history of conservation, is, on the other hand, a history of loss. (Voss and Werner 1)

The function of the archive is to preserve or protect the past. However, as Voss and Werner suggest, the archive is susceptible to “wastage” or destruction, both from within and from without. Internally, the repression of archived material allows the archivist to regulate or limit access to historical material, thus dramatically reconstituting history itself. This raises the important though enigmatic distinction that Sigmund Freud attempts to make between “material truth” and “historical truth” (*Archive* 59). How much of what we understand of the past, and of ourselves, is tied up in material culture—in the very letters, diaries, manuscripts, and photographs that constitute archives? Externally, the archive is vulnerable to looting, burning, flooding, and other forms of spoilage. Historical battles to wrest control of cultural strongholds such as the library at Alexandria, or the purposeful bombing and burning of libraries during wartime, reflect the profoundly political nature of the archive.

The history of the archive charts a path that has been far from democratic. Those who controlled access to the archive also controlled access to, and dissemination of, knowledge, since the archivist was guardian, interpreter, classifier, and transmitter of the archive’s contents. “Effective democratization,” writes Derrida, “can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (*Archive* 4). Any study of the archive must therefore take into account its institutionalization as well as its law-making function. As Derrida reminds us, “[t]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (*Archive* 4). By locating their fiction within the archive or library, the modernists thus fashion themselves as the new archons.

“Set Fire to the Library Shelves!” A Modernist Battle of the Books

The publication of F. T. Marinetti’s “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909) marked a critical moment in the history of literary modernism. Signifying a new conflict over the preservation of the past and the veneration of cultural institutions, the manifesto anticipated a literature of catastrophe that plays out within the walls of the library. The incendiary novels of Elias Canetti, Ray Bradbury, Lawrence Durrell, and Mervyn Peake figure the library as the casualty of revolution and rebellion. Historical, cultural, and psychological conflicts are waged within its walls. Modernist fiction thus reflects the wreckage induced by war and by the revolutionary impulses of groups such as the Futurists. “We will,” writes Marinetti, “destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind” (50). With its call for acts of “incendiary” violence against libraries and museums—those “literary catacombs” and “cemetaries” of the “eternal and futile worship of the past”—Marinetti’s manifesto presents an alarmingly accurate forecast of the fates of the book and the library in the first half of the twentieth century.

The manifesto opens with a description of how Marinetti and his contemporaries escape the claustrophobic confines of a reading-room or library where they had spent the night: “We had stayed up all night, my friends and I, under hanging mosque lamps with domes of filigreed brass, domes starred like our spirits, shining like them with the prisoned radiance of electric hearts. For hours we had trampled our atavistic ennui into rich oriental rugs, arguing up to the last confines of logic and blackening many reams of paper with our frenzied scribbling” (Marinetti 47). Suddenly, through the windows, the “famished roar of automobiles” (47) breached the hushed stasis of the room. Released instantly from their “worship” of one god—“Mythology and the Mystic Ideal”—the

young men are captivated by the introduction of another: “fire, hatred and speed” (52). They flee from the library’s “horrible shell of wisdom” and enter the “Unknown” streets (48), convinced that the past, and its material representations, must be overthrown: “So let them come, the gay incendiaries with charred fingers! [...] Come on! set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums! [...] Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded! [...] Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammer, and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!” (Marinetti 51).

As a monument to the past, a cemetery of “empty exertion” (Marinetti 51), the library of Marinetti’s manifesto signifies a dead end. Those who cross its threshold become, as he writes in “Let’s Murder the Moonshine,” the “inhabitants of Paralysis” (53). The books that the library accumulates bar the way to the future, foil the modernist’s claim to originality, and “thwart” his desire “to express his dream completely” (50): “In truth I tell you that daily visits to museums, libraries and academies [...] [are] for artists, as damaging as the prolonged supervision by parents of certain young people drunk with their talent and their ambitious wills” (51). The Futurists want no part of the “admirable past,” its “calvaries of crucified dreams,” its “registries of aborted beginnings” (51). For Marinetti and his contemporaries, the collective bulk of literary history, the “real corpus of literature” (Barth 74), resembles a corpse, and the “venerable” space of the library its coffin or “sickly palace” (Marinetti 47).

Marinetti’s manifesto directly challenges the age-old valuation of the library and the book as vital cultural entities, and the “pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep” embodied by the literatures of the past and the hushed domain of the library (49, 51). For

Marinetti and the Futurists, a break with the past was necessary for the development of avant-garde or experimental art. For all its bluster, however, Marinetti's manifesto ends with an allusion to the Futurists' indissoluble ties to the past: "Our fine deceitful intelligence tells us that we are the revival and extension of our ancestors—perhaps! [...] If only it were so!—But who cares? We don't want to understand! [...] Woe to anyone who says those infamous words to us again!" (52). At once acknowledging and resenting their role as cultural "successors" (51), the Futurists claim a different future for their own "scattered treasures":

The oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade for finishing our work. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts—we want it to happen! They will come against us, our successors, will come from far away, [...] sniffing doglike at the academy doors to the strong odor of our decaying minds, which already will have been promised to the literary catacombs. But we won't be there. [...] They'll see us crouched beside our trembling airplanes in the act of warming our hands at the poor little blaze that our books of today will give out when they take fire from the flight of our images. (51)

Books kindle beside airplanes, which emblemize modernity. The value of books, according to Marinetti, lies not in their longevity but in their violent impact, their "fire, hatred, and speed" (51). Marinetti's manifesto thus points to a particular crisis of modernism: in the destruction of the past, the dismantling of order, and the invasion of formerly private, hermetic spaces, modernist fiction introduces a renewed recognition

that libraries are susceptible, that books are objects of contention—the source, in some cases, of a pervasive bibliophobia or literary censorship. Moreover, these fictions depict the fear of books in direct tension with the love of books, with the compulsions of reading, writing, and collecting them. As Rebecca Knuth suggests in *Libricide*, attacks on books constitute a “sub-phenomen[on]” in the larger framework of genocide and ethnocide that characterizes the twentieth century (viii).

While libraries have been the casualties of war throughout the ages, their architectural exteriors falling in Alexandria, in Iraq, in Germany, England, Poland, and elsewhere, they have also been infiltrated from within, and nowhere is this more evident than in early twentieth-century accounts such as Marinetti’s. With its threat of revolution and wreckage, Marinetti’s manifesto is, admittedly, an extreme expression of modernist discontent. However, in his targeting of the library, and in his characterization of it as a site susceptible to violence and a space conducive to conflict, Marinetti’s text serves as an important historical counterpart to the works of literary modernists such as James, Wharton, Forster, Joyce, and Woolf, who stage similar intrusions on the library in their fiction

In this study I demonstrate how the modernists’ jealous custody of the past, their keen “sense of property” (Joyce, *Ulysses* 262) and possession, and their proud self-identification as the “revival and extension of [their] ancestors” (Marinetti 52), is held in tension with their resentment of such guardianship, their desire to be dispossessed of the past, and ultimately, their resolve to discredit its material representations. In a bid to free themselves from the past, these modernists mine the library with forms of subversion, blast open its traditionally inviolate domain, and claim its authority for themselves. The

modern library is in disarray, a sanctuary that has been violated or invaded. Like Marinetti's account of escape from the library and his call for its destruction, these modernist fictions simultaneously extend an historical phenomenon and break new ground. On one hand they figure the library as the hallowed space of the father, an inviolable sanctuary of wisdom and permanence, and on the other they imply that traditional notions of the library, and by extension, of literary history, are under siege, both from within and from without. Things begin to happen *in* and *to* libraries and archives in these texts: theft, romance, debate, accidents. The library becomes a site of contestation, transformation, and catastrophe—of, paradoxically, both the obliteration and the liberation of knowledge.

James's *The Aspern Papers*, Wharton's *Summer*, and Forster's *Howards End* embody the inflammatory sentiments of the Futurists. In their representations of the archive and the library as invaded spaces, as sites of violence, contestation, and debate, these works stage a modernist "battle of the books" that recalls Jonathan Swift's 1697 work and acknowledges the larger twentieth-century conflict over the possession and dispossession of material culture. Swift's "The Battle of the Books" is an account of a battle fought in the Saint James's Library between the "ancient" and the "modern" books over the question of the relative values of each. The battle plays out on the grounds of territorial bookshelf space, with ink-filled quills as "the great missive weapons" (4) on each side. The "trophies" of the battle are the books' "rejoinders," and the most significant of these become known as "books of controversy," which are placed in libraries. Moreover, Swift's text satirically accounts for the modern organization of the library by stating that when the librarian mistakenly "clap[ped] Des Cartes next to Aristotle" and "poor Plato had got between Hobbes and the

Seven Wise masters,” there “was a strange confusion of place among all the books in the library” (Swift 6). The modern library, Swift implies, is a site of confusion and controversy, a place not immune to mistakes. *Howards End*, whose plot reads as a “series of mistakes” (233), epitomizes the state of the modern library. The library, Forster suggests, is a site of the uncanny, a place where the present encounters the past, the familiar meets the strange. To enter a library is to cross a threshold between the known and the unknown, the real and the imaginary. Libraries, like books, facilitate Joycean “booktalk” between author and reader, the ancients and the moderns, the living and the dead.

Another “battle” of the books pertains to the relationship of women readers to library spaces. Given that the original principles of the archive were patriarchal ones, Woolf’s charges against the meddling librarian in *A Room of One’s Own* are particularly relevant. The “coterie” of insiders in control of the archive were, historically at least, men.¹ Traditionally, the library has been a male space or domain. In her essays and novels, Wharton, like Woolf, challenges this tradition. Drawing on her own experience of exclusion, she characterizes the library as contested space. In *The House of Mirth*, *Summer*, *The Age of Innocence*, and *Hudson River Bracketed*, Wharton exemplifies the modernist impulse to democratize the archive or liberate the library. Her women readers wish to transform the library from a mausoleum of dead authors to a living space of their own. From Woolf’s “How Should One Read a Book?” to Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, twentieth-century writers exhibit a prevailing anxiety about the distinguished history of books—books that crowd their libraries and their fictions—and its effect on the reception

¹ As an interesting departure from connotations of paternity in relation to the library, I note that the ancient libraries were defined as either “mother” or “daughter” libraries (the former serving as the main or parent collection and the latter housing the less valuable or surplus volumes in the collection).

of their own work. Writing is always a by-product of reading in these fictions.

The book in modernist fiction thus metonymically denotes both the susceptibility and the durability of cultural knowledge. The book is a technology, an instrument that facilitates knowledge, but is not knowledge itself. Until it is read, a book is a thing among things. Etymologically, the word “book” is connected with the name of the beech tree, from the Old English *bóc* or *béce*, since it is thought that inscriptions were first made on beechen tablets, or cut in the bark of beech-trees. The earliest definitions of “book” identify it as a “writing-tablet,” a “writing,” or a “written document” (“Book”). Later definitions underscore the material form of the book, as well as its composite nature and portability:

A written or printed treatise or series of treatises, occupying several sheets of paper or other substance fastened together so as to compose a material whole. In this wide sense, referring to all ages and countries, a *book* comprehends a treatise written on any material (skin, parchment, papyrus, paper, cotton, silk, palm leaves, bark, tablets of wood, ivory, slate, metal, etc.), put together in any portable form, e.g. that of a long roll, or of separate leaves, hinged, strung, stitched, or pasted together. (“Book”)

As a series of pages, the book is always a collection. A library, similarly, is an organized collection of books belonging to an individual, a group, or an institution (Ousby 551), as well as the place where books are stored. The early form of the word “library,” the Greek *bibliotheke*, means “the slot for a book, books’ place of *deposit*, the place where books are put (*poser*), *deposited*, laid down (*reposer*), the *entrepôt*, for books, writings, nonbook archives in general” (Derrida, *Paper* 6). As a repository for published materials

primarily, the library is a domain of the public, whereas the archive is largely a domain of private or unpublished papers. In addition to storing books, a library represents “a place set apart [...] for reading, study, or reference” (“Library”). As a great mass of knowledge, the library furnishes the objects of study as well as symbolizes acquired learning. A person of wide-ranging knowledge is considered a “living” or “walking” library.

Libraries imply legitimacy. The “library edition” of a book is “an edition of good size and print and strongly bound,” and specifically “a uniform edition of a writer’s works” (“Library”). In a 1939 letter, Aldous Huxley admits that the idea of a library edition made him feel “horribly posthumous” (*Letters* 440). As Huxley implies, the institutional authority of the library confers canonical status and is thus an integral part of canon-formation. The books housed in a library are somehow standardized or definitive. Unlike Huxley, James welcomed this standardization, particularly towards the end of his career. His New York Editions are self-fashioned “library editions” that make claims for legitimacy as the definitive versions of his works. In this regard, libraries have both “a current and a historical value” (Ousby 551) because the library and its catalogue serve both its own time and provide records of the “tastes, preoccupations, achievements and thought of past generations” (Ousby 551). Like a book, a library is both a record and a repository of the past.

Historically, libraries can be classified into a variety of types. The earliest libraries in England were medieval monastic libraries, such as that of Benedict Bishop at Wearmouth-Jarrow (which was used by Bede for the writing of his treatises), as well as the collegiate libraries at Oxford and Cambridge, founded in the thirteenth century. Another type was the copyright library, such as Cambridge University Library, the

Bodleian, and the Royal Library, which, under the Licensing Act of 1662, each received one copy of every new book published in England (Ousby 552). The Royal Library was later subsumed by the British Museum, which was considered the greatest library in the world in the mid-nineteenth century for its wide-ranging collection and the publication of its authoritative catalogue (Ousby 552). Circulating libraries developed in the eighteenth century. These were commercially run libraries that charged a small subscription for the loan of books. Circulating libraries were popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and significantly affected the literary market. The “three-decker” novel, for instance, became popular largely thanks to the success of libraries such as Mudie’s (Ousby 554). Other subscription libraries include the London Library, founded in 1841 by Thomas Carlyle and others, and the Leeds Library (Ousby 554).

The Museums Act of 1845 and the Public Library Act of 1850 instigated the rise of the modern public library, which was a product of industrialization and urban expansion. By 1919, Andrew Carnegie, an American steel magnate, and his Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, had opened 2800 public libraries in Britain and North America (Ousby 555). In the United States, free public libraries were established starting in 1852, with the Boston Public Library. The New York Public Library emerged in its modern form in 1895 by a merger of three collections: the libraries of fur-trader and capitalist John Jacob Astor, wealthy bibliophile James Lenox, whose collection was particularly rich in Americana, and Samuel J. Tilden. America’s Library of Congress was founded in 1800. This library was destroyed by British forces in 1814, and the current collections are based on the library of Thomas Jefferson (Ousby 555). The Library of Congress is the largest and most influential library in the world, thanks to “its position as a copyright

deposit library, its world-wide collecting policy, and its role as provider of catalogue records to other libraries” (Ousby 555). Finally, university libraries such as the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas, and independent research libraries such as the Huntington Library, founded by railway entrepreneur Henry E. Huntington in 1920, also contain rich collections of Americana, English literature, and archival material. The emphasis on access to information in the modern public library is a modern notion. No longer chained to bookshelves or hidden away in stacks manned by librarians, books were easily accessible on the shelves, and library patrons browse freely among them. The democratic function of the library is thus a product of modernity.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period of widespread reading and increased access to books. Literacy levels were high—about eighty percent—with England claiming a “reading public” of approximately twenty million adults (Baldick 17). The mass-production of newspapers and magazines during this period provided the largest source of reading material, and books were usually borrowed from libraries rather than bought because of their relatively high price:

Most people would [...] read at least one newspaper or magazine a week, and a book from time to time, but very few—perhaps about two percent of the adult population—would buy newly published books from a bookseller. Most books were borrowed, usually from a variety of commercial libraries catering to different levels of the market. The public library service, although expanding significantly, was poorly stocked outside the major cities, conservative rural taxpayers being unwilling to subsidize the novel-reading habits of their servants. (Baldick 18)

According to book reviewer Arnold Bennett, despite their modest incomes, England's working classes did read. "They read with earnestness and understanding," he writes in the *Evening Standard* Years, "at certain hours of the day, the prophecies of gifted men about the relative speeds of horses at certain later hours of the day" (qtd. in Baldick 19). Forster's working-class clerk Leonard Bast disproves Bennett's suggestion that the working population read only newspapers. Bast devours books by John Ruskin and Robert Louis Stevenson in *Howards End*. As Forster suggests, this period witnessed a stratified book market and a correspondingly stratified hierarchy of distinct reading publics (Baldick 21). This division of books and readers is evident in the development of a variety of commercial libraries that offered an alternative to the public library service. These "circulating" and "subscription" libraries, such as Boots' Booklovers' Library and W. H. Smith & Sons, loaned books to the middle and lower classes, often from railway station stalls (Baldick 21, 22). London's upper middle classes, including Virginia Woolf, patronized Mudie's Library, Day's Library, Harrod's department store, or the Times Book Club (Baldick 22). In Q. D. Leavis's book *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), she concludes that literature was in danger of extinction thanks to the mass-production of "cheap trash" flooding the market (qtd. in Baldick 21). Leavis found that working-class readers, mostly women, were renting romances and thrillers from shops called "Twopenny Libraries" rather than using the public libraries (Baldick 22). George Orwell worked in one of these shops in the early 1930s, and describes the experience in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936). As the popularity of these commercial libraries suggests, the small group of readers who bought books belies the vast numbers of subscribers who borrowed books from lending libraries, and who read on average two books a week.

Libraries thus played a fundamental role in the debate about the stratification of “highbrow” and “lowbrow” literature in the modernist period. The proliferation and ready availability of newspapers, journals, and so-called pseudo-literature, instigated mass literacy in this period. This widespread literacy led, ironically, to a sense of heterogeneity amongst readers that contrasts with the “homogeneity of the reading public of the mid-Victorian period, in which Dickens and Tennyson had appealed to all levels of the literate population at once, or of the later Victorian decades, in which Hardy and Kipling had achieved something similar” (Baldick 23). Reading was fundamentally linked to questions of class in the modernist period. Access to reading material, changing attitudes towards books and libraries, and a broadening of literary tastes shaped social relations as well as social spaces. As Leah Price observes, changes in the places of reading shape reading practices, and vice versa. The “open spaces of antiquity (gardens, porticoes, squares, streets) [became] the closed sites of the Middle Ages (churches, monks' cells, refectories, courts)” (Price, “Reading” 309). In modern times, “silent reading carved out privacy within communal institutions such as the coffee shop, the public library, and the railway carriage” (“Reading” 309-10). Congruently, in this period the library transforms from “temple to market, from canon to cornucopia” (Battles 119). The heightened demand for access to books and libraries ushered in the public library movement in Europe and North America in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

The public library reflects the modernist ideal of intellectual freedom. Public libraries were conceived of as free or democratic spaces, in direct contrast to the restricted access and membership of the nineteenth-century private library. One of the mottoes of the public library movement was “a book for every person” (Battles 121).

American Melville Dewey, the founder of the Dewey Decimal System, introduced his principles of classification, efficiency, and access to information to the modern library. In this regard, Dewey was the “John Adams of the American library movement” (Battles 140). Dewey also influenced a shift in the librarian’s function, from custodian of books to public caregiver (Battles 120). Not surprisingly, the public library movement affected the long-time domain of the private library, particularly the nineteenth-century gentleman’s library. As a hermetic or self-enclosed world, the private library was an oasis for the bookish antiquarian, a cultural holdout in which he could read, write, and think in comfortable solitude. The private library, as Susan Stewart suggests, provided both “the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world—a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority” (152). Furnishing him with autonomy, order, cultural edification, and privacy, the gentleman’s library was not only a collection of books but a space that reflected his tastes.

Modernism thus marks a shift away from the private, domestic spaces of the home to the public spaces of cities brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, the book was at its apex of popularity and prestige. Reading was the dominant trope for understanding the world, and books seemed to contain all knowledge, providing a disciplining or organizing structure. Yet changes to reading practices and to private and public spaces reflect larger social and cultural transformations that brought a sense of instability to life in this period. Commenting on the relationship between modernity and the library, Penny Fielding notes that “the library’s metonymic position as a signifier of ‘culture,’ at a time when that very

word was a contested issue, allowed it to become a repository not only of books but also of competing social fears and desires. And in the midst of these, as [Walter] Benjamin observes, were anxieties about subjectivity in a period when psychoanalysis was turning its attention to our relationship to objects such as books” (752-53).

The history of the library thus informs the history of literature. From accounts of the ill-fated library at Alexandria to the British Museum Reading Room, a favourite haunt of the Bloomsbury group, the rich history of libraries shapes literary representations. Early literary bibliophiles include Shakespeare’s Prospero, who values his library of magical books above all other possessions in *The Tempest*. Tricked out of his dukedom by his brother while immersed in secret study, Prospero is banished from Milan. He arrives at an island with his daughter, Miranda, and his collection of magic books, secured by Gonzalo: “Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me / From mine own library with volumes that / I prize above my dukedom” (1.2.165-68). Books are more important than titles to Prospero. Like Prospero, Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus owns a fantastical library and communes with his necromantic books. Another avid reader is Don Quixote, whose vast collection of books on chivalry is censoriously burned. Quixote reads all day and night: “through little sleep and much reading, his brain was dried up in such a manner, that he came at last to lose his wits” (Cervantes 22-3). So enamoured is he of his books that Quixote believes that everything he reads is true, which leads others to blame his library for his madness. Another famous bibliophile is Michel de Montaigne, who esteemed his books and their authors so highly that he wore only his best clothes for reading. Montaigne’s private tower library overlooked his garden, which was his way “of achieving Cicero’s idea of happiness, a library in a garden” (Jackson 434). For

Montaigne, the library was the fertile precinct of literary borrowings. His essays, stuffed with quotations from the books in his library, underscore the indexical and organic qualities of books.

Representations of libraries and readers in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature are similarly ubiquitous. George Eliot's *Middlemarch* features the bookishly imperious Edward Casaubon, who works assiduously at a treatise on religious history which he calls the "Key to All Mythologies" (407), yet admits that he "live[s] too much on the dead" and dozes in his library (14, 391). Casaubon's fastidious system of religious learning counters the "miscellaneous opinions" of Mr. Brooke (6), who "collects documents" but does not know how to arrange them (15), perhaps because he is considered to have a "too rambling habit of mind" (14). Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh is a bibliophile who, like Jo March in *Little Women*, reads voraciously in the tranquility of a garret-room. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy's august family library at his country estate, Pemberley, testifies to the acquisitive "work of many generations" (27). Darcy's pride in his library and in the family heritage it embodies manifests in his own book-buying compulsion. "[Y]ou are always buying books," observes Miss Bingley (27). Darcy and his library contrast starkly with the Bingley library, which has been passed down to Charles Bingley, a self-proclaimed "idle fellow" (27) who loathes reading and has made no additions to his father's already small collection of books (27).

Twentieth-century writers Evelyn Waugh, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Henry Miller conceive of books as "a vital experience" (Miller 9) in the sense that they are inextricably tied to the life of the writer. Waugh's *A Little Order*, Sartre's *The Words*, and Miller's

The Books in My Life resemble bibliographies as much as biographies, self-consciously recording the writers' formative experiences in libraries. Additionally, Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*, Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*, Mervyn Peake's Titus trilogy, and the short stories and essays of Jorge Luis Borges all manifest a compulsive fascination with the darker, phantasmagorical qualities of the past, embodied in libraries that incite madness, go up in flames, or haunt characters with their dizzying, tyrannical grip on the mind. These works herald other important twentieth-century books about books, such as Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, in which characters retain libraries in their heads as a way to preserve books in an age of bibliophobia, paranoia, and conflagration. Bradbury's text exemplifies Georges Poulet's sense of reading as the incorporation of the author's thoughts into the mind of the reader. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* features murder in a monastic library, and Thomas Wharton's *Salamander* opens with the "bombed-out ruins" of a bookshop where books are still smouldering, reduced to "mounds of cold, wet ash" (2).

Reading, Connecting, and Collecting

Characters in modernist fiction are, like their authors, obsessive readers. Reading is figured as the quintessential modernist activity—a way to absorb, accumulate, edit, and appropriate the past. In a letter, Woolf confesses that "Sometimes I think heaven must be one continuous unexhausted reading" (*Congenial* 305). According to Lyndall Gordon, Woolf, like other modernists, was a systematic and exhaustive reader. She "filled notebooks with the names of great writers in order of merit and with lists of books she had read or planned to read" (76-7). Woolf was determined to read the classics, and she

began by “devour[ing]” the Elizabethans (Gordon 77). Her reading lists “included no contemporary writers. Meredith, Hardy, and James were, by then, established classics. [...] And as there was no acceptable giant, to her mind, she decided to have nothing to do with smaller men. She would stay with the classics ‘and consort entirely with minds of the very first order’” (Gordon 77). Similarly, Woolf’s *Orlando* is afflicted with the “disease of reading” (*Orlando* 72). With the advent of printing, Orlando finds, to her delight, that the “whole works of Shakespeare cost half a crown and could be put in your pocket” (*Orlando* 270). After visiting a bookseller and placing an order for “everything of any importance in the shop” (271), Orlando arrives home to find her hall “completely littered with parcels” (276). The house “was crammed—there were parcels slipping down the staircase—with the whole of Victorian literature done up in grey paper and neatly tied with string” (276). The house transforms into a library with the proliferation of printed books and the compulsive tastes of the reader.

An addiction to reading can be a job hazard, as the literary editor in James’s *The Aspern Papers* discovers. Similarly, Jorge Luis Borges and Harold Bloom attest to an inability to stop reading. Borges was a librarian whose blindness did not temper his love of books, and literary critic Bloom suffers the same reading disease as Orlando. Bloom’s exhaustive reading regimen is quixotic in scope; he has in the past “exacerbated a severe case of bleeding ulcers and aggravated a heart condition [...] from having read for great periods without pausing for rest” (qtd. in Basbanes, *Patience* 370). Over more than forty years, Bloom has attempted to “read out” the Yale Library, fully recognizing the impossibility of that task. An addiction like any other, Bloom’s reading has been restricted by his doctor, who prescribes “constitutionals” from books out of concern for

Bloom's health (Basbanes 370).

Compulsive reading—and the documentation of that reading—is a trademark of modernism. Catalogues of books fill modernist literature. The library scene in *Ulysses* is a compendium of the classics, as Joyce's literary name-dropping accumulates into lists that include a host of English, Irish, and French writers, including Mallarmé and Wilde. Under the guise of an allusion to Shakespeare, Joyce even refers to Sylvia Beach's bookshop, Shakespeare and Co., which is another modernist library: "William Shakespeare and company, limited" (262). Libraries, Joyce implies, exist within libraries. In *The Gutenberg Elegies*, Sven Birkerts claims that Woolf's writing evinces what he calls "a magpie aesthetics" (13), and this is an appropriate term for modernist writing in general, which resembles a compulsively accumulated bricolage of perceptions, sensations, and ideas. Like Poulet, Birkerts considers the "metaphysics of reading" (79). He asks, "What is the difference between the self when reading and when not reading" (78-9), and, "Where am I when I am involved in a book?" (79). In his "Phenomenology of Reading," Poulet tackles these questions and also considers the relationship between books that are read and books that remain unread.

Reading books, Poulet observes, delivers them "from their materiality, from their immobility" (53). Despite being held in hand, a book that is read becomes a metaphysical entity abstracted from its physical form, "a series of words, of images, of ideas" (Poulet 54). In reading, the reader's ideas merge with those of the writer: "I am aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even

allows me, with unheard-of license, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels” (Poulet 54). Reading dematerializes books, converting them from “exterior objects” to “interior objects” (Poulet 55). In reading a book, the reader temporarily houses the writer’s subjectivity. Reading is thus an act of transmission and accommodation. A book conveys and preserves its author’s subjectivity. In return, books proffer a particular form of freedom to the reader: in their radical openness, books abolish distinctions between inside and outside, between the reader and the world, between reader and writer. A book wants to “exist outside” of itself, and to let the reader exist in it (Poulet 54). Books promise and proliferate connections, as Forster shows in *Howards End*. In this regard, the library, as a nexus of books, exemplifies connectivity. Moreover, part of the uncanniness of literature has to do with the experience of reading. Reading is akin to déjà vu. While reading, the reader feels as though her thoughts come back to her, as if from an earlier moment in time, and yet these thoughts seem new. The writer’s thoughts begin to seem like the reader’s own while she reads.

Despite their avidity, modernist authors and their characters frequently complain that there are too many books to read. The impossibility of reading everything is alleviated in some cases by collecting books. In “Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,” Walter Benjamin reflects on the relationship of the book collector to his books while unpacking the “several thousand volumes” (67) comprising his library. Surrounded by crates of books, Benjamin becomes acutely conscious of the material presence of his books:

I am unpacking my library. Yes, I am. The books are not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order. [...] Instead, I must

ask you to join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of wood, the floor covered with torn paper, to join me among piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again after two years of darkness, so that you may be ready to share with me a bit of the mood—it is certainly not an elegiac mood but, rather, one of anticipation—which these books arouse in a genuine collector. (59)

In physically handling his books, Benjamin perceives “the accustomed confusion” of his library (60), noting the “dialectical tension” it evokes between order and disorder (60), the material and the immaterial, the present and the past. Each book reminds him of the city in which it was acquired, and the rooms where it has been housed. Benjamin’s library also evokes the collector’s “mysterious relationship to ownership” (60).

Ownership, he writes, “is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects” (67). The book collector lives in—and through—his books. He does not collect books because they are useful; rather, he “studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate” (60). Each book enchants him because of its synecdochic relationship to his personal past. Yet just as often as he finds books in second-hand shops, separated from previous owners and back on the market as commodities, he knows that his books, too, can have the same fate. A book, once it is owned, is not permanently owned. Book ownership, Benjamin indicates, is more custodial than eternal.

Like the reader, the collector’s attitude is, “in the highest sense, the attitude of the heir” (66). The collector’s deepest desire is to “renew the old world” (61), to let the past live on in the present. Genuine collectors, according to Benjamin, are bibliophiles; they do not acquire books as an investment or as tools for learning but because they have a

passionate desire to possess them. Just as reading books is a form of accumulation, so too is book collecting. Collectors often acquire books that they do not read, however.

Collectors exhibit a desire to discipline their collections—to catalogue, enumerate, and contain them—in the same way that they might wish, nostalgically, to order (or re-order) the past. Moreover, collecting is a response to modern anxieties about the public sphere, and particularly its open-endedness. By collecting books, the collector takes them off the market; by cataloguing and enumerating them, he prepares them to cross the threshold into the private sphere, a world under his control.

Like reading, the impulse to collect books can be a form of a madness, a kind of acquisitive compulsion or fixation. As Herbert Muensterberger details in *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, Sir Thomas Phillipps, the single-minded nineteenth-century British book collector, once proclaimed the following in a letter: “I am buying Printed Books because I wish to have ONE COPY OF EVERY BOOK IN THE WORLD!!!” (74). Phillipps thought of himself as the “self-appointed protector and curator of documentary material of all sorts” (81). At the time of his death he left behind “at least sixty thousand manuscripts and around fifty thousand books” (75). According to Muensterberger, Phillipps’s interest in book collecting grew out of a need to fill the void left by his mother, who was illegitimate, and who was discouraged from any contact with her son, as well as by a father whose only semblance of affection was the bestowal of money. From a young age, Phillipps used this money to support his self-described mania of book buying. Other than an infrequent correspondence by mail, the boy’s mother used to send him books, a fact which might account for his compulsive collecting.

Phillipps’s relation to books differs from that of the reader. He demonstrates little

interest in the aesthetic and epistemological value of his collection, and instead focuses on the acquisition of mass quantities of texts. The wild disorder of his collection (his only attempt at organization was to box his more valuable volumes) contradicts Phillipps's insistence on writing and printing catalogues that enumerated his collection. Quantity, not quality or taste, shaped his collecting habits. Similarly, modern-day book collector and American lawyer, Rolland Comstock, estimates his collection at fifty thousand books and has built a two-floor annex to house them all. Comstock travels all over the world to have his books signed by authors and considers himself a "literary groupie" (Basbanes 172). In his quest to acquire all the writings of a particular author, Comstock describes himself as an "unrepentant completist" (qtd. in Basbanes 172), which means that everything written by an author—even childhood scribbles—is included in his search. For most collectors, one fine copy of a book is sufficient, but not for Comstock, who owns up to 800 copies of a single book: "I do not buy these books as any kind of investment or as a scheme to make money. If a book is good, I want a lot of them. [...] I get a kick out of possessing ten copies of a great book. If one copy is great, it stands to reason that having ten copies is going to be ten times as great" (qtd. in Basbanes 174). Excess is a virtue in collecting. Like Phillipps, Comstock's hunger to accrue books stems from an impossible dream to "complete" what is incompletable.

Collectors are hoarders. Like readers, who want to know everything, collectors want to own everything. In *Paper Machine*, Derrida confesses to his own "paper spleen" (65). Like a packrat, he aspires to "the keeping of everything" (65), despite the fact that he suffers from "*too much paper*," a correspondingly distressing problem (65). Like Phillipps, whose boxes of books eventually fill all the rooms of his manor, Derrida

confesses that his accumulation of paper “expels me—outside my home. It chases me off” (*Paper* 65). Modernist collections, such as Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, are archives in the sense that they are collections that will never be complete. The open-ended nature of archives at once frustrates and incites the modernist project of completeness or comprehensiveness. As loose-leaf libraries, archives collect and deposit a surplus of paper.

Like the archive, the modern library is thus an open rather than a closed system, a site of potentially infinite invention and innovation. In “Fantasia of the Library,” Michel Foucault suggests that the experience of the fantastic, the “singularly modern and relatively unknown” discovery of the imaginary, “is born and takes shape in the interval between books. It is a phenomenon of the library” (“Fantasia” 91). The library as phenomenon is not only synonymous with the phantasmagoric or the “power of the impossible” (91), but with the advent of modern literature. Foucault cites Gustave Flaubert’s nineteenth-century novel, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (which he compares to the “museum” paintings of Manet) as a work that self-reflexively acknowledges its status as a book. Flaubert’s novel, like Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, seems aware of its location within the library. As Foucault suggests, it “erect[ed] its art within the archive” (“Fantasia” 92), and thus redefined the relationship of the book to literary history. For Foucault, literature begins when “the book is no longer the space where speech adopts a form [...] but the site where books are all recaptured and consumed” (“Language” 67). The book is no longer a “closed and dusty volume” resting inertly on the shelf—a “mere episode in the history of Western imagination”—but a node in a vast network, one that “opens a literary space” in the domain of knowledge (“Fantasia” 90, 91). The book

“exists by virtue of its essential relationship to books,” by its location in that ultimate “domain of phantasms,” the library.

Like Benjamin, James, Wharton, and Forster demonstrate a striking attunement to the materiality of books, libraries, and archives. These writers figuratively “unpack” the library in their fiction, characterizing it as the scene in which the fates of books (and sometimes, the fates of characters) are played out. Accumulation is endemic to these texts. James and Wharton play up intertextual allusions and strategies, and construct their plots around enigmatic archival pursuits. In *Howards End*, Forster plants key narrative action in libraries. A host of bookworms crowd these texts. James, Wharton, and Forster use motifs of material culture as a means to examine the grip of the past and to consider questions of property ownership, cultural inheritance, space, interiority, and the compulsion to collect.

Modernity is marked by a profound engagement with the past. Despite their protests to the contrary, modernists often possessed antiquarian tastes. James, Wharton, and Forster figure the reading of classics as a necessary and natural precondition to writing them. The bibliophilia gripping their protagonists evokes the modernists’ own preoccupation with cultural heritage. Moreover, these writers characterize the modern library as a place where the past intrudes, often in violent ways. Archive trouble stems from archive fever in these fictions. An unhealthy compulsion for books, reading, and collecting has its own dangers. James’s literary editor in *The Aspern Papers* discovers that archives induce monomania, that “scholarly malady” (van Zuylen 141). Monomaniacs harbour an “abstract, autonomous desire to reorganize the world according to the long-lost model of wholeness” (van Zuylen 5). The bibliophile reads out of a desire

for wholeness, yet reading, ironically, requires “a willful separation from the world” (van Zuylen 49). While reading is a form of connecting, reading too much prevents the reader from connecting with others. In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer sits in his gentleman’s library late in life and feels troubled by a sense that he has not lived, or that he has lived only in his library and books. Like Don Quixote, who reads so many books that he becomes a book (Foucault, *Order* 48), or Gustave Flaubert, whose first published story was “Bibliomania” and who was known for regarding people as books (van Zuylen 49), or Harold Bloom, who admits that he has “done nothing but read all my life” (qtd. in Basbanes 370), Archer’s compulsive reading is a substitute for living.

The central premises of this study thus revolve around a view of books and archives as material objects and libraries as repositories of the material vestiges of the past. By “reading” matter, particularly the tropes of the book, the archive, the library, and the bibliophile, I show that modernist writers, like their characters, demonstrate an acute “book sense,” an intuitive identification with and passion for books. Moreover, this study traces the family resemblances between the acts of reading and writing books, as well as thinking and talking about them, and suggests that these connections distinguish modernist fiction.

Though a number of studies of the history of the book, the book collector, the archive, and the library have been written, only a few critical analyses of representations of books and libraries in literature have been published to date. These include Suzanne Keen’s *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (2001), and Debra A. Castillo’s *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature* (1984). Both Keen’s and Castillo’s works zero in on postmodern representations of libraries, and

Keen focuses on British novels. With the exception of Adeline R. Tintner's *The Book World of Henry James* (1987), no book-length study of modernist representations of books, archives, and libraries has been written. In addition to Derrida's *Archive Fever*, texts such as Carolyn Steedman's *Dust* and Marina van Zuylen's *Monomania*, as well as Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, and Jean Baudrillard's *The System of Objects* significantly inform and enrich this study. By considering a number of modernist authors and texts, I attempt to resolve thematic and culturally conceived issues concerning the material culture of the book and the archive as it relates to modernity. Moreover, I take into account historical events, such as the development of the public library and the harrowing destructiveness of warfare, in order to furnish an appropriate context for my readings and to generate an innovative contribution to the study of literary modernism.

Chapter One

The Master's Library: Henry James and the Classics

Books, archives, and libraries abound in the fiction of Henry James. The bibliomania of his characters attests to James's own lifelong preoccupation with books and libraries, archives and authors. The owner of a large and heterogeneous private library, James valued books as material objects and as literary resources. According to Adeline R. Tintner, James "read books, wrote books, bought books, presented books, edited books, and wrote prefaces to books. The evidence of their presence in his life and work is reflected in his constant allusion, in novels and tales, to all aspects of book-life and the presence of books in civilized existence" (Edel and Tintner, *Library* 69). The colourful accounts of bibliophiles in his fiction exemplify James's own passion for books.

Like any obsession, however, the devotion to books and reading has a dark side. Nowhere is this more evident than in *The Aspern Papers*, James's 1888 novella about a literary editor and critic whose attempts to acquire the private papers of his favourite Romantic poet involve him in a series of exploits and improprieties. In *The Aspern Papers*, reading is a way to connect or commune with the dead. Fixated on the papers, which he regards as relics of the dead poet Jeffrey Aspern, the editor pursues the archive for its secrets. His intention is to learn everything there is to know about Aspern, and thus to forge a personal connection with his literary idol. Archives, James implies, connote value precisely because they do not circulate. The Aspern archive is classified or secret, yet unclassified or unknown. In this way, James distinguishes archives from libraries in

his fiction: despite their materiality, archives have a ghostly or transcendent quality. An archive is synonymous with writing, with the private marks or traces of an author.

Libraries, by contrast, generally contain materials already in the public domain. A private library, like that of the eponymous Princess in *Princess Casamassima*, is not only a repository but also a “display” or “performance” (Bishop 37). Libraries flaunt cultural taste and knowledge, while archives stow it away.

James’s materially minded characters, such as the editor of the *The Aspern Papers*, the aging novelist Dencombe in “The Middle Years,” or the bookish Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, are variously readers, writers, editors, or collectors. Preoccupied with books and archives, these characters forge “connection[s] with literature” (James, “Middle” 212) that reflect their own values, interests, and agendas. Some readers, such as Dencombe, who is a “passionate corrector” (219), read with a view towards excellence. Reading, in this sense, is a form of editing, as James also demonstrates in *The Aspern Papers*. Other readers, such as Doctor Hugh in “The Middle Years,” read serially and omnivorously because reading brings them pleasure. Hugh excitedly reads the finer passages of Dencombe’s novel aloud to him without realizing that Dencombe wrote them. While reading, Hugh is “indifferent” to the “romance” of the world around him, but completely absorbed in and receptive to the created world of the book (212). Dencombe, the “weary man of letters” (217), thus finds his ideal reader—“the greatest admirer in the new generation” (217)—with the publication of his last novel. Reader and writer sit together on a bench reading from the same book; the book itself orchestrates this connection. Doctor Hugh’s avid and sympathetic reading of Dencombe’s novel illustrates Georges Poulet’s point that reading collapses the subjective distinctions

between the reader of a book and its author. As a reader and physiologist, Hugh figuratively heals Dencombe's censorial or corrective attitude towards his work, allowing him a measure of peace before he dies.

As James suggests in "Honoré de Balzac," reading is a way to gain knowledge of the past, to assimilate "the substance itself of knowledge" (*Art* 24). Reading is a means of internalizing one's precursors, a way to get in touch with the "substance"—the core or essence, as well as the material—of the past. For James, reading is thus a necessary precondition of writing:

The authors and the books that have, as we say, done something for us [...] exist for us, with the lapse of time, as the substance itself of knowledge: they have been intellectually so swallowed, digested and assimilated that we take their general use and suggestion for granted, cease to be aware of them because they have passed out of sight. But they have passed out of sight simply by having passed into our lives. They have become a part of our personal history, a part of ourselves [...] so far as we may have succeeded in best expressing ourselves. ("Honoré," *Art* 24)

Literature, James suggests, comes from literature, books from other books. Reading and writing transmit cultural knowledge. The writer, who is first and foremost a conscientious reader, acts as a conduit or medium. In *Leaves of Grass*, a book that James grew to love late in life, Walt Whitman characterizes writers as divine conveyers. In this sense, the book embodies inherited or conveyed knowledge. Not simply a product of writing, a book is also always a record of reading.

Reading is thus fundamental to writing for James. The book is a bound genealogy,

the materialization of literary influence or inheritance. Yet James refers to a particular class of books when he describes the writer's "digestion" of knowledge. The books that have "done something for us," and whose "general use and suggestion" we take for granted, are the classics. For James, the classics are enduring masterpieces of literature that have withstood the passing of time, the burning of books, the fickle tastes of the reading public, and the sometimes feckless discriminations of critics. A classic is a book "of acknowledged excellence" ("Classic"), a work whose literary merit has been established. In *The Library of Henry James*, Tintner tracks James's liberal use of the classics in his writing, arguing that their "prevalence in his fiction shows how [he] expects his reader to keep up with him in his literary cultivation" (Edel and Tintner 74). To read is to improve the mind and to hone literary tastes. For the writer, reading the classics is a means of benefiting from the work of one's forerunners. Literary allusions signify a shorthand for culture. "Endless [...] are the uses of great persons and things," writes James in "Honoré de Balzac," "and it may easily happen in these cases that the connection [...] is never really broken. We have largely been living on our benefactor—which is the highest acknowledgment one can make" ("Honoré," *Art* 24-5).

The writer, James suggests, can pay no greater tribute to his precursor than to pilfer his works. To read a classic is to steal from the best. "If a work of imagination, of fiction, interests me at all," writes James in a letter dated 1902, "I always want to write it over in my own way, handle the subject from my own sense of it. [...] I take liberties with the greatest" (qtd. in Tintner, *Book* xix). Despite his appreciation for the classics, James's tastes were heterogeneous. As Tintner suggests, it was not only with the "greatest" that James took liberties: "histories, biographies, popular fiction, and

‘sensation’ novels [...] were all grist to his mill” (*Book xx*). Moreover, James’s notion of “living on” one’s literary precursors has interesting architectural connotations for the houses of modernist writers. Edith Wharton’s private library in The Mount was located directly below her bedroom suite. Since she wrote her novels in bed, she literally “lived on” the books in her library. In James’s Lamb House, books ranged freely throughout the house and were not confined to one room or corner. Since his income was supplemented by his writing, James lived on, as well as with, his books.

Just as James made use of the fiction of his precursors, his own works provided fodder for his modernist successors. In *How to Read* (1931), Ezra Pound likely has James in mind when he identifies several different groups of writers, one of which he terms “The masters”:

This is a very small class, and there are very few real ones. The term is properly applied to inventors who, apart from their own inventions, are able to assimilate and co-ordinate a large number of preceding inventions. I mean to say that they either start with a core of their own and accumulate adjuncts, or they digest a vast mass of subject-matter, apply a number of known modes of expression, and succeed in pervading the whole with some special quality or some special character of their own, and bring the whole to a state of homogeneous fulness. (Pound 22)

Pound closely echoes James’s own description of the writer’s “digestion” of the classics, yet his description of the master’s “success” in bringing some “special” quality or character to his “invention” underscores his own modernist yen to make it new. Masters, as Pound intimates, have the enviable knack of reinventing the classics. They absorb

them into their own writing and imbue these new works with their contemporary outlook. This mastery of the past is precisely what Pound and his cohort aspire to in their modernist innovations. By studying the work of the masters, they seek to create modernist classics to rival those of their precursors.

Despite his acknowledgement of these literary masters, Pound conceals a keen ambivalence towards the work of precursors such as James. His attunement to the dynamics of authorial influence ironically evokes his own “anxiety of influence.” In an essay published in *The Little Review* in 1918, Pound disparages James’s novelistic preoccupation with material objects and with what he calls the “conservation of furniture” (“Henry James” 311). According to Pound, James’s “cobwebby” novels of connoisseurship were the product of his “lamentable lack of the classics”: “If James *had* read his classics, the better Latins especially, he would not have so excessively cobwebbed, fussed, blathered, worried about minor mundanities” (Pound 311).² Pound’s speculation about James’s reading habits—and particularly his belief that what James read directly influenced what he wrote—illustrates an important trend in early twentieth-century thinking, one James’s own writings tacitly acknowledge and endorse: the tendency to equate a writer’s personal library with his literary inheritances. What was on James’s bookshelves, in other words, went into his books. Moreover, by maintaining that James might have written better novels had he read the right books—those that Pound himself had read—Pound calls attention to a vital yet relatively unexplored form of modernist connoisseurship: the trope of the well-stocked or well-chosen library. A

² Pound’s complaint exemplifies a generational squabble: in an essay on Balzac, James pins his French precursor’s literary failings on his too acute “consciousness of the machinery of life, of its furniture and fittings [...]. Things, in this sense with him, are at once our delight and our despair; we pass from being inordinately beguiled and convinced by them to feeling that his universe fairly smells too much of them” (*Art* 31).

skilfully selected book collection, he implies, one comprising a healthy dose of the classics, is compulsory for one's own fashioning of a classic. You are what you read, Pound warns.

The irony of Pound's denigration of both James's fiction and his reading practices is particularly rich. As Hugh Kenner points out in *The Pound Era*, "[Pound's] *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1917) was achieved by a mind filled with James's prose, the entire canon of which Pound reread between the Master's death (January 1916) and *The Little Review* memorial issue (August 1918)" (Kenner 15). Pound, it turns out, read James obsessively for two years and was deeply influenced by his stylistic and thematic sensibilities. In fact, as Kenner observes, it was James's "great sensibility" that "brought in" Pound's generation: "But for that sensibility *Prufrock* is unthinkable, *Mauberry* and the *Cantos* are unthinkable: not that one can imagine James reading any of these. The *Prufrock* situation is stated in a story James published just before the poem was begun: 'Crapey Cornelia.' A decade later *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* was 'an attempt to condense the James novel'" (15-16). Despite his protestations to the contrary, Pound the apprentice studied James the master. Pound had James's novels on his bookshelves, and he was intimately familiar with their contents. As Kenner rightly notes, Pound's own achievements are "unthinkable" without James's literary precedent. Pound and his contemporaries thus inherited James's reading and writing practices. This age-old affiliation between literary precursors and successors, and between reading and writing, characterizes the modernist period. Literary connoisseurship raises the spectres of authorial influence and indebtedness. As he confesses in his notebooks and letters, James himself suffered from a guilty thief complex while looking for subjects in the pages of

Shakespeare, Browning, Dickens, and Scott. Evidently even masters can be troubled by their profitable forays into the archives.

We can conceive of the modernist writer, then, as one who is saturated in the past, obsessed by the classics, and self-conscious of his literary forerunners. While no two writers may share the same library, or even the same catalogue of all-important literary precursors, each makes a case for the supreme collection—the one considered essential reading. To do otherwise, as Pound implies, would be to admit a deficiency in one's own works since they are the product of intensive reading. The modernist's preoccupation with the past manifests in symptoms of "archive fever" (Derrida, *Archive* 12). Haunted by the material accumulations of the past, by the ubiquity of books and archives, the modern novelist constructs his own books as miniature archives or libraries. In his extensive reading, James gathers or collects fragments of other books; his own fictions then "collect" and adapt these fragments. Desiring both to mask *and* highlight their intrepid "handling of fragmentary elements from the classics of Western civilization" (Tintner, *Book* 202), James and his modernist successors, Wharton, Forster, Woolf, and Joyce, turn to the materiality of books and archives. They employ the tropes of the book, the library, and the archive to show that they are comfortably familiar with the illustrious stockpile of literary classics. With his discriminating devotion to books and reading, James fathers this modernist practice. This chapter examines how James's appropriation of the classics renders literary history a kind of ransacked or pilfered archive, as he suggests in *The Aspern Papers*. This approach to modernist fiction will provide not only an overview of what the modernists were reading and their attitudes toward what they

read, but it will also illustrate how reading is of fundamental importance to modernist writing.

“A Devourer of Libraries”: The Portrait of a Reader

James was a lifelong bibliophile who collected books and read voraciously.

“When Henry James was a small boy,” writes Leon Edel, “his father described him as ‘a devourer of libraries.’ His generous family kept the child supplied with reading matter by presenting books on all occasions and by subscribing to the weeklies and monthlies with their serialized novels and melodramas” (*Library* 1). In *A Small Boy and Others*, James recalls being taken by his father to a bookstore where he revelled in “the English smell” of the books (qtd. in Edel, *Library* 1). As a young student living in Boulogne, James haunted Merridew’s English Library, and he remembers it as “the solace of my vacuous hours and temple, in its degree too, of deep initiations” (qtd. in Edel, *Library* 1). These childhood initiations awakened the young James to the delights and comforts of reading, and to the illustrious halls of English literature.

James’s early encounters with books and libraries surface autobiographically in his fiction, and particularly in novels such as *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), and *The Bostonians* (1886). In *The Portrait of a Lady*, James’s protagonist, Isabel Archer, is a bookish, solitary young woman. Like the young James, she is a reader. When Mrs. Touchett finds her in her grandmother’s house in Albany, Isabel sits reading a “history of German Thought” (*PL* 33):

One wet afternoon [...] this young lady had been seated alone with a book.

To say she was so occupied is to say that her solitude did not press upon

her; for her love of knowledge had a fertilising quality and her imagination was strong. There was at this time, however, a want of fresh taste in her situation which the arrival of an unexpected visitor did much to correct. The visitor had not been announced; the girl heard her at last walking about the adjoining room. It was in an old house at Albany, a large, square, double house, with a notice of sale in the windows of one of the lower apartments. (PL 31)

This unexpected “intruder” in the library (PL 34) is a common motif in James’s fiction. Like Isabel, Jamesian readers are often interrupted in their reading by relatives, lovers, or friends. In *Washington Square*, Catherine Sloper interrupts her father’s ritual of reading and writing in his study one night to announce her engagement to Morris Townsend. Yet to do so requires courage to cross the formidable “threshold” into the male space of his library (49). Later in the novel Catherine returns to his study, this time to defend her feelings for Townsend, despite her father’s order that she give up the relationship: “She heard him move within, and he came and opened the door for her. ‘What is the matter?’ asked the Doctor. ‘You are standing there like a ghost.’ She went into the room, but it was some time before she contrived to say what she had come to say” (84). Her surroundings intensify Catherine’s inarticulacy. The authority of her father’s words is reinforced by the authority of his library: to disobey him “would be a misdemeanour analogous to an act of profanity in a great temple” (83). Similarly, *The Sacred Fount* features an intrusion on the male space of the library, but in this case the intruder is also male. The narrator interrupts Ford Obert’s “charmed communion with the bookshelves” when he enters the smoking-room and strikes up a conversation with him (163).

Reluctant to be distracted from the books, Obert “[keeps] his eyes [...] on the warm bindings, admirable for old gilt and old colour, that covered the opposite wall” throughout the conversation (164). In contrast to Obert’s desire to be left alone with books, Isabel Archer, who daydreams while she reads, welcomes the distraction of an unexpected visitor.

Isabel’s “love of knowledge” and her “strong” imagination are spurred not by lessons at the Dutch House school across the street from her grandmother’s house, but by the hours she spends reading alone in the “mysterious melancholy” (*PL* 33) of the Albany house library:

The foundation of her knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother’s house, where, as most of the other inmates were not reading people, she had uncontrolled use of a library full of books with frontispieces, which she used to climb upon a chair to take down. When she had found one to her taste—she was guided in the selection chiefly by the frontispiece—she carried it into a mysterious apartment which lay beyond the library and which was called, traditionally, no one knew why, the office. Whose office it had been and at what period it had flourished, she never learned; it was enough for her that it contained an echo and a pleasant musty smell and that it was a chamber of disgrace for old pieces of furniture whose infirmities were not always apparent [...] and with which, in the manner of children, she had established relations almost human, certainly dramatic. (32-3)

As a foundation of knowledge and a space conducive to solitude and “idleness,” the

library is an appropriate setting for Isabel's "dramatic" relations with books and furniture. Idleness, as James shows, is a prerequisite to reading. Yet Isabel, whose active imagination is spurred by—but not limited to—the books she reads, also appreciates books as aesthetic objects. She chooses books to read based on their frontispieces or illustrations, which reflects her distinctly visual nature. Reading is thus a form of visualization for Isabel. Books and furniture are catalysts for her daydreams. Isabel's "almost human" relations with the old books and "heterogeneous" furniture (34) in her grandmother's house epitomize the Jamesian attitude towards material culture. In *Portrait*, *The Spoils of Poynton*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The Aspern Papers*, characters establish relations with books, furniture, portraits, and other collectibles that in some ways transcend the relations they have with other characters. Mrs. Gereth's obsession with her "spoils" and the narrator's passion for the Aspern archive generate narrative intrigue. There is, however, something particularly unfathomable or "mysterious" about Isabel's contact with books in this remote library office. Books, unlike other objects, have a depth or interiority that exists independently of their exterior forms. The reading of books thus distinguishes them from other collectibles. Like the interior spaces of libraries, books profoundly shape the nature of human relationships and interactions in James's fiction.

Isabel's imaginative encounters with books reflect James's own boyhood in the shadows of his elder brother, William, and his moody, difficult father, Henry James Sr.:

Escape from the frustrations of his juniorhood lay for the young Henry James in books, in the imagination, in writing. [...] The small boy cultivated a quiet aloofness; nothing would happen to him if he withdrew

and used his eyes and his mind in that arguing family. [...] And Henry James, inexhaustible younger brother, making himself small and quiet among the other Jameses, turned into the depths of himself to fashion a fictional world based on the realities around him in which elder brothers are vanquished, fathers made to disappear, mothers put into their place.

(Henry, Edel 19)

Edel's observations are confirmed in James's fiction: Hyacinth Robinson, the protagonist of *The Princess Casamassima*, is an orphan. Rumour has it that Hyacinth's mother, a French woman of low birth, was killed by his aristocratic father. Hyacinth's flower-like name and love of books aligns him with Isabel Archer, with her "fertile" mind and "garden-like" nature (PL 55). Moreover, Isabel's father dies at the outset of *Portrait*. She too is orphaned and, unlike Catherine Sloper, is thus at liberty to decide her own fate.

An autodidact by circumstance and disposition, Isabel's literary tastes are already well-honed. She "had had everything a girl could have: kindness, admiration, bonbons, bouquets, [...] plenty of new dresses, the London *Spectator*, the latest publications, the music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot" (PL 41). In large part because of her reading, Isabel's imagination is "remarkably active" (52). She is "a young person of many theories" (52). Indeed, her aunt, Mrs. Varian, "once spread the rumour that Isabel was writing a book—Mrs. Varian having a reverence for books, and averred that the girl would distinguish herself in print" (52). James satirically distinguishes between the "active" reading and use of books, and the passive "reverence" for them. Mrs. Varian's veneration of books implies a lack of familiarity with their insides. She values books as cultural capital; they represent tokens of achievement rather

than achievement itself. In contrast, James suggests that Isabel's avid reading and active mind furnish her with the requisite tools to be a writer.

In fact, Isabel develops a "reputation" for her incessant reading (*PL* 41). Of her three sisters, she is considered "the 'intellectual' superior" (37). Isabel's well-known "acquaintance with literature" (39) makes the young men who come around to see her sister Edith, considered "the beauty," afraid of her (37). These would-be suitors—James calls them "suspicious swains"—believed that "some special preparation was required for talking with her" (41):

[Isabel's] reputation of reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic; it was supposed to engender difficult questions and to keep the conversation at a low temperature. The poor girl liked to be thought clever but she hated to be thought bookish; she used to read in secret and, though her memory was excellent, to abstain from showy reference. (41)

James's treatment of Isabel's bookishness, with its implicit association with cleverness and the social difficulties that incurs (particularly *because* she is a marriageable young woman), is remarkably acute. He is sensitive to the ways that Isabel's reputation for reading, her contact with books, serves to thwart, or even to preclude, romantic contact. While it does not make her "a social proscript," or outlaw (*PL* 41), Isabel's reading triggers inner conflict and social difficulty: she reads "in secret" and avoids quoting from books in an effort to diminish the impression of her cleverness. Like a "goddess in an epic," Isabel's familiarity with books gives her an aura of remoteness or unattainability, as though she were a character in a book (which, of course, she is), and keeps possible

suitors at bay. Unsurprisingly, Isabel comes to resent her time spent with books. While she “had a great desire for knowledge,” she “really preferred almost any source of information to the printed page” (*PL* 41). After discovering the world through books, Isabel, like the young James, longs to experience that world first-hand. She had an “immense curiosity about life” and a great “determination to see, to try, to know” (*PL* 54).

Like Isabel, James’s “liberal education” (*PL* 40) was the product not of his studies at the Dutch House in Albany, but of his trans-Atlantic trips and his hours spent in the library. According to Edel, as a boy James was “brought crying and kicking to the primary school in the Dutch House in Albany” (*Henry* 18). Isabel similarly “protest[s] against its laws” (*PL* 32) after spending a single day there, and is allowed thereafter to stay at home. As his portrait of Isabel suggests, James’s education as a writer—as someone who ultimately “distinguishes” himself in print—came initially from the books he read. *The Portrait of a Lady* can thus be considered James’s nostalgic account of a childhood spent in libraries, as well as a defence of the merits of self-directed reading. Isabel’s protest against the “laws” of learning at the Albany school reflects the modernist resistance to cultural institutions and to supervised or controlled reading.

The modernist fantasy of autodidacticism is not simply an educational philosophy or an objection to conventional forms of learning. Rather, the modern reader privately dreams of having full and free access to the teachings of books. She wishes to be guided solely by the organizing principles of the library, and to have time, in the face of the increasingly accelerated pace of modernity, to study the past. This fantasy is memorably realized in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *La Nausée*, written in 1938. The novel features a “Self-

Taught Man,” a bibliophile who for the last seven years has been reading his way through the book collection in the local library in Bouville, France. He “teaches himself alphabetically,” moving methodically through lists of authors: “Lambert, Langlois, Larbalétrier, Lastex, Lavergne” (30). He has “read everything” (30), observes the book’s narrator, though “his choice of reading always disconcerts me” (30). He passes “brutally” from “the study of coleopterae to the quantum theory, from a work on Tamerlaine to a Catholic pamphlet against Darwinism” (30). Regardless of method, the dream of self-governed, leisurely reading in the encyclopaedic realm of the library is common ground for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers from James to Joyce to Sartre. These writers consider the nature of reading and classification, and particularly the different ways that characters order and assimilate knowledge: some autodidacts conquer the library systematically, as in *La Nausée*, and others, like Isabel Archer, read haphazardly or whimsically.

Through his wide-ranging and constant reading, James became familiar with the classics and he soon began acquiring books in order to assemble his own private working library. This library became the permanent and essential foundation of his writing career:

[James] was a regular buyer of books during his long working life—not a collector who looks for rarities and specialities but simply a highly informed reader, a “professional” who somehow sniffed out certain interests in volumes as soon as he glanced at them. Over the years he acquired many French classics as well as crowded shelves full of memoirs both English and French. He couldn’t have enough autobiographies of the First Empire, the Napoleonic time—especially those of the military. [...]

Certain writers were needed in his home so that he could readily reach for them. (Edel, *Library* 1)

James collected books not as commodities but as material for his writing. He *used* books as a craftsman uses his tools, and so by examining particular volumes of his library, critics have been able to uncover an elaborate system of intertextual references and allusions.

James's library thus reveals much about how he read and how that reading shaped his writing. As Leon Edel puts it, "the way that James used his books" is "important for posterity":

[His books] were auxiliary to his writing; and this gave them importance above the autograph content which delights collectors. A line drawn down a page, a single word and page number, set down in the front of a book, a tiny cross at the beginning of a paragraph to enable him to find the place when he wanted it—an entire signal system exists in his library. [...] Or we come across a Hawthorne novel (as I did once) which has on the title page Hawthorne's signature. Under this, Henry James signs his name. The two great American novelists of their time, the older and the younger, here keep eternal company. (*Library* 2)

James used the blank spaces of his books, their margins and title pages, to signal his kinship with his literary "fathers" and to mark out his own authorial identity. In fact, the "eternal company" he wished to keep with Hawthorne by coupling their signatures—the writer's with the reader's—is a central concern of James's fiction. The obsessive and tempestuous father-daughter relationship James depicts in *Washington Square*, for

example, is not only a direct descendent of Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter," but a possible reflection of James's own ambivalence towards his American precursor.

After James's death in 1916, Edel describes how a walk through Lamb House, James's last home in Rye, Sussex, revealed that his collection of approximately two thousand books was not contained in a library or study. Instead, it was dispersed throughout the house. As Edel's account suggests, James's books were as much a part of the house as the furniture itself: "[Books] were in every room and crammed also into a series of shelves on the top floor, the servants' quarters. [...] [T]hey were intimately a part of James's creation as his notebooks. [...] There were books in the Green Room upstairs, where I knew James worked in the evenings and on cold days in winter. The books were strangely miscellaneous, as if gathered from other shelves, consulted and left mixed up with those tenanted here" (*Library* 2-3). The "intimate" life that James shared with his books is reflected in this account of Lamb House as diffuse library. Like Derrida's notion of the economy of the household (*oikos*), James's books circulated freely in the house. He lived and worked with his "tenanted" books; they shared the spaces of the house. Indeed, James's favourite books were lodged in his favourite writing spaces—the Green Room and the Garden Room. The latter held the works of Browning, Kipling, Ibsen, Milton, H.G. Wells, and Edith Wharton, as well as French memoirs. The Green Room "had reference works and certain books [James] particularly liked, [...] including his Hawthornes" (Edel, "Library" 158).

Edel's account of his visit to Lamb House makes it possible to characterize James's home as an "archival economy" (Derrida 8). In the miscellaneous storage and free circulation of his books, James's house was a working archive, an invaluable

storehouse of source texts for his fiction. Moreover, as Edel's visit suggests, since James's death Lamb House has served as a museum for his readers. The house functions as a cultural institution, an archive of Jamesian books and artifacts. For the price of two pounds, one can enter James's final dwelling-place, examine his personal effects, and walk through his beloved walled garden. Countless other museums preserve the writing and dwelling-spaces of modernist authors, such as Virginia Woolf's writing-shed which features the custom-built desk she used in order to compose standing up, and Edith Wharton's The Mount, the famed estate and gardens she designed in Lenox, MA. These sites recreate the private (and creative) spaces of these public figures, which suggests that the artist's architectural and material conditions are valuable in their own right.

The rambling and disorganized nature of James's book collection is one of its most remarkable aspects, as H. Montgomery Hyde, Edel, and Tintner have noted in their writings on James. As Hyde observes, James's library, "which seems to have been somewhat haphazardly assembled appears largely utilitarian in content. English, French and Italian literature, biography, literary criticism, history, drama, crime, belles-lettres, philosophy, theology, topography and travel are the subjects principally represented. [...] The collection was richest in modern first editions" (Hyde 292-93). These first editions were by English, French, and American writers and Hyde provides a comprehensive list in *Henry James At Home*. Indeed, James's own bibliophilia seems to have rubbed off on his biographers. In *The Library of Henry James*, Edel and Tintner describe how they became avid collectors of books once owned by James, and how this prompted them to publish an inventory of his books. The "exciting" discoveries Tintner made upon acquiring James's books upheld her critical work on his fiction. She obtained James's

signed copy of Oscar Wilde's first edition in French of *Salome* (1892), which "supported my finding in the New York Edition of *Roderick Hudson* that James's recasting of his Christina as Salome echoes the very words Wilde used in describing his own Salome" (*Library* 161). Tintner's passion for James's books manifests her own bibliophilia and echoes James's fictional accounts of book collectors: "The high point of my collecting career occurred when I was able to convince Viscount Eccles that I would not only keep intact his important collection of Henry James's French books but that I would treat it lovingly" (161).

The catalogue of James's library by Edel and Tintner was first published in *The Henry James Review* in 1983 as "The Library of Henry James, From Inventory, Catalogues, and Library Lists." In his introduction to this initial list, Edel describes James's library as "essentially a library of *belles lettres*—travel, novels, history, memoirs, and some of the books that had come to him from his father's library, like works of Heine and Renan" (Edel, "Library" 158). James's library, as Edel observed in his stroll through the Oak Room at Lamb House, was both "heterogeneous and comparatively modern":

Here you might have seen all of the works of John Addington Symonds, about whom James wrote a short story called "The Author of 'Beltraffio.'" The complete Flaubert was here in eight volumes in half red morocco, also the *Arabian Nights* and the illustrated *Contes drolatiques* of Balzac which I consider myself fortunate to own. Then, in a secrétaire-bookcase, a large number of his friend Edmund Gosse's books, some autographed Kipling, a volume of Tennyson given him by his father which he had owned since

boyhood, and the writings of the Goncourts. On one table in a miniature bookcase, he had Browning's *Men and Women* in the two-volume first edition, yellow calf by Bedford, and the four volumes of the *Ring and the Book* by Riviere. We know how carefully these were read. (Edel, *Library* 4)

Like Tintner's avid collecting of James's books, Edel's "reading" or appraisal of his library illustrates an important emerging trend in contemporary literary criticism. By becoming familiar with the way James used his books to serve his writing, Edel and Tintner are able to ascertain patterns and habits not only in his writing but also in his reading. The way James read provides a revealing portrait of the artist, shedding light on his literary influences, the creative catalysts or spurs to his writing, and the particular way he responded to other texts. Like most writers, James needed his books on hand to aid his memory. He read to remember and to verify. Reading was also a form of leisure, a way to unwind after writing, traveling, or socializing. Finally, as Edel attests, James read books written by his friends. He collected the writings of Edmund Gosse, Andrew Lang, and Edith Wharton, among others, and regarded these works, like his friendships with their authors, as an invaluable aspect of his rich life with books.

Hypothetical Libraries

James's reading was not limited to his own library. He was, as Edel attests, a frequent visitor to various London libraries: "I knew that the library I was examining [at Lamb House] did not give us any measure of the extent of [James's] reading. He had used the fine libraries at his London clubs, the Athenaeum and the Reform; and he

belonged to the London Library, that favorite private library that Carlyle founded long ago when he couldn't take books home from the British Museum" (Edel, "Library" 158). Just as a young James had found solace at the English Library in Boulogne, the adult James haunted his favourite libraries in London, finding in them not only material for his books but opportunities for quiet reflection and conversation with other writers and intellectuals. According to Tintner, *The Princess Casamassima*, which she describes as James's "library" book (Edel, *Library* 79), was inspired by his discussions with two noted nineteenth-century bibliophiles, Edmund Gosse and Andrew Lang:

James had close friends in the literary world in London who had special interests in books and who were authors of books on books, like Edmund Gosse and, in particular, Andrew Lang, whose books on that subject are singularly plentiful. Lang's *The Library* (London, Macmillan, 1881) preceded *The Princess* by five years and an uncut presentation copy of the book can be found in the Lamb House library. The chances are that James read it either in the Athenaeum or in the Reform Club libraries, or, what is more likely, discussed the book and books with Lang over lunch, since he was meeting him and Gosse daily at the Reform Club during the early 1880s just prior to his writing *The Princess*. (*Library* 94)

The Princess Casamassima, which features different kinds of books and libraries, is, like the influential texts of Gosse and Lang, perhaps James's definitive book on books.

As a boy, James read books found in his father's library, and the first book he owned was "Moxon's Illustrated Edition (1857) of the *Poems* of Alfred Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, bound in half-morocco and given to [him] by his father during the

family's stay in St. John's Wood in 1858" (Hyde 291). The allusion to a book of Tennyson's poems in *The Princess Casamassima* thus has an autobiographical origin. Hyacinth Robinson, the protagonist, is a Soho bookbinder whose love of fine books and bindings recalls James's own. Hyacinth "had at home a copy of Tennyson's poems—a single comprehensive volume with a double column on the page, in a tolerably neat condition despite much handling" (PC 206). Hyacinth, whose father is dead, reads Dickens and Scott aloud to his adoptive mother, Miss Pynsent, who "believed that at fifteen [Hyacinth] had read almost every book in the world. The limits of his reading had been in fact only the limits of his opportunity" (PC 83). James's allusions to Dickens and Scott pay homage to their "books on books," particularly *David Copperfield*, in which David escapes the brutality of his stepfather by secretly reading books from his dead father's library, and Scott's *Waverley*, which has an account of the young Waverley's insatiable reading in his uncle's library. Though Miss Pynsent cannot afford to buy Hyacinth books of his own, her friend Anastasius Vetch, who recognizes Hyacinth's "subtle" intelligence and shares his love of books, "lent him every volume he possessed or could pick up for the purpose" (PC 83). "Through reading," Tintner suggests, Hyacinth "gains an education, pulls himself up the social ladder, and makes himself a kind of gentleman" (*Library* 79). "Reading," writes James, "was his extravagance, while the absence of any direct contact with a library represented for him mainly the hard shock of the real; the shock, that is, he could most easily complain of" (PC 83).

Hyacinth's "apprenticeship" under his two father figures—the poor but gentlemanly musician and man of culture, Anastasius Vetch, and the French bookbinder, Eustache Poupin, "the most brilliant craftsman in the establishment" (PC 80)—helps him

to advance. When he meets the “most remarkable woman in Europe” (206), the titular Princess herself, and is later invited to her country home, “Medley,” they converse about “pictures and antiques” (198). The Princess is impressed by Hyacinth’s “fine sensitive mind” (255). Upon first arriving at Medley, Hyacinth is asked to wait for the Princess in her “luxurious” library. James describes Hyacinth’s first “direct contact” with a library as if it were his first contact with a lover. He “ravages” the Princess’s library, finding in its “treasure-house” his first experience of “true happiness”:

Mr. Withers conducted him to the library and left him planted in the middle of it and staring at the treasures he quickly and widely took in. It was an old brown room of great extent [...] where row upon row of finely-lettered backs consciously appealed for recognition. [...] In the course of an hour he had ravaged the collection, taken down almost every book, wishing he could keep it a week, and then put it back as quickly as his eye caught the next, which glowed with a sharper challenge. He came upon rare bindings and extracted precious hints—hints by which he felt himself perfectly capable of profiting. Altogether his vision of true happiness at this moment was that for a month or two he should be locked into the treasure-house of Medley. (250)

James’s use of the word “ravage,” with its connotations of destruction or wreckage, seems at odds with Hyacinth’s careful handling of the Princess’s books. For the book-hungry and virginal Hyacinth, this first experience in the Princess’s library is symbolic (in James’s discreet way) of his first sexual experience. Indeed, the “sharper challenge” Hyacinth faces in wanting to hold and appreciate each of the finely crafted books in this

unattainable woman's library suggests that this is an ideal encounter for the bibliophile: the lover is "locked" in with his beloved. The unattainable is within reach. In contrast to his unsuccessful liaison with the Princess, Hyacinth finds himself "perfectly capable of profiting" from intimate access to her library. Indeed, as a bookbinder, Hyacinth "profits" by "extracting precious hints" from the design and craftsmanship of the books he examines. His eye for their "rare bindings" and "finely-lettered backs" recalls James's own love of fine books. Moreover, Hyacinth's expert "recognition" and "extraction" of the details of the books' exteriors serves as an analogy for James's authorial expertise: he similarly extracts "precious hints" from books, his own novels and tales profiting from the designs of other masters.

After one particularly exciting meeting with the Princess, Hyacinth takes his prized Tennyson book to pieces and "devote[s] himself to the task of binding [it] as perfectly as he knew how" (206), before presenting his "masterpiece" to her as a gift. Describing it as a "material link" between them, Hyacinth considers the "superior piece of work" he had done "a virtual proof and gage—as if a ghost in vanishing from sight had left a palpable relic" (207). The newly bound book is physical "proof"—a "palpable relic"—of Hyacinth's feelings for the Princess. It is also a "gage" or pledge of his devotion. The book is an uncanny or ghostly conduit between the past and the future. Its physical existence will remain after its maker has died. Like Derrida's archive, Hyacinth's book "opens out of the future" (*Archive* 68). His feelings, fastened into the physical binding of his book, become an archive; they will outlive him. As Derrida says of the archive, it "has always been a *pledge*, and like every pledge [*gage*], a token of the future" (*Archive* 18).

This scene becomes more poignant (and uncanny) after the reader learns of Hyacinth's premature and self-inflicted death at the end of the novel. A gunshot wound through the heart transforms him into a "ghost" who does indeed "vanish from sight." His Tennyson, painstakingly bound and intended for the Princess, is Hyacinth's only legacy—his "rare death-song" (*PC* 341). The book is emblematic of the bookbinder. Hyacinth had hoped one day to write books, for "to bind the book, charming as the process might be, was after all much less fundamental than to write it" (*PC* 341), but his death prevents him from doing so. As a gift from his own writer-father, James's copy of Tennyson's poems may similarly have been a "material link" between father and son, especially after the death of James Sr. in 1882. In fact, the idea of a loved one's literary "remains" was clearly on James's mind when he wrote *The Princess Casamassima*. In 1884, William and Henry published a book entitled *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James*—a posthumous collection of James Sr.'s writings. James also uses the expression "literary remains" in the 1908 version of *The Aspern Papers* (6), a story similarly preoccupied with questions of literary legacies.

The "father question," a term used by Andrew Taylor in *Henry James and the Father Question*, persists in James's fiction. The centrality of literary "fathers" or forefathers in James's writing life is reflected both in his actual library—in the books he read and referred to while writing in Lamb House—and in a second "hypothetical" library (Edel, *Library* 12). This library is composed of the books James refers to within the pages of his books, both real and imaginary. James's practice of peppering his fiction with literary allusions is a literary tradition passed on by James's favourite writers, namely Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was a contemporary of James's father, as well as

Hawthorne, Whitman, and Poe. Like Hawthorne, Emerson was an important literary “father” to James. In a revealing essay, James describes Emerson’s intimate relationship—his “free association”—with his “numerous and dear” books, and the way he used them in his writings (James, *Critical* 220). Given James’s own proclivity for allusiveness, his comments on Emerson sound remarkably like a self-description: “he needed [his books] and liked them; he had volumes of notes from his reading, and he could not have produced his lectures without them. He liked literature as a thing to refer to, liked the very names of which it is full, and used them, especially in his later writings, for purposes of ornament, to dress the dish, sometimes with an unmeasured profusion” (*Critical* 220). According to James, Emerson’s literary name-dropping is rather old-fashioned: he “mentions more authorities than is the fashion to-day” (*Critical* 220). In this regard, Emerson models himself after the “irrepressibly allusive Montaigne” (*Critical* 220). James discovers in Emerson’s “bookishness” a certain “contradiction” which, ironically, mirrors a tension at the heart of James’s fiction as well: “Independence, the return to nature, the finding out and doing for one’s self, was ever what he most highly recommended; and yet he is constantly reminding his readers of the conventional signs and consecrations—of what other men have done” (*Critical* 220).

The impulse for self-directed reading and literary innovation is seemingly at odds with the writer’s reverence for the classics. The desire to direct or govern one’s own learning recalls Isabel Archer’s determination “to see, to try, to know” (*PL* 54). For both Emerson and James, as well as for Whitman, this is a distinctly American trait. Isabel’s “liberal education” is a point of pride, an indicator of cultural refinement, good taste, and freedom of thought. James uses the same term in his essay on Emerson when he equates

the scholar or “cultivated man”—one who has a “tincture of books”—with “the man who has had a liberal education” (*Critical* 221). Emerson’s scholar is “the most distinguished figure in the society about him”—not “the banker, the great merchant, the legislator, the artist” (221). To read well and widely, James implies, is to be marked for greatness. As James observes, however, the writer’s endorsement of self-governed learning is held in tension with his liberal use of literary allusion, with what James calls “the conventional signs and consecrations” of “what other men have done” (220). In the manner of Montaigne, Emerson’s “unmeasured profusion” of references to the writings of others provides an influential example for James’s own writing. In his essay, “Of Books,” Montaigne appraises the value of his own literary “borrowings,” suggesting that the successful writer is one who borrows freely but judiciously. Montaigne alludes to other authors because he cannot retain all that he reads at once. Authors commingle in his mind like a library, so that reading becomes, and indeed defines, the interiority or subjectivity of the reader. Books help to classify what is disorderly; they arrange the writer’s thoughts. Despite the seeming disorder of James’s Lamb House library, books create order within the mind. Montaigne also suggests that citation hides his authorial deficiencies. Under this alternative paradigm, “doing for one’s self” means shrewdly sizing up what others have done and then drawing on those efforts. The contradiction lies in James’s (and Emerson’s) championing of both instincts—that of the original thinker and self-taught reader, and that of the canny *littérateur* who regards literature as an invaluable network of source texts, a resource or “thing to refer to.”

Just as James collects references from the books in his actual library, he fashions in his fiction an alternative “library” composed of a vast network of real and imaginary

books. This “hypothetical” collection of books establishes what Edel describes as a “subtle anagogical device” in James’s fiction (*Library* 11). The books he refers to in his writing collectively function as an allegory of literary history itself—an infinite, fantastical library that James, like Montaigne before him and Jorge Luis Borges after him, creates for his own literary amusement, instruction, and acclaim. James did not take his authorial reputation lightly. As his New York Editions suggest, he was anxious about how he would be remembered. In *The Library of Henry James*, Edel describes how James’s literary allusions “came to have profound meanings” not only as instances of “reference and criticism” (11), but also as proof of James’s feeling that there was nothing new under the sun: “This was the response of a writer to a vision of a past which seems to say to all artists that everything has been tried, that here are the millions of books already written, and what is the artist to do who wants to add to their number?” (*Library* 11).

James did what modernists such as Joyce, Pound, and Eliot did after him, and what later twentieth-century writers such as Borges, Umberto Eco, and John Barth have also done. He demonstrates in his fiction “how literature comes out of literature, and how much it is nonsense to think of literature as coming exclusively out of life” (*Library* 13):

The greatest artists have understood that the best thing they can do is to renovate old forms by creating new ones, *using* the past rather than relinquishing it. Ezra Pound was doing this when he turned to Provencal poetry or rewrote Propertius. T.S. Eliot did it by grafting lines out of classic poetry into his own, representing a continuity of thought and allusion, a feeling of profound kinship, a peculiar personal intimacy with a dead author—as when Eliot made poems out of Lancelot Andrewes’ old

sermons. So Henry James, before these moderns, took old stories and rewrote them very much as Manet repainted a Raphael classic in *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. Out of the library in James's stories the novelist made new books that have endeared themselves to us, and that reflect the America of his time and more profoundly still the dilemma in which Americans found themselves in the nineteenth century. (*Library* 11)

This sense of "continuity" or literary kinship with the work of dead authors defines James's fiction. His textual "renovations" of his literary precursors pay tribute to the past, and serve as a flattering homage to his heroes. These tributes form a "fascinating literary game of association and terminology, of criticism and emulation" (Edel, *Library* 11), which James plays in his novels and stories. To become a "Master," James knew, required both an exhaustive reading of the classics and a willingness to profit from one's own sense of belatedness. "In his game," says Edel, "[James] tells himself that Hawthorne came out of a primitive America; a later arrival, like himself, could redo Hawthorne benefiting by the accretions of time and civilization" (*Library* 11). As Edel suggests, James's literary sport is also a response to the larger "dilemma" of belatedness that nineteenth-century American writers faced. In this regard, James found his own way to win: if he could not beat the giants of literature, he would join them.

The most extensive explorations of the books in James's books have been pursued by Tintner in *The Book World of Henry James*, and Edel and Tintner in *The Library of Henry James*. Tintner, for example, observes that certain male characters in James's fiction "carry volumes (presumably in small-format editions) in their pockets. Rowland Mallet in *Roderick Hudson* pockets his Wordsworth; the hero in "The Ghostly Rental,"

an early tale, has Pascal's *Pensées* as a pocket-companion" (*Library* 71). In fact, the bulk of books read by Jamesian characters are classics: "Vanderbank and Mrs. Brookenham discuss a character's resemblance to Anna Karenina in *The Awkward Age*. [...] In *The Wings of the Dove*, the heroine and her companion have read Pater, Marbot, Maeterlinck, and Gregorovius" (*Library* 76). In addition to the actual books that characters read in James's texts, Edel lists the imaginary books that are written by characters in various novels and tales, suggesting that they "exist [...] in his books, quite as if they were on his shelves" (*Library* 14): "Ralph Limbert's 'The Major Key' or his other book 'The Hidden Heart' and finally his unfinished novel, 'Derogation.' There is Neil Paraday's fragment in 'The Death of the Lion'; there is a work called *Obsessions* by Guy Walsingham, who turns out to be a woman, and then Dora Forbes, who is a man, has written a work called 'The Other Way Round' (*Library* 13). Such fanciful titles reflect James's private amusement in authoring books for other authors, and in requiring his readers to distinguish between real and made-up books. In this hypothetical library he was free to play, to invent literary in-jokes, and to pursue every writer's fantasy: the creation of books that do not require writing.

The trope of the book, whether real or imaginary, recurs in fundamental and imaginative ways in James's fiction. Tintner's essay, "The Books in the Books: What Henry James's Characters Read and Why," which is included in *The Library of Henry James*, provides a comprehensive treatment of James's use of this trope. In *Writing and Reading in Henry James*, Susanne Kappeler offers another useful discussion, as does Robert L. Gale in *The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction of Henry James*. A highlight of Gale's study is his description of James's penchant for portraying

his characters *as* books. A number of Jamesian faces are described in terms of the “features” of books: “She had long cheeks, like the wide blank margins of old folios” (qtd. in Gale 119). As these critics demonstrate, James’s bibliophilia manifests in a variety of interesting ways in his writing. This preoccupation with books is often closely tied to other important Jamesian motifs, such as the modern subject’s nostalgic gaze toward the past, the affinity for beauty and fine objects, the collector’s desire to own or possess a thing completely, and the pleasures, conflicts, anxieties, and disappointments that inevitably accompany these bibliophilic inclinations.

Jamesian Bookworms

A remarkable number of James’s characters are bookish types who share the author’s own bibliomania and devotion to knowledge and learning. “For real excitement,” James writes in *The Sacred Fount*, “there are no such adventures as intellectual ones” (168-69). This could serve as the motto for any number of Jamesian bookworms. As Stephen Spender remarks in *The Destructive Element*, for James “[p]assionate activity is intellectual activity. [...] His realization of this is James’s great contribution to the novel. The effect of passion is not a momentary display, but a stimulus to thought, which is at once dazzling and intricate” (193). In James’s fiction, archive fever sublimates romantic passion. The homoerotic tension between Ford Obert and the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* is “confessed,” subversively, in the book-lined smoking-room where Obert fixates on the shelves (164). His “charmed communion” with books (163) displaces his feelings for another man. A passion for reading, writing, editing, and collecting books signals intrigue in James’s fiction. Books metonymically suggest desire.

Donnish readers, singled-minded scholars, and well-heeled collectors typify the Jamesian obsession for printed matter. Their bookish exploits stir up archive trouble.

A host of Jamesian bookworms are writers, editors, scholars, bookbinders, and booksellers. These include the maniacal literary editor in *The Aspern Papers*, the ardent bookbinder in *The Princess Casmassima*, and the self-important bookseller in “The Bench of Desolation.” Similarly, in the opening scene of *The Bostonians*, James describes his precocious protagonist, Basil Ransom, as a visitor who, kept waiting for a few moments, “was already absorbed in a book. The gentleman had not even needed to sit down to become interested: apparently he had taken up the volume from a table as soon as he came in, and, standing, there, [...] had lost himself in its pages” (5). Basil, James tell us, “had read Comte, he had read everything” (18). In his “spare hours and on chance holidays, he did an immense deal of suggestive reading” at the Astor Library (163). In fact, “he asked himself what was the use of his having an office at all, and why he might not as well carry on his profession” at the library (163). The library serves as an ideal office space for the young lawyer, a haven for his solitary studies. He prefers to work there rather than at his little law office. Basil moonlights as a journalist. The “copious” notes he takes from books are used to “shape” the articles he sends off to the editors of periodicals, who decline them “with thanks,” suggesting that his doctrines are “about three hundred years behind the age” (163). Basil’s old-fashioned writing, James implies, is not exactly a virtue: the “classics” aspire to timelessness. However, Basil “had a longish pedigree [...], and he seemed at moments to be inhabited by some transmitted spirit of a robust but narrow ancestor” (164). He is critical of “the encroachments of modern democracy,” and of the “maudlin” nature of his age (164). Unusually self-assured

and opinionated for someone of his relative youth, Basil recalls another Jamesian journalist, the worldly and straight-talking Henrietta Stackpole from *The Portrait of a Lady*. Henrietta also has ties to libraries, or rather to one particular library: she inherits Ralph Touchett's library of "rare and valuable books" in "recognition of her services to literature," as stated in his will (475). This allusion to the writer's relationship to literature is echoed in James's description of Basil, with his "reverence" for precursors. Like James, Basil "liked his pedigree, he revered his forefathers, and he rather pitied those who might come after him" (*Bostonians* 164).

In "Glasses," James portrays a scholarly bibliophile and aesthete who is, like James, "fond of London, fond of books" (qtd. in Edel, *Library* 12). He creates a similar character in "Benvolio." Benvolio is a literary young man caught up in flirtations with two very different women: the rich, well-traveled Countess, and the serious, inexperienced young Scholastica, "daughter of a Philosopher." At the behest of the Countess, Benvolio writes a play—one that "exactly adapted to her resources" (James, *Complete* 379). To do so, he "shut himself up" in her library and "in a week produced a masterpiece. He had found his subject, one day when he was pulling over the Countess's books, in an old MS. Chronicle written by the chaplain of one of her late husband's ancestors" (*Complete* 379). In this story, James highlights the textual and investigates the composite nature of texts: Benvolio, whose name comes from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and suggests, etymologically, "good book" or volume (or folio), is a writer who finds his source text in a library. In this regard, he is variously textualized. Books and archives, James implies, belong in libraries. Texts engender other texts. Benvolio's composition of a play whose subject is extracted from an old manuscript

found in his lover's library is an ideal example of a Jamesian "adaptation," where the newly created text has been "adapted" from a library's ancient "resources." "Benvolio" thus accurately renders James's own writing process, as well as his dual identities as a writer and socialite. According to Edel, this tale represents James's "unashamed personal allegory": "Benvolio is an artistic and pleasure-loving young man, who enjoys both his public and his private life, his monk-like cell on the quiet garden, and his well-furnished room looking out on the large city square" (qtd. in James, *Complete* 10).

All of these characters share James's romantic or sentimental passion for the printed page, for his sense that books, like libraries, are storehouses of knowledge and are thus both enthralling and indispensable. This quixotic or idealistic view of books and the wisdom they yield is a form of literary nostalgia, a way to commune with the past, as James suggests in "Professor Fargo," first published in 1874. In this tale, the narrator finds a "tattered volume of 'Don Quixote'" while "rummaging idly on a bookshelf in the tavern parlor" (*Complete* 265). Drawn or "magnetized" by the great classic's appeal, he begins to read it: "I repaired to my room, tilted back my chair, and communed deliciously with the ingenious hidalgo. Here was 'magnetism' superior even to that of Professor Fargo. It proved so effective that I lost all note of time, and, at last on looking at my watch, perceived that dinner must have been over for an hour" (*Complete* 265). James, who owned an 1866 illustrated edition of Cervantes's *Adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Tintner, *Book* 384), clearly alludes to the bookish "hidalgo's" own feverish reading in *Don Quixote*, where Quixote's beloved library of books on chivalry is blamed for his growing madness: "You must know then," writes Cervantes, "that this gentleman aforesaid, at times when he was idle, which was most part of the year, gave himself up to

the reading of books of chivalry, with so much attachment and relish" that he began to read all night and day and "thus, through little sleep and much reading, his brain was dried up in such a manner, that he came at last to lose his wits" (Cervantes 21-3). The unhappy fate of Quixote's precious books is shared by many twentieth-century books. Centuries after Quixote's books go up in flames, books are still liable for charges of madness, corruption, cultural antipathy, and even anti-social tendencies.

Just as the narrator of "Professor Fargo" "communes" with Don Quixote, James communes with the "ingenious" Cervantes. James's narrator is clearly a stand-in for James himself, and the tale seems self-conscious of its status as literary tribute. In fact, as Tintner argues, James's direct mention of *Don Quixote* as a book that is read within his story signals his adoption of Cervantes's narrative strategy of writing in analogues (*Book* 201). As Tintner attests, until he wrote "Professor Fargo," James "had not built a story on a single literary classic clearly identified as the book actually read by a character, unless we include "The Story of a Masterpiece" (1868) in which "My Last Duchess" by Browning is brought into the story and although known 'perfectly' is not held in hand" (Tintner 202). By holding Cervantes's novel "in hand," James's narrator (who stands in for James himself) travels back in time and is able to connect or "commune" with Quixote and his creator. This kind of "interrelation" or connection between literary classics such as *Don Quixote* and the "psychology and action" (Tintner, *Library* 76) of James's own stories is a compelling though still largely unexplored area of James criticism.

In "The Hawthorne Aspect," T. S. Eliot observes that both Hawthorne and James had "that sense of the past which is peculiarly American" (50). "I delight in a palpable

imaginable *visitable* past,” writes James in his Preface to *The Aspern Papers*, “in the nearer distances and the clearer mysteries, the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to as by making a long arm we grasp an object at the other end of our own table. The table is the one, the common expanse, and where we lean, so stretching, we find it firm and continuous” (“Preface” viii-ix). The “object” he reaches for at the end of his table is the past made “palpable,” the past embodied in the form of a book, perhaps, or a letter—an archive of the “marks and signs” of the past. James’s real and hypothetical libraries represent his attempt to “embody” or give form to the past (Edel, *Library* 13). The books he has authored, likewise, collectively function as a library. Both in their material form and in their symbolic content, they articulate James’s desire to “grasp” the past. Like many of his characters, James covets the past in some tangible, physical form. To grasp the past, or hold it in hand, is to understand it better.

In this regard, the library is the ideal space or setting in which to reflect on the material and metaphysical implications of culture, and particularly cultural taste and heritage. Books represent the transmission of cultural knowledge. As a room full of books, the library embodies the materialization, accumulation, and containment of knowledge. The library is total knowledge confined yet accessible. Edel claims that “[i]f we could gather in one immense library all the works of the human imagination written since the beginning of writing, what we would have would be a vast record of human imaginings and overwhelming proof of our myth-creating powers” (*Library* 13). This “immense library” accumulates the wisdom and creative endeavours of the past. In this sense, literature is a “vast record” or archive of writing and reading throughout the ages. Similarly, James sees himself and his books as belonging to a long line of writers and

their “records.” He conceives of his work as a kind of reading-room “table”—a site or surface of palpable contact and exchange between the present and the past, between the modern writer and the ghosts of dead authors. Like his modernist successors, James stages scenes of altercation, debate, and conversation in libraries, studies, and other reading-rooms. He implies that the library is not a neutral backdrop for dialogue or other forms of narrative action, but a space that is charged with its own meanings and implications. In this sense, the library acts on the plot and characters in James’s fiction.

Recognition of the vastness of cultural heritage is thus something James transmits to his own successors. Echoing James’s allusion to a reading-room table, Ezra Pound conjures up a similar scene in *Guide to Kulchur*. He recalls how as a young man he found himself reading at a table in the British Museum, and how “appal[ed]” he felt when faced with the “vast task of swallowing the damned lot” of books piled in front of him:

About thirty years ago, seated on one of the very hard, very slippery, thoroughly uncomfortable chairs of the British Museum main reading room, with a pile of large books at my right hand and a pile of somewhat smaller ones at my left hand, I lifted my eyes to the tiers of volumes and false doors covered with imitation book-backs which surround that focus of learning. Calculating the eye-strain and the number of pages per day that a man could read, with deduction for say at least 5% of one man’s time for reflection, I decided against it. There must be some other way for a human being to make use of that vast cultural heritage. (*Guide* 53-4)

Like James, Pound sees literary history in decidedly materialistic terms: he conceives of his literary inheritance as piles of books stacked on a table. However, when he glances up

at the seemingly infinite tiers of books on the shelves and “calculates” how long it would take to read them all, he is inundated by the immensity of that heritage, and by the impossible task of “swallowing it” all. Creativity, in the modernist sense, thus begins with the repudiation of absolute mastery, despite the desire to know everything. One picks up useful fragments rather than entire scholarly disciplines. Reading is an interminable activity, an exhaustive (and exhausting) pursuit of knowledge. With the rise of larger public and institutional libraries like the British Museum, the modern reader’s view of the library changes. No longer simply a quiet, private sanctuary that holds out the seductive promise of totality, the modern library becomes a disquieting deluge of pages and books.

What Pound formerly thought of as culture has been transformed into information—altogether too much information. This account of Pound’s predicament, and its implicit critique of the library as public institution (with its “false” doors, “imitation book-backs,” and uncomfortable furnishings), is emphatically modernist. As Declan Kiberd writes in the introduction to *Ulysses*, “At the heart of modernist culture is a distrust of the very idea of culture itself” (Joyce, *Ulysses* xlix). This distrust, which frequently takes the form of literary parody in modernist fiction, stems from the modern writer’s sense of being swamped by the great mass of classics already written. Pound, like James, wants to “make use” of the classics, but he is decidedly less “delighted” by their overwhelming “palpability” or presence. In *How to Read*, he writes: “I have been accused of wishing to provide a ‘portable substitute for the British Museum,’ which I would do, like a shot, were it possible. It isn’t” (8). This dream of a “portable” British Museum—conceivably, a book that contains all the books in the library—is shared by

Pound's like-minded contemporary, Joyce, in his attempt to write what Kiberd calls "the book to end all books" (Joyce, *Ulysses* xxi). This impulse towards bibliographic portability and economy, a kind of high modernist "digest" of the past, is at odds with James's old-fashioned or dilatory interest in the value of archives, in the papers and books that embody the weight of the past. James, unlike Pound or Joyce, is seemingly at home in the company of reticent librarians and know-it-all archivists. He shares their quiet passion for what Carolyn Steedman calls "the cult of the archive" (x), their careful custodianship of the accumulated vestiges of the dead. Besieged by the depth and breadth of archives, by the material (and sometimes architectural) vastness of the library, James's modernist successors grapple begrudgingly with the past, while trying to generate new ideas about the nature and function of culture.

James's archival impulse, his desire to gather and make some "use" of the works of his precursors, is a defining feature of his writing, but as with other Jamesian preoccupations it is a complex, subtly nuanced matter. James's "backward vision," as he describes it in the preface to *The Aspern Papers*, is at once a deeply sentimental "appreciation" of the "romance-value" of the past (vii), and a shrewdly modern "revisiting, re-appropriating impulse" (vi). That is, James's authorial "sense of the past" involves both the historian's nostalgic view of the past, which he calls his "sense of the romantic" (vi), and a seemingly contradictory compulsion to "grip" or "grasp" the past and thus "profit" from its "element of the appreciable" (ix). "We are" he writes, implicating both himself and other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers, "divided of course between liking to feel the past strange and liking to feel it familiar; the difficulty is, for intensity, to catch it at the moment when the scales of balance hang with

the right evenness. I say for intensity, for we may profit by them in other aspects enough if we are content to measure or to feel loosely" (ix). As is often the case in his prefaces, James writes somewhat disingenuously: he advocates a "loose" or "measured" hold on the past, advising the modern writer to be "content" with what Eliot describes as a "sense of the sense" of the past ("Hawthorne" 50), yet he himself often attempts a more substantial, or material, understanding or "familiarity" with the past. As his late, unfinished novel *The Sense of the Past* attests, James was deeply engaged in determining the role of the past in the present. Likewise, in *The Aspern Papers*, he implies that the past is understood most effectively when it takes some material form, in this case the form of an archive of unpublished love letters.

In his 1884 essay, "The Art of Fiction," James contends that "as the picture is reality, so the novel is history" (*Art* 5). In *The Sense of the Past*, and in his prefaces, essays, notebooks, and letters, James portrays the modern novelist as a collector and chronicler of the past. As Tintner argues, "It is in *The Sense of the Past* that James becomes his own historian through his hero, Ralph Pendrel, the writer of a small but 'remarkable' book, *An Essay in Aid of the Reading of History*" (*Book* 177). As Pendrel's book title suggests, James sees the novelist's task as providing precisely this kind of "aid" or service in the "reading of history." Not simply an historian, he is an archivist; he has a responsibility to the past, to the preservation of its material "relics" at all costs (*Aspern* 56). As James suggests in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*, this novelist is one who "delights" in the past, who cultivates "a sense of the past," and who is, instinctively, "fond and filial" (*Aspern* ix). James regards the archive or library as the scene of that cultivation. Emblematic of the past, the archive amasses what is already there, already

written, waiting to be read or assimilated. In “The New Novel” (1914), James describes a new aspect of the novelist’s range of resource as the degree to which he is “saturated” or “immersed” in his own “body of reference”: the modern novelist’s “extraordinary mass of gathered and assimilated knowledge” points towards his “*generally* informed condition” (James, *Art* 185). Thanks to his access to libraries and archives, and to his wide-ranging reading, the novelist has in his “handiest possession [...] immeasurably more concrete material” than he could ever use, all “amenable for straight and vivid reference, convertible into apt illustration” (*Art* 185).

Though he refers explicitly to the novels of H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett in “The New Novel,” James comments on his own “possession” of literary materials. James takes up this notion of a stockpile of literary documents in *The Aspern Papers*. Given his penchant for tackling pathological extremes in his fiction, as well as his pervasive nostalgia for material vestiges of the past, this account of archival monomania exemplifies James’s own contradictory relation to textual sources. James amplifies his theme so convincingly that *The Aspern Papers* transmits an implicitly autobiographical account of the modern writer’s use and potential abuse of the products of the past. *The Aspern Papers* is thus a study of what James calls “exploitable knowledge” (James, *Art* 188). As he writes in “The New Novel,” this is an innovation specific to the subject matter and style of the modern novel: “Reduction to exploitable knowledge is apt to mean for many a case of the human complexity reduced to comparative thinness [...]. This was a fresh and beguiling impression—that the state of inordinate possession on the chronicler’s part, the mere state as such and as an energy directly displayed, *was* the interest, neither more nor less, *was* the sense and the meaning and the picture and the

drama, all so sufficiently constituting them that it scarce mattered what they were in themselves" (James, *Art* 188). With its motifs of appropriation and exploitation, of privacy and publicity, of property, economics, and propriety, James's *The Aspern Papers* presents exactly this kind of "impression." Indeed, the "drama" incorporates both the immoderate, appropriating impulses of the narrator and those of its "chronicler." The central indictment of the text—"Ah, you publishing scoundrel!"—takes aim at its protagonist as well as its author.

Chapter Two

Pilfered Archives: *The Aspern Papers*

In a notebook entry dated 12 January 1887, Henry James wrote from Florence about a scandalous story he had heard concerning Captain Edward Silsbee—the “Boston art-critic and [Percy Bysshe] Shelley-worshipper”—and his encounter with Mary Jane Clairmont, Lord Byron’s former mistress (James, *Complete Notebooks* 33). The story, according to James, was that Silsbee knew of some “interesting papers—letters of Shelley’s and Byron’s”—that were in the custody of the Clairmonts, and he “cherished the idea of getting hold of them” (*Complete* 33). He planned to stay with the Clairmonts at their home in Florence in the hope that Miss Clairmont would die while he was there, “so that he might then put his hand upon the documents, which she hugged close in life” (*Complete* 33). When she does die, Silsbee asks her niece about the letters. Knowing that he wants to acquire them very badly, the niece says that she will give them to him only if he agrees to marry her. Silsbee, deeply unsettled by her proposal, leaves the city. After recording the story in his notebook, James expressed his interest in using it as material for his fiction:

Certainly there is a little subject there: the picture of the two faded, queer, poor and discredited old English women—living on into a strange generation, in their musty corner of a foreign town—with these illustrious letters their most precious possession. Then the plot of the Shelley fanatic—his watchings and waitings—the way he *couver*s the treasure. [...] The interest would be in some price that the man has to pay—that the

old woman—or the survivor—sets upon the papers. His hesitations—his struggle—for he really would give almost anything. (*Complete* 33-4)³

Many of James's favourite themes are here, which accounts for his attraction to the story—the enduring quality of the past, the encounter of an old order with a new one, the compulsion to possess material objects, the conflicts and compromises involved in relations with others, the ethical deliberations that property and ownership incite, and the price exacted for the gratification of one's desires.

Just over a year after hearing Silsbee's story, James's tale, "The Aspern Papers," was published in the March-May 1888 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. James uses the same "little subject" of Silsbee and the Clairmonts in his text, but he replaces Byron with a fictitious American Romantic poet named Jeffrey Aspern, the Clairmonts with the Misses Bordereau, and Florence with Venice. An unnamed narrator—a literary critic and editor of Aspern's work—serves as the "fanatical" figure of Silsbee. As he explains in his 1908 preface to the revised New York Edition of the tale, James's "delight" in the idea of a "palpable imaginable *visitable* past" ("Preface" x) prompted him to "appropriate" the Florentine legend, and to "transpose" its elements for his fictional account (xi). Indeed, the "palpable" past he thrills to is as susceptible to authorial pilfering as the private archive of letters in question in *The Aspern Papers*. To underscore James's point about the vulnerability of archives to the authority wielded by literary critics, editors, and other "publishing scoundrels" (AP 117), I use the text of the original 1888 edition of *The Aspern Papers* in my analysis, rather than the later New York Edition. In keeping with the theme of editorial intervention in *The Aspern Papers*, my decision to refer to the

³ The French verb *couver* means "to sit on"—like a hen over her eggs—and also "to be sickening for" or obsessed with something.

original text—the one James chose *not* to be remembered for—resists the author’s attempt to dictate how his work will be read after his death. Like the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, who has an “editorial heart” (AP 76), James aspired to a literary perfectibility in his New York Edition. This implies that he thought of the original version of *The Aspern Papers* as an archive or record of his germinal impulse to document Silsbee’s tale. While James made no structural changes to the New York Edition of the text, certain verbal alterations were made, such as the renaming of Miss “Tita” in the original text to “Tina” in the revised version.

James’s desire to gather the Silsbee story suggests an intriguing correspondence between the narrator’s ruthless attempts to acquire the Aspern archive and the author’s canny appropriation of the anecdote for his fiction. Rather than crafting the “situation,” James “comes upon” it like a researcher sifting through an archive:

I not only recover with ease, but I delight to recall, the first impulse given to the idea of “The Aspern Papers.” It is at the same time true that my present mention of it may perhaps too effectually dispose of any complacent claim to my having “found” the situation. Not that I quite know indeed what situations the seeking fabulist does “find”; he seeks them enough assuredly, but his discoveries are, like those of the navigator, the chemist, the biologist, scarce more than alert recognitions. He *comes upon* the interesting thing as Columbus came upon the isle of San

Salvador, because he had moved in the right direction for it. (“Preface” v)

Archives, James implies, are analogous to unknown or unexplored territory. As private papers, archives exemplify “esoteric knowledge” (AP 76). Moreover, his

characterization of the writer as a “seeking fabulist” or explorer who hopes to lay claim to some undiscovered detail in an archive is an apt metaphor for James, a late nineteenth-century American *littérateur* renowned for his “international theme” and for his ambivalence towards his own American background and precursors.

James’s mixed feelings about his Americanness and his reluctance to acknowledge the literary influence of his American forerunners figure centrally in *The Aspern Papers*. Jeffrey Aspern shares James’s penchant for literary exploration, his desire to be the first to discover some “interesting thing,” and his ambivalence about his literary heritage. According to the narrator, Aspern aspired “to live and write like one of the first” (AP 79):

His own country after all had had most of his life, and his muse, as they said at the time, was essentially American. That was originally what I had loved him for: that at a period when our native land was nude and crude and provincial, when the famous “atmosphere” it is supposed to lack was not even missed, when literature was lonely there and art and form almost impossible, he had found means to live and write like one of the first; to be free and general and not at all afraid; to feel, understand and express everything. (79)

Despite this unfavourable account of early American culture, with its intimation of the unrefined or “provincial” nature of American letters, Aspern’s “muse” for his literary innovations was American, just as James’s literary ambitions were shaped by his American precursors, Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Poe. The narrator values Aspern’s originality in the same way that James prized Hawthorne for being, as

Tony Tanner puts it, “the first American novelist” (“Introduction” 3). In fact, Hawthorne “was the one man above all others with whom [James] had to come to terms” (“Introduction” 7). After Hawthorne’s death, James describes in *Notes of a Son and Brother* how the tone of his work had been “ever so appreciably American. [...] Thus he was at once so clear and so entire – clear without thinness [...] and entire with heterogeneity” (qtd. in Tanner, “Introduction” 20). James’s literary tribute to his American forefather echoes the narrator’s fond appraisal of Aspern. Both praise the distinctively American quality of their precursors’ fiction, as well as its heterogeneity and scope. James’s debt to Hawthorne was immense. According to Tanner, “in matters of subject, theme, and even technique (particularly with regard to the symbolism in James’s late work) the influence of Hawthorne is pervasive. It is quite arguable, indeed, that no other writer influenced James more” (“Introduction” 2). Coming to terms with Hawthorne meant coming to terms with his own Americanness, as well as owning up to his secondary or filial status, his literary apprenticeship under the first American master.

As James writes in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*, it was “natural, it was fond and filial” to gather the “distilled drops” of the past from some vision of life in an earlier America (xi). This “filial” instinct, which is exemplified in the narrator’s “fond” appraisal and veneration of Jeffrey Aspern, is always an appropriating instinct for James. The past, recorded in papers and books, is sought and then “gathered.” The writer’s dream, made possible by the vulnerability of archives to seizure, is to amass or collect “everything” already felt, understood, and expressed, and yet to write like one of the first. Like Joyce, who describes literature as “exploitable ground” in the library scene in *Ulysses* (245), James is attuned to the latent opportunities for literary inspiration hidden in archives. *The*

Aspern Papers is thus an exposé of archive fever. The text explores and articulates the tension at play in James's fiction and prefaces between the writer's filial instinct, his sense of creative indebtedness, and his resentment of such indebtedness. Indeed, this conflict forms the crux of James's own archive fever. In search of source material for his fiction, he turns to the books of his American precursors. In them he finds a sampling of exemplars with which he can forge his own visions of life. The need to acknowledge and draw on the accomplishments of his forerunners naturally incites in James a sense of antipathy toward them and towards the formidable archive of Americana that they have left behind. Thus James's impulse to remember or to collect the archived impressions of the past is at odds with his will to forget, to fashion new or novel impressions of his own.

James's "acquisitive propensity" (AP 90) is reflected in his narrator's desire to seize or possess the past and to commodify it in the form of the Aspern papers. The narrator is a literary editor and critic, an expert on Jeffrey Aspern. Criticism, as the literary critic knows, is a form of appreciation. As James contends in the preface to *What Maisie Knew*, to appreciate something is to recognize its value and hence to claim a kind of abstract ownership of it: "To criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one's own. The large intellectual appetite projects itself thus on many things" (qtd. in Tintner, n.p.). James plainly refers to his own authorial "appetite" or desire to appropriate the past. As a writer he wants to take "intellectual possession" of his subjects and make them his own. This appropriating impulse, which forms the central intrigue of *The Aspern Papers*, exemplifies James's expert recognition or "appreciation" of the values of the past, and particularly what he calls its "romance-value" ("Preface" vii). James shares the

historian's "curiosity" or interest in the past, and especially in the period he terms "the Byronic age" ("Preface" xi). The narrator's fixation with Aspern serves, then, as an appropriate analogy for James's authorial fixation with literary history, with the appraisal or appreciation of his own "muses." James uses the word "appreciate" in all of its senses in *The Aspern Papers*: his narrator, as a researcher, writer, and critic, is naturally inclined to appreciate or value the past, and particularly adept at recognizing or appreciating its value; he is also gratified by or appreciative of its spoils. This nostalgic valuing and evaluation of the past, embodied in its material forms, causes it to appreciate or to rise in value. By appreciating the past, James implies, the writer ensures an increase in its romance-value. By appropriating that romance-value, the writer's own fictions profit.

Moreover, James's claim that the literary critic establishes a "relation" with the thing criticized emphasizes the relational nature of aesthetic appreciation, an idea that is central to *The Aspern Papers*. He suggests that the writer, as an amateur historian or archivist, is particularly adept at espying the connections between things—between the past and the present, between people of different eras, between people and objects. To write is to gather; to put things together implies plotting, scheming, or even conspiring. A relation is a connection, and writers are expert at connecting things. A relation is also a relative, persons connected by blood or marriage, who share a common origin. As Juliana Bordereau's niece, Tita, tells the narrator at the end of *The Aspern Papers*, "if you were a relation it would be different" (125). If he were not a "stranger," then anything that was hers, including Aspern's papers, "would be yours, and you could do what you like. I shouldn't be able to prevent you—and you'd have no responsibility" (125). Tita effectively proposes marriage to the bewildered narrator, tendering what she considers an

equitable trade-off—marital relations for the narrator's unrestricted access, or relation, to Aspern's papers. She offers one kind of relation for another. As James implies by the narrator's dismayed reaction to the proposal, however, appreciation and appropriation are never free from the constraints of intimacy or the responsibilities of property and propriety. If he were to become a "relation," a legitimate proprietor of the papers, things would be "different," indeed. Ironically, however, becoming a proprietor also would entail losing possession of his liberty as a single man and his so-called editorial "objectivity."

Writers, according to James, like "all painters of manners and fashions [...] are historians" ("Honoré," *Art* 27). James's narrator is, like James, a "man of letters," a writer and an historian (*AP* 100). In a conversation with Juliana Bordereau, the narrator tells her that he writes about "the books of other people. I'm a critic, an historian, in a small way" (101). "The historian," as James writes in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*, "wants more documents than he can really use; the dramatist only wants more liberties than he can really take" ("Preface" vii). As a collector and critic of Aspern lore, James's narrator exemplifies both of these impulses: the "fanatical" and perpetual desire to accumulate as many of Aspern's "documents" as he can (*AP* 58), and the compulsion to do so at the risk of behaving in unseemly or unacceptably familiar ways. Indeed, the narrator excels at "taking liberties" at the Bordereau household, but he claims to do so for the benefit of literary history, for public and not personal profit. He wants to liberate the Aspern archive from neglect in a forgotten corner of Venice, he assures the reader, so that it might become the intellectual property of all. The sincerity of such claims, however, is contradicted by the narrator's zeal: if he is concerned with posterity, it is his own and not

the papers' which he hopes to secure.

James thus sets out an important relationship between propriety and property, where the former is abused, exploited, and manipulated for the sake of acquiring the latter. The ethical dimensions of this relationship are very familiar to James, who famously burned the bulk of his private papers before he died, and whose own misgivings about being a "publishing scoundrel" are dramatized in this story (*AP* 117). As he acknowledges in his notebook in 1891, the "terrible law of the artist" is one by which "everything is grist to his mill" (*Complete* 61). With this in mind, I read *The Aspern Papers*, with its trope of the pilfered archive and its portrayal of the single-minded researcher-writer, as a cautionary tale, a confession of sorts. In it, James offers up a portrait of the writer as an acquisitive, obsessive, and unscrupulous archivist of the past, one who conspires to secure his literary spoils at almost any cost. The narrator's archive fever is ultimately thwarted by his disregard for the code of conduct or propriety that governs the Bordereau household and that safeguards the precious papers that he covets. A transgression against the rightful owner of the archive is, in the end, a transgression against the papers themselves. Consequently, the past in James's *The Aspern Papers* remains intangible or unvisited: the eponymous archive never materializes. Instead, the reader is told that it was burnt by Tita, Juliana Bordereau's only living relation. This conclusion brings the author's cautionary message into focus. The past, James suggests, is susceptible to the pilfering or appropriating impulses of the modern writer or biographer. Embodied in the form of flammable (and potentially inflammatory) papers, the past remains elusive at the very point where it is pursued most recklessly.

Unlike previous critical analyses of *The Aspern Papers*, my reading takes up a bibliographical or archival approach by emphasizing the centrality of the papers and their pivotal role in the narrative. Several book-length studies on James have incorporated analyses of *The Aspern Papers*. Of these, Adeline Tintner's *The Book World of Henry James* and Suzanne Keen's *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* are relevant to this discussion for their view that James conceives of the archive as a site and source of romance, desire, and intrigue. Keen describes the narrator of James's tale as a "romancer" of Aspern's archive, and thus, of the romantic poet himself (74). Similarly, Tintner suggests that James invokes Byron's heroic "aura" in the tale, and that *The Aspern Papers* thereby attests to James's "infatuation" with his literary precursors, and particularly with the English romantic poet (95). A number of other critics read James's tale as an expression of his ambivalent attitude towards the enticement of literary homage on the one hand, and the attendant anxieties of literary influence on the other. I follow up on the work of Daniel Mark Fogel, John Carlos Rowe, Tessa Hadley, Millicent Bell, William Veeder, and Gary Scharnhorst by tracing that ambivalence to the archive itself, the actual source of homage and influence.

Finally, Stephen Spender, Evan Carton, and Julie Rivkin signal the economic or "pecuniary" nature of James's story. They track the centrality of money, commerce, value, and profit to its plot, and outline the various economies at work in its pages—its "textual" and "household" economies (Rivkin 141), as well as its "exchange economy" (Carton 118). By drawing on this approach, I expose an alternative economy, one that lies at the heart of *The Aspern Papers*, namely Derrida's "archival economy" (*Archive* 8). An archive, as Derrida suggests, is capital accumulated "in advance" (7). The "capital" in

question in James's story is the past embodied in the preserved papers of Jeffrey Aspern. Archives are economic in the sense that they serve a "conservative function" (Derrida 7): an archive "keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves" (Derrida 7). As sites of accumulation and conservation, archives have value that can be capitalized on. *The Aspern Papers*, like Derrida's *Archive Fever*, considers the value of archives. The intrigue surrounding the value, use, and ownership of the Aspern archive forms what I call a conspiracy economy in *The Aspern Papers*—a system of schemes, plots, and manoeuvres directed exclusively at capitalizing on archival desire.

"A Kind of Conspiracy": Archival Stakeouts

Archive fever triggers conspiracy, or archive trouble, in *The Aspern Papers*. The *trouble de l'archive*, according to Derrida, stems from a *mal d'archive* (Archive 91). Archival desire generates secrets and elicits plots. It stirs up trouble, and particularly the trouble housed at "the unstable limit between public and private" (Derrida 90). The archive, though a public entity, stores the personal and the private. *The Aspern Papers*, which tells the story of an ultimately frustrated attempt to publish a private archive, begins with precisely this kind of conspiring and conjuring.

The Aspern Papers opens with the narrator and his friend, the resourceful Mrs. Prest, sitting in a gondola outside the Venetian home of the Misses Bordereau. They survey the premises and discuss the narrator's "plan of campaign" to seize Juliana Bordereau's archive of love letters (AP 54). "I had taken Mrs. Prest into my confidence," declares the narrator. "[I]n truth without her I should have made but little advance, for the fruitful idea in the whole business dropped from her friendly lips" (53). The narrator has

made a wise choice in selecting his accomplice. Mrs. Prest, whose name suggests the use of pressure or force, has come up with an unusual strategy: the most effective way for the narrator to worm his way into the Bordereau household, she advises, is to insist that he become its tenant. In a strange inversion of conventional propriety, Mrs. Prest holds that “the way to become an acquaintance was first to become an intimate” (53). As this opening scene suggests, the narrator’s archival obsession instigates the serious “business” of conspiracy, disrupts social conventions and proprieties, and reconstitutes the relations between involved parties. Archive fever, James implies, is both a superlative motivator and a dangerous adversary.

In this stakeout scene, where the narrator “besiege[s]” the house with his eyes (54), James sets the stage for the central conspiracy of *The Aspern Papers*. The narrator must have the papers, and he will exploit all manner of privacy, intimacy, and propriety to do so. The Bordereau ladies, the narrator observes, “desired no attention” (53). They “lived now in Venice obscurely, on very small means, unvisited, unapproachable, in a dilapidated old palace on an out-of-the-way canal” (54). Nonetheless, it “charmed me,” the narrator confesses, “to hover about the place” (54). Indeed, since his arrival from England, he has already come to “look at” the house half a dozen times. Until he can plunder the papers, the narrator must satisfy himself by stalking their dwelling-place. Mrs. Prest does not share her friend’s fixation, yet she is intrigued by it all the same:

I could see that she was amused by my infatuation, the way my interest in the papers had become a fixed idea. “One would think you expected to find in them the answer to the riddle of the universe,” she said; and I denied the impeachment only by replying that if I had to choose between

that precious solution and a bundle of Jeffrey Aspern's letters I knew indeed which would appear to me the greater boon. (54)⁴

The narrator's archival "infatuation" masks James's own case of monomania. As Tessa Hadley suggests, James's narrator causes all "bookish readers – biographers, literary critics, *et al.* –" to recognize themselves "with a wriggle of luxurious complicity" (314). James, an insatiable reader and avid writer and biographer, clearly implicates himself, candidly illustrating how the "ignominies of literary discipledom" bring his narrator, "a grown-up, sane and ordinarily respectable man," to have "visiting cards printed with a false name" and to prey upon the "sensibilities of two vulnerable old ladies" (Hadley 314).

Archive fever, James implies, is a literary propensity, a symptom of book-sickness or compulsive reading. The narrator's complicity extends not only to James but also to the reader. In its exposition of the dangers or "ignominies" of archive fever, James's tale implicates its author, narrator, and reader. Just as James appropriated the gossip circulating around the Silsbee tale, the narrator attempts to possess the Aspern letters. Similarly, the reader, limited by the narrator's myopic point of view (Rowe 107), infected with his urgency, and titillated by his improprieties, ethical crises, and self-justifications, finds herself voyeuristically invested in his plot. The drama or excitement built into archive fever, with its excesses or extravagance, is contagious. The narrator's pursuit of the Aspern papers thus becomes synonymous with the reader's experience of reading *The Aspern Papers*. Just as the narrator is compelled to finish his hunt for the archive, the reader finds herself unable to put the book down. Suzanne Keen calls this

⁴ In the New York Edition James stresses the pathological nature of archive fever by describing the narrator's *idée fixe* as a "fine case of monomania" (4).

“[t]he desire for narrative satisfaction, for knowing as fully as possible what happened” between characters (36). Bound up in watching and waiting for the secrets of the archive to be revealed, the reader is complicit in the perilous impulses and costs of archive fever. Through the act of reading the text, she finds herself wondering what she might be capable of placed in the same situation. *The Aspern Papers* thus conspires to make the reader recognize herself: she too wants the secrets of the papers revealed. Archive fever partly stems, then, from not knowing what the papers reveal: a love affair? Inspiration for poems? Drafts of poems? The fact that the Aspern archive has been kept from public knowledge suggests that its contents are significant, and this increases the value of the papers; any scraps of Aspern’s might be worth reading.

James suggests that archive fever, as an extension of the will to own property, is not limited to readers and is thus possible in anyone. Tita cares little for the literary value of Aspern’s papers, but because she hopes to profit from the narrator’s appreciation of that value she holds onto the archive. This alignment of archival monomania with proprietorship works to empty the papers of their literary value. In this regard, the papers are not coveted for their aesthetic value, for their fine prose or poetry, but for their worth as property or goods. As Hadley observes, “It has been often noted how relatively little interest [the narrator] actually shows in Aspern’s *poetry* [...] and how much in the peripeteia of Aspern’s life” (315). Under the guise of a literary critic, James’s narrator betrays “the familiar features of the literary property developer” (Hadley 315). Susan Kappeler concurs, suggesting that “despite his repeated profession of literary interest,” the narrator is an historian or biographer, but not a literary critic (Kappeler 25). His interest lies in the private life of Jeffrey Aspern, not in the literary merits of his poetry.

By treating the great writer's papers as a commodity, the narrator diminishes their literary value. James's authorial disapproval of this exploitative use of archives is evident in his satirical portrait of the narrator and his faux scholarly pursuit, yet at the same time James seems to acknowledge the falseness of this position, particularly in light of his own appetite for archival exploitation and appropriation.

The Aspern Papers thus presents and interrogates this twofold—and two-faced—treatment of archives and archival desire. The author's hypocritical stance is exemplified by the narrator's variable attitudes towards the papers. His plotting or scheming becomes synonymous with the plot. More valuable to the narrator than the "precious solution" to the riddle of the universe, the archive *is* his answer. The Aspern archive is both the cause of his monomania and its antidote. By unearthing Aspern's "genius" for the rest of the world, the narrator and his friend and fellow critic (and conspirator), John Cumnor, claim to pursue a calling of the highest order, something that sets them apart. The narrator insists that his interest in the papers "isn't for myself; there is no personal avidity in my desire. It is simply that they would be of such immense interest to the public, such immeasurable importance as a contribution to Jeffrey Aspern's history" (AP 97). In truth, the narrator is motivated by a hunger for personal acclaim; he wants the papers for himself, even at the expense of exploiting the Bordereaux. Neither the interests of the public nor the betterment of Aspern's literary status motivates him, but rather his own "interest" or advantage. Scholarly expertise, in this sense, is a form of capital. The critic or biographer wishes to show *himself* as a key contributor to Jeffrey Aspern's history, to announce his own "immeasurable importance" as one who has "recognized" Aspern's greatness:

The world, as I say, had recognised Jeffrey Aspern, but Cumnor and I had recognised him most. The multitude, to-day, flocked to his temple, but of that temple he and I regarded ourselves as the ministers. We held, justly, as I think, that we had done more for his memory than anyone else, and we had done it by opening lights into his life. He had nothing to fear from us because he had nothing to fear from the truth, which alone at such a distance of time we could be interested in establishing. His early death had been the only dark spot in his life, unless the papers in Miss Bordereau's hands should perversely bring out others. (*AP* 55)

As if at once to confess and to justify his “perverse” or obsessive desire to access Aspern's papers, the narrator's rhetoric is strangely circuitous in logic, and evangelical in tone. Aspern has nothing to fear from his self-appointed “ministers” because they seek only to establish the “truth” by publishing his private archive of letters; and yet the truth his papers might “perversely” or uncooperatively reveal could be of a kind that brings to light the darker spots of his life. This is something the narrator, like James himself, undeniably fears. He wants critical acclaim for what he has done for Aspern's “memory,” but not at the expense of the poet's honour. To tarnish that would be to damage Aspern's towering reputation, which serves as a “temple” or literary sanctuary for worshippers such as Cumnor and himself. The narrator's fears are legitimate: Aspern, that dashing American Casanova of the romantic period, may have had an illegitimate child with Juliana Bordereau, his mistress. That child, as several critics have noted, might be Tita

herself.⁵

James suffered from profound anxiety about what “dark spots” his private papers might elicit to mar his reputation after his death. *The Aspern Papers* is, therefore, a portrait of the writer’s own apprehensions about archival interference and the perils of literary veneration. In a chapter entitled “Literary Taboo,” Susan Kappeler notes that many of James’s tales feature “characters of literary and artistic vocation, as well as editors, critics, journalists and readers of all shades” (75), who are consumed by the very same compulsions and qualms as James himself, and particularly the fear that one’s private papers might be used to exploit and possibly even to discredit one’s reputation: “For even if the author is dead, there is his biography (his Life) or some descendant whom the reader might want to consult. Such removed incest is better known by the name of bardolatry or idolatry; yet critics are by no means agreed on the boundary where crime ceases and legitimate biographical scholarship begins” (Kappeler 76). This tenuous border or boundary between “legitimate” scholarship and literary exploitation is precisely what James explores in *The Aspern Papers*.⁶ James’s narrator is surprisingly frank about his conduct and about being full of “literary concupiscence” (AP 130). James is even more explicit about the narrator’s strategizing in the New York Edition, stating that he is full of “stratagems and spoils” (141). Getting at Miss Bordereau’s papers is a delicate business, he tells Mrs. Prest, and the only way to do so successfully is to conceal his

⁵ For a provocative analysis of this view, see Bernard Richards’s “How Many Children Had Juliana Bordereau?” Similarly, Susan Kappeler suggests that Tita might be Juliana’s daughter by Aspern “in accordance with the tradition of the time of calling illegitimate children nephews and nieces—*Daniel Deronda*, for example” (qtd. in Richards 122).

⁶ The centrality of borders or boundaries (between characters, between the living and the dead, between eras, between permissible and illicit behaviour) in James’s tale is interesting given that the French word “bordereau” resembles the word “bordure,” meaning “edge” or “border,” including “flower border” and the “edge of a page” (Mengham 41).

motives:

“The old woman won’t have the documents spoken of; they are personal, delicate, intimate, and she hasn’t modern notions, God bless her! If I should sound that note first I should certainly spoil the game. I can arrive at the papers only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic practices. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I’m sorry for it, but for Jeffrey Aspern’s sake I would do worse still. First I must take tea with her; then tackle the main job.” (AP 58)

Given his hosts’ old-fashioned or antiquated way of life, the narrator’s strategy is to “ingratiate” himself with the Bordereaux through a battery of “diplomatic” arts. Like a proper gentleman, he will kill them with kindness. After inviting himself into their home, he will flatter and flirt with Tita, take tea with Juliana, and plant flowers in her unused garden, all the while hoping to “put her off her guard,” or trick her into complacency. Propriety is thus a form of duplicity in *The Aspern Papers*. The narrator infiltrates the Bordereau household with showy affectations of courtesy and good manners. On the surface, he does the “proper” things: he curries favour with his hosts, takes tea with them, and exchanges pleasantries, but these are merely a cover for his real intentions to gain access to the papers. Sincerity, the narrator implies, will spoil the game, while two-facedness or insincerity will mask his ulterior motives.

Unfortunately for the narrator, the Bordereaux are up to the same dodge. They too harbour editorial ambitions. Like their uncultivated garden, they have let the Aspern papers lie fallow, tucked away in a remote corner to hide the great man’s flaws, and to

keep his secrets off the public record and out of circulation. Juliana's baffling green visor works in precisely the same way as the narrator's careful diplomacy. Her shade serves to put him off. He cannot see her eyes and thus read her true feelings or intentions. As John Carlos Rowe suggests, these motives concern the safeguarding of family secrets. Tita's illegitimacy (as the natural daughter of Jeffrey Aspern) keeps the Bordereaux in seclusion. Just as the narrator attempts to use the Bordereaux for their Aspern connections, Juliana conspires to secure Tita's legitimate or lawful status by plotting "to trick the narrator into marrying [her]" (Rowe 101). According to Rowe, the narrator's "own pretenses of 'self-creation' are quite trivial when measured by [Juliana's] grander and more enduring design" (109).

The Aspern Papers is a story about the challenges of interpreting, or reading, the motives and plots of others. Just as the characters attempt to decipher, and at times, dismantle, the conspiracies at work in their dealings, so too must the reader try to make sense of the duplicitous and at times contradictory rhetoric employed by James, as author, and that of his narrator, as well as the baffling actions of the Bordereaux. As Tony Tanner puts it, James's tale offers an exercise in "the problematics of reading": "As the story is narrated in the first person, we have to work out how to take the narrator, what to make of him, morally speaking, how to assess his own rationalizations, justifications, self-exonerations (a device perfected by Browning in his monologues, which James certainly knew well)" ("Henry" 47). To complicate matters, the narrator, like James himself, "seems honest enough about his lack of scruple: 'Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance'" (Tanner, "Henry" 47). The narrator's frankness and his willingness to own up to his unscrupulous intentions makes it difficult to get a lead on his ethical position.

Reading, and the difficulties and dangers it entails, is thus the chief concern of *The Aspern Papers*. Reading functions as both the source of and the solution to conspiracy.

The conspiratorial “plots” or plans of characters are synonymous with the narrative plot of *The Aspern Papers*. The narrator’s “designs” on the Bordereaux mirror James’s authorial designs on the reader. Near the end of the tale, during a conversation with Tita concerning the whereabouts of the papers, the narrator makes what he calls a “confession” (AP 113) of his motives to her, admitting that he has been guilty of deceiving his hosts from the beginning:

“I have sailed under false colours.” I felt now as if I must tell her that I had given her an invented name, on account of my fear that her aunt would have heard of me and would refuse to take me in. I explained this and also that I had really been a party to the letter written to them by John Cumnor months before.

She listened with great attention, looking at me with parted lips [...]

“So it was a regular plot—a kind of conspiracy?”

“Oh, a conspiracy—we were only two,” I replied, leaving out Mrs. Prest of course.

She hesitated; I thought she was perhaps going to say that we had been very base. But she remarked after a moment, in a candid, wondering way;

“How much you must want them!”

“Oh, I do, passionately!” I conceded, smiling. (113)

Like a true conspirator (and editor), even when confessing the narrator cannot help but omit details of his plot to secure the papers, in this case the early and pivotal role of Mrs.

Prest. He attempts to downplay the planned and collaborative nature of his scheme for fear that his host will consider him “base.” Nonetheless, the narrator is not as concerned about Tita’s opinion of his moral character as he is afraid that she will demand his immediate departure. In fact, the narrator’s alleged confession can be considered one last calculated (albeit desperate) attempt to win Tita over and to persuade her to join him in his conspiracy, so complete is his “passion” for the papers. The most accurate account of the narrator’s single-minded guile is provided in the New York Edition by Mrs. Prest during their stakeout of the Bordereau property: “You’re very extravagant,” she observes, “— it adds to your immorality” (13). Extravagance, as Mrs. Prest perceives, is a prominent feature of archive fever; immorality is simply its by-product.

The narrator’s candid (though ultimately duplicitous) confessions and self-assessments echo James’s own in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*. James had mixed feelings about authorial hypocrisy and duplicity. His impulse to appropriate the gossip and scandal that prompted his writing of *The Aspern Papers* seems at odds with his anxiousness about concealing his own private affairs. Like his New York Editions, James’s notebooks and prefaces testify to his literary appetites as a reader and his stylistic tendencies as a writer. They present a carefully constructed artistic persona—a Henry James with no dark spots in *his* past. However, James’s personal papers are another matter entirely. They render him posthumously susceptible to the same “base” acts of manipulation and exploitation that the narrator intends by attempting to access Aspern’s papers. Authorial vulnerability starkly contrasts in *The Aspern Papers* with the biographer’s zeal. James, who vigilantly burned his own papers at the end of his life, and

yet whose book on Hawthorne is proof of his own susceptibility to the lure of biography, was clearly familiar with both impulses.

Reading is a personal and usually a private act in James's fiction, and this is certainly true in *The Aspern Papers*. To hold a book in hand is to commune with its author, to forge a connection. To read is to surrender one's grip on this world and become temporarily suspended in another, imaginary world. Reading is thus "a personal transaction" (Holland 350), an intimate or private activity, as well as an act of faith, a suspension of doubt or disbelief. Just as *The Aspern Papers* grapples with the problematics of reading, it is also concerned with the power or grip of reading. Our protagonist is at once a typical and an atypical Jamesian reader. Like James's other bookworms, he reads avidly and regularly. He does not, however, read widely. His obsession with Jeffrey Aspern precludes any other literary interests. When he opens a book in bed at night it is almost invariably written by Aspern. "In general," he tells Tita, "before I go to sleep—very often in bed (it's a bad habit, but I confess to it), I read some great poet. In nine cases out of ten it's a volume of Jeffrey Aspern" (AP 87). After making his confession, the narrator watches Tita closely for her reaction, trying to determine if his mention of Aspern's name will prompt some reaction, some clue as to whether or not she knows about the papers: "I watched her well as I pronounced that name, but I saw nothing wonderful. Why should I indeed—was not Jeffrey Aspern the property of the human race?" (87). The narrator's question seems purposefully ironic: another reader might view the poet as belonging to the world, his published texts circulating freely in bookshops and libraries, but *this* reader, with his fixation on all things Aspern, his jealously guarded knowledge of Aspern's private papers, regards the

poet as his private property. Jeffrey Aspern's *works* might be the property of the human race, but Aspern the man, as revealed in his private papers and letters, is sacred ground. Only knowledgeable authorities on Aspern such as Cumnor and himself could appreciate the value of the papers. Indeed, as the narrator reassures himself, "People had not been after them, inasmuch as they had not heard of them; and Cumnor's fruitless feeler would have been a solitary accident" (86).

The narrator's avowed love of Aspern's poetry is thus motivated by his jealous devotion to the poet. In *Agon*, Harold Bloom argues that the love of poetry is a love of power, but he has a particular power in mind, namely "the power of usurpation" (17). But what is it the reader of poetry hopes to usurp? "A place, a stance, a fullness, an illusion of identification or possession; something we can call our own or even ourselves" (*Agon* 17). The narrator wants to assume this illusion of possession, this fantasy of passionate kinship or "connection with the poet" (*AP* 85) that the narrator wants to assume. He wants something he can call his own, not something he must share with other readers. "He is my poet of poets," declares the narrator to Tita, "I know him almost by heart" (87). This, then, is the essence of his archive fever: to have the poet's private papers is almost to have the man, and to have him all to oneself. Tita's response addresses the narrator's greatest hope—that the Bordereaux might in fact have the papers—but it also serves as a maddening reminder of Juliana's closer familiarity with, and knowledge of, Aspern: "Oh, by heart—that's nothing," replies Tita. "My aunt used to know him—to know him . . . to know him as a visitor" (87).

"As a visitor?" I repeated, staring.

"He used to call on her and take her out."

I continued to stare. "My dear lady, he died a hundred years ago!"

"Well," she said mirthfully, "my aunt is a hundred and fifty." (87)

The narrator hopes that access to Aspern's papers might provide him with the kind of intimacy or familiarity that Juliana once enjoyed. Tita, noting his avid interest in the poet, asks, "Do you write about *him*—do you pry into his life?" (88). The narrator's response is uncommonly candid. For once he forgets to dissemble: "Yes, I have written about him and I am looking for more material. In heaven's name have you got any?" (88).

In his quest to forge a connection with Aspern by reading his work and by seeking "more material" about him, the narrator acts more like a biographer than a literary critic or editor. As John Carlos Rowe notes, "It is important to remember that the narrator of *The Aspern Papers* is an avowedly biographical critic, even though he takes pains to pose rather ambiguously as a 'writer,' a pose not only designed for the Misses Bordereau but also less deliberately a sort of self-deception" (107). Presumably, the narrator attempts to acquire the poet's private papers so that he can write about the poet's life, and thus claim authorial ownership of it. Biography, James implies, is a craft not unlike the cultivation of a garden. "I must work the garden—I must work the garden" (60), the narrator declares upon first entering the Bordereau villa. Just as he plans to usurp the garden space to "work" or cultivate it for the purposes of flattery and flirtation, he also intends to "work" the Bordereaux, hoping to use them for his biographical designs on Aspern. In fact, the narrator betrays his biographer's bent early in the tale when he admits to having "hatched a little romance" about Juliana's past (*AP* 78). As he sits in her garden he finds himself "spinning theories about her" (78). In doing so, he unwittingly reveals his tendency to read into things, to piece together a grand narrative from what little he knows

of his subject's life. Even his language betrays how much his thinking on Juliana is based on mere "intimations" or "signs": "There hovered about her name a perfume of reckless passion, an intimation that she had not been exactly as the respectable young person in general. Was this a sign that her singer had betrayed her, had given her away, as we say nowadays, to posterity?" (78). The narrator's musings seem purposefully ironic. Like Frost's "Oven Bird," the famous poet is a "singer" everyone has heard. Fashioning himself after Aspern, and caught up in the romance-value of Juliana's past, the narrator makes himself a singer, the biographer who intends to betray her or "give her away," who hopes to share her secrets with the public. Like a modern-day tabloid journalist, he is willing to "spin" stories for his own profit, to trade on her good name to secure his own. He will gladly sing if it will ensure his gift to posterity, his own literary legacy.

The biographer is, then, one who usurps or commandeers private archives. Like the narrator, the biographer views his subject's personal history as a commodity, a form of crude matter that can be "worked" up or crafted and then sold on the market. While the biography is not a modern phenomenon, James's alignment in *The Aspern Papers* of commerce and economy with archive fever suggests that the modern biographer aims, above all, to profit from the past. The narrator's impulse to treat Juliana like an archive, so that her history is pilfered like Aspern's private letters, is figured partly as a symptom of the times, a by-product of modernity. Paradoxically, though he hopes to cash in on the romance-value of Juliana and Jeffrey's liaison, the kind of tell-all biography he envisions has the capacity to "annihilate" the secrets of the past (*AP* 79), to flatten or render mundane its mysteries or romance. "When Americans went abroad in 1820," the narrator recalls, "there was something romantic, almost heroic in it, as compared with the

perpetual ferryings of the present hour, when photography and other conveniences have annihilated surprise" (79). The stuff of archives is the stuff of secrets or "surprise." James implies that the very forces of modernity that threaten the safekeeping of archives also endanger the romance-value of the past. The destruction or devaluing of one leads to the demise of the other. As James suggests, the biographer plays a crucial (and delicate) role in the future of archives. In fact, as Arnold E. Davidson argues, the plot of *The Aspern Papers* hinges on the success or failure of both "prospective biographers" to "recover [...] the whole story" of the Aspern-Bordereau affair, the story not told in Aspern's poetry (39). With the destruction of the papers, *The Aspern Papers* "devolves into a different story of the biographer's failure" (Davidson 39). That failure, James suggests, has something to do with the dangers of wanting to know the "whole story," of attempting to wrest the past from its resting-place, and of exploiting private archives.⁷

The will to plunder private archives is tied to Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence." *The Aspern Papers* is very much concerned with influence, as a number of critics have noted. James's narrator is influenced by the poetry of Jeffrey Aspern, just as James was influenced by his literary precursors. Critics such as Adeline Tintner and Jeremy Tambling regard Aspern as a fictional model of Shelley or Byron, while Gary Scharnhorst reads Aspern as a stand-in for Hawthorne, and the tale as an expression of James's anxiety about the ethics of biography. Tintner describes how James's immense appetite for the classics led to his appropriation of the works of other writers for his own writing. His "devouring interest in fiction," she argues, "lay in measuring his mind

⁷ An interesting stylistic parallel to James's championing of romance-value in *The Aspern Papers* is teased out by Ellen Brown, who notes that James's revisions to the 1908 version of the text effectively heighten the "romantic quality of the story by frequently replacing the mere 'papers' or 'documents' of the first version with words much more connotatively loaded: 'relics,' 'tokens,' and 'spoils' (p. 11); 'literary remains' (p. 12); and 'mementoes' (p. 44)" (266).

against the works of others” and his “pleasure arose from rewriting them in his own way” (Tintner xix). Despite his comparisons with other writers, Tintner maintains that James did not suffer from any anxiety of influence:

The classic model, impersonal and complete, was at his mercy for his adoption, his “violence and mutilation,” his correction, his criticism, and his “free rearrangement.” He had none of the fears nor qualms of a plagiarist because his adaptation turned the original into his own thing. James’s complex relation to the absorbed text produced another work of art—his own—which justified the theft, just as the same kind of appropriation justified Shakespeare’s liberties with existing texts. “Theft” was James’s own word about his relation to other books. (Tintner xxii)

Tintner’s assertion that James was unhindered by such anxieties, that he regarded the works of his predecessors as source texts free for the taking, seems credible given how James himself characterized his “thefts” and “appropriations” in the prefaces to the New York Editions. However, Tintner’s emphasis on the writer’s “justification” of his theft (and her insistence on James’s innocence), lends itself to a different conclusion. Despite James’s apparent candour in his late prefatory writings, *The Aspern Papers* stands as a direct refutation of Tintner’s claim.

As Daniel Mark Fogel suggests in *Covert Relations*, James had an “antipatriarchal side” that was “bent on deconstructing his own claims, and the claims of his art, to be definitive, authoritative, masterful” (142). James’s literary aspirations led him to be “a critic as well as a creator, one who ‘rewrote’ his literary forebears in his own fiction as an act of intelligent appreciation” (Fogel 52). Theories of influence and intertextuality are

thus linked. As Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein observe, scholars have “worried throughout the twentieth century how to discriminate genuine influences from commonplace images, techniques, or ideas that could be found in almost any writer of a given period” (5). For many critics, “influence has smacked of elitism, the old boy networks of Major Authors and their sleek entourages” (Clayton and Rothstein 3). To unpack a writer’s anxiety of influence is to ask questions about what constitutes a classic, what is the role of influence and intertextuality in those texts, and what factors determine the list of literary masters or “Major Authors”? James self-consciously raises these issues in *The Aspern Papers*. As Edel suggests, the text reflects James’s characteristic technique of making “his hero his own historian”:

[He writes] his story with such candor and ingenuousness that he discloses his own duplicity, his easy rationalizations and his failure to grasp the fact that, in his zeal for literary history, he is an invader of private lives. In this sense the tale is a moral fable for historians and biographers. It has dramatized, once and for all, their anomalous role: and it makes clear, as James’s notes did not, on which side the novelist placed himself. He might have been shocked by the Countess Gamba’s having burned a Byron letter; but in the tale all the Aspern papers are burned—sadistically we might say—‘one by one.’ (*Henry* 338)

The Purloined Papers: Archive Theft

From the first, James’s narrator yearns to acquire Juliana Bordereau’s papers. His covetous impulse is undeniably premeditated, and yet there is something instinctual or

involuntary in it. So “extravagant” (AP 13) is his desire for the papers that he cannot help himself. This archival instinct aligns James’s narrator with the archetypal book-thief or biblioklept. This type, whose ethical character Andrew Lang considers in *The Library* (1881), adores books “out of measure and excessively” (50). The biblioklept is not, however, “always a bad man,” writes Lang. “There are distinctions” (46). Lang, a London acquaintance of James’s, whose own weakness for books and book-hunting explains his sympathetic treatment of the book-thief, gives an account of “a great Parisian bookseller who had an amiable weakness. He was a bibliokleptomaniac. His first motion when he saw a book within reach was to put it in his pocket” (46). Book-theft is the extreme form of book-love. Who among us, Lang implies, has loved books and has *not* been seized by such an urge? In *The Anatomy of Bibliomania* (1930), Holbrook Jackson concurs: “No phase of book-passion causes greater anxiety or more vehement discontent among bibliophiles, yet, as you may easily perceive by observing your own or another’s particular symptoms, there is something of the biblioklept in all who traffic among books” (453).

The regular handling of books by editors, archivists, librarians, booksellers, and book collectors makes them prime candidates for bibliokleptomania. Those who “traffic” in books are more likely to fall victim to the excessive love of books. The book-thief is thus “one who would purloin, divert, side-track, annex, and otherwise appropriate books not rightfully his own” (Jackson 454). As Mrs. Prest shrewdly observes, the narrator’s immoderate fixation with the Aspern archive renders him uncharacteristically immoral. Like Lang’s biblioklept and his “amiable” weakness, James’s narrator is not a “bad” man. His work as a literary editor and critic, however, has roused his archive fever. Under its

spell, he is capable of any number of acts that he would otherwise regard as deplorable. His desire to possess the papers overrules his better judgment.

Jackson's assessment of the biblioklept's moral character is decidedly less sympathetic than Lang's. He dubs book-stealers a "debauched, corrupt, covetous, greedy, acquisitive crew, who will get books honestly if they can, but get books they will" (453). Lang, on the other hand, maintains that "books naturally belong to him who can appreciate them" (50), which seems to legitimate book-theft. This relationship between appreciation and ownership, and particularly the defence of theft as a form of appreciation, are prominent Jamesian motifs. Both *The Aspern Papers* and *The Spoils of Poynton* feature disputes over the rightful ownership and unauthorized appropriation of material objects. The central intrigue of both fictions lies in the fierce rivalry of collectors. James pits collector against collector, as if to test one character's love for her objects by setting it against another's desire for those objects. Since possession is the ultimate aim, theft or unlawful appropriation is permissible. Who better to own an object than one who values it above all else? Only a true devotee of Aspern deserves his papers. Only someone like James's literary critic, who has recognized the poet's greatness, can fully appreciate the value of his archive. For the critic, as for the biblioklept, the end justifies the means. Maintaining the integrity of Aspern's literary reputation legitimizes any shady dealings.

Nevertheless, our scholarly pilferer meets his match in Juliana Bordereau, a miser who *couvers* or dotes upon her archival treasures. Juliana's hoarding instincts suggest that there is good or "ample reason," as Jackson argues, "for such precautions as have been taken against biblioklepts, pilferers, embezzlers, borrowers tardy of redeeming their

trust, and other bookish malefactors, rogues, and depredators” (463). Since no one is better suited to spot a biblioklept than one who shares his archive fever, Juliana and the narrator are natural foils for each other. Each engages in schemes, deals, and manoeuvres that work to frustrate and provoke the other. Juliana knows precisely how to fan the narrator’s fetishistic fire. During one of their negotiations, she produces an Aspern relic—a portrait of the poet—and asks him if he knows what kind of price it might bring in. The narrator examines the object carefully: “I judged the picture to have a valuable quality of resemblance and to have been painted when the model was about twenty-five years old. There are, as all the world knows, three other portraits of the poet in existence, but none of them is of so early a date as this elegant production” (*AP* 104). Given its rarity and age, the value of the portrait is immediately apparent to the narrator; however, his excitement is checked by his confusion at Juliana’s motives. “I could not believe that she really desired to sell it or cared for any information I might give her,” he muses. “What she wished was to dangle it before my eyes and put a prohibitive price on it” (104). Like the “price” the narrator ultimately refuses to pay for the papers (Tita’s hand in marriage), Juliana’s assessment of the value of the portrait renders it “prohibitive.” Juliana knows that the more unattainable an object, the more it will be coveted.

Juliana’s intentions, like her eyes, are masked. “She was such a subtle old witch that one could never tell where one stood with her,” gripes the narrator (*AP* 103). What he fears most is Juliana’s subtlety, her duplicity, the very qualities he himself wields so carefully. He is “surprised” that she has “the energy, in her state of health and at her time of life, to wish to sport with me simply for her private entertainment—the humour to test me and practise on me” (104). What if, he wonders, Juliana plans to capitalize on my

archive fever and ultimately withhold the papers? Or worse, perhaps she has already destroyed them, but is stringing me along in order to profit from the “fancy price” I am paying her for my rooms (*AP* 102): “What was more in my mind was that she had a fancy to play me the trick of making me engage myself when in fact she had annihilated the papers” (103). James’s punning use of the words “fancy” and “engage” mirrors the duplicitous motives of his characters. The “fancy” or exorbitant price that Juliana asks for the lease of her rooms reflects what the narrator regards as her “fancy,” her whimsical intention to dupe him into “engaging” in her game. Though the narrator does not fancy Tita, and vows to avoid any attempt to “engage” himself to her, he does fancy the papers. James often plays up the ambiguity or duplicity of language in his fiction. The words his characters use conceal subtexts and hidden motives that require careful decipherment or a “real reading of the matter” (*AP* 75), as James’s narrator observes of his dealings with Juliana Bordereau: “it was well to let her see that one did not notice her little tricks” (*AP* 75).

The narrator’s attempt to possess Aspern’s archive is also an urge to stake claims on the past. In this regard, James’s tale concerns “how the present—in one way—seeks to appropriate the past. Precious things—great loves, great buildings, great poets, great papers—are always vanishing” (Tanner, “Henry” 47). The narrator is initially spurred by his wish to preserve Aspern’s literary greatness. He performs what Tanner calls a “salvage operation” (“Henry” 47) on the past by attempting to “dig” it up (*AP* 101). When Juliana asks the narrator about his line of work, he replies that he writes about “the great writers mainly—the great philosophers and poets of the past; those who are dead

and gone and can't speak for themselves" (101). Juliana's response sets off a debate concerning the appropriate handling of the past and its precious things:

"Do you think it's right to rake up the past?"

"I don't know that I know what you mean by raking it up; but how can we get at it unless we dig a little? The present has such a rough way of treading it down."

"Oh, I like the past, but I don't like critics," the old woman declared, with her fine tranquility.

"Neither do I, but I like their discoveries."

"Aren't they mostly lies?"

"The lies are what they sometimes discover," I said, smiling at the quiet impertinence of this. "They often lay bare the truth." (*AP* 101)

The narrator's desire to excavate the past and thereby preserve its truths and its fictions contradicts Juliana's wish to hoard the past. He has the impulse of the editor or biographer, whose function is ultimately a public one, and she has the impulse of the private collector. Whereas he wishes to speak for the dead, she feels that the past should remain uncultivated by the living, just as her villa garden was untended before her guest's arrival: "The truth is God's, it isn't man's: we had better leave it alone. Who can judge of it?—who can say?" (101). The narrator responds by championing literature itself—"all the fine things" that have been written (101). "What becomes," he asks, "of the work I just mentioned, that of the great philosophers and poets? It is all vain words if there is nothing to measure it by" (101-2). For the narrator, as for James, literary history is a continuum. Like an archaeologist, the modern writer wants to exhume or access the past

in order to “measure” his own work against that of writers of other eras. But who has the right to “rake up” the past? The question is one of property ownership: how does the ownership of archives affect the way that they are read or interpreted? Do owners of private archives have a responsibility to the past, an obligation to place their archives in the public domain? The owner’s attitude towards archives reflects her attitudes towards the past.

In truth, the narrator’s determination to excavate the past smacks of self-interest and egotism. Hadley describes it as the “boy-collector single-mindedness, that stubborn self-fulfilling absorption in a single purpose” (315). The narrator’s archive fever is the clear mark of a monomaniac. In *Monomania*, Marina van Zuylen suggests that the *idée fixe* “lures the subject into a sense of agency” and thus furnishes him with a sense of order, control, and comfort (6). The monomaniac’s obsession endows his life with “a purpose, a worthy goal” (4). That goal is the pursuit of an ideal, which van Zuylen describes as the idea of “perfection and permanence” (1). Through literary excavations, the narrator wishes to uncover the “perfection” of Aspern’s life and works, and ensure their “permanence.” In doing so, he seeks to align himself with Aspern’s greatness, assert his own literary pre-eminence, and reap some of his hero’s “general glory”:

I had invoked him and he had come; he hovered before me half the time; it was as if his bright ghost had returned to earth to tell me that he regarded the affair as his own no less than mine and that we should see it fraternally, cheerfully to a conclusion. [...] My eccentric private errand became a part of the general romance and the general glory—I felt even a mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past

had been in the service of art. They had worked for beauty, for a devotion; and what else was I doing? That element was in everything that Jeffrey Aspern had written and I was only bringing it to light. (73-4)

For James's narrator, his archival obsession, or "eccentric private errand," is justified because it serves the greater glory of literature. Just as Aspern was devoted to literary greatness, so too is the narrator devoted to preserving Aspern's great name. By bringing his genius "to light," the editor hopes to secure his own destiny as a literary celebrity. His conspiracy to secure the papers is justified by his "devotion" to the "moral fraternity" of the masters, whose ranks he aspires to join.

By the end of the story, however, this ideal has been engulfed by the narrator's growing archive fever. What began as a service to literature, a scholarly project or objective, transforms into a dangerous compulsion. After learning of Juliana's sudden death and enduring Tita's unsettling proposal, the narrator sits in his gondola, stunned into silence: "As the day went on I grew to wish that I had never heard of Aspern's relics, and I cursed the extravagant curiosity that had put John Cumnor on the scent of them. We had more than enough material without them, and my predicament was the just punishment of that most fatal of human follies, our not having known when to stop" (*AP* 128). Having failed to check his "extravagant" curiosity, the narrator's hunt for Aspern relics precipitates a full-blown case of archive fever. Like Peter Kien in Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* (1935), James's protagonist proves susceptible to that scholarly malady of having more than enough material at hand, yet nonetheless desiring more—more papers, more books, more knowledge. Like Kien, his "fatal" folly lies in not knowing when to stop: when to cease collecting, and when to stop living in the safe and static

accumulations of the past rather than in the unpredictable realities of the present. Indeed, Derrida's notion of an archive "fever" is exactly suited to the narrator's agitated and confused state at the end of the tale. His archival passion prompts a kind of disorienting fever—an obsessive fervour for the papers, as well as a disordered, agitated, and overheated mind: "As my confusion cooled I was lost in wonder at the importance I had attached to Juliana's crumpled scraps; the thought of them became odious to me and I was vexed with the old witch for the superstition that had prevented her from destroying them as I was with myself for having already spent more money than I could afford in attempting to control their fate" (*AP* 128). Like a temporary form of madness, the narrator's archive fever alters his perception: in the grips of the fever the Aspern documents are precious objects whose secrets merit any amount of expenditure; in its aftermath, however, the prized papers lose their value and become unremarkable "crumpled scraps." Like Kien's desire to control the fate of his books, the narrator's attempt to acquire and administer Aspern's private papers ends badly. The narrator walks away from his encounter with the archive, yet his ambivalent feelings for it remain.

Like James, the narrator conceives of literary history as a fertile garden of unsown seeds, a field of authors and their works lying in wait, ready to be discovered. He conceives of himself as a gardener who tends or cultivates the fallow past. He wants to preserve the great works of literature, and to honour the dead writers who can no longer "speak for themselves." This, however, is where the narrator's nobler intentions end. As Edel puts it, "the hero-worshipper, the lover of poetry, the gallant gentleman, is nothing but a common thief" (*Henry* 339). Because Aspern cannot speak for himself, the narrator wants his papers. According to Arnold E. Davidson, the narrator hopes to "speak in

Aspern's place" as this would "attest to succession, potency; it would be to claim [...] the Name of the Father" (42). The narrator wants unrestricted access to his precursor's archive in order to "measure" himself and his work against Aspern and his masterpieces. As Norman N. Holland says of the rivalry between Monsieur Dupin and Minister D— in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," it is "an Oedipal struggle between father and son, but of a very archaic kind" (354).

The trope of the pilfered archive is famously employed in Poe's "The Purloined Letter." As James recounts in *A Small Boy and Others*, he discovered Poe's stories at an early age, and he presumably read this tale, the third of Poe's detective stories. James later came to regard Poe as another American precursor with whom he must contend, and his fiction attests to "[t]he variety of ways in which Poe, his legend, and his work fed" James's literary imagination (Tintner, *Book* 187). Citing several instances of James's textual appropriations of Poe's fiction, Tintner notes the direct allusion to Poe's novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, in *The Golden Bowl*, and suggests that James's short story, "Glasses" (1896), is modelled on Poe's "The Spectacles" (1844). "The Purloined Letter" was first published in *The Gift* in 1845, and is set in the "little back library, or book-closet" of Mr. C. Auguste Dupin (Poe 680). The original thief of the eponymous letter is the Minister D—, a figure who, like James's narrator in *The Aspern Papers*, "dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man" (Poe 682). The ingenuity and audaciousness of Poe's Minister D— is reflected in the ruthless improprieties of James's literary editor. Both figures are obsessed with the act of pilfering letters not rightfully their own, and each aims to do so for his own personal and professional gain. In both stories, the perpetrators' lack of principle foil these plots. Poe's

Minister is “a desperate man, and a man of nerve,” but he is also “that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius” (Poe 697). James’s editor is equally reckless and unscrupulous. His failure to appropriate the Aspern archive echoes Minister D—’s thwarted attempt to bring about the downfall of his political adversary. Poe, like James after him, implies that some secrets are better left undiscovered, some letters better left unread.

In “The Purloined Letter,” as in *The Aspern Papers*, intrigue is generated by the secrets housed in private archives, by what Holland calls “knowing what others do not know” (354). As Poe’s Prefect of the police explains, the thief’s disclosure of the stolen document “would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized” (Poe 682). Like the rumours of romantic indiscretion that threaten to tarnish Aspern’s reputation, the high or “exalted” status of Poe’s “royal personage” is called into question when the thief reads a letter alluding to a secret liaison. In both stories, reading is figured as a subversive, and potentially dangerous, act. Readers possess knowledge that non-readers do not. To read a private paper is to hold a transformative power over the fates of others, a kind of omniscient authority or control.

A final striking parallel between the stories involves their conclusions. In Poe’s story, the original thief, Minister D—, is duped by another thief, the clever and bookish Monsieur Dupin, who steals the letter back and leaves a facsimile in its place. Like Juliana Bordereau, Dupin wears green glasses that render him indecipherable or unreadable. As Holland suggests, “Dupin exists in a world of texts, but he himself is not a

text to be read. Behind the green spectacles, he sees but is not seen" (357). Juliana's green shade has the same effect. It helps her to interpret the motives of her guest without revealing her own. In the end, she foils the plans of her would-be thief just as Dupin outwits Minister D—. Approximately forty years after its publication, James purloins details from Poe's story, rewriting it as a subtly disguised, self-reflexive exposé of the authorial impulse to pilfer archives.

In the spirit of "The Purloined Letter," James conceives of reading and writing as forms of theft in *The Aspern Papers*. As Harold Bloom suggests, "We read to usurp, just as the poet writes to usurp" (*Agon* 17). Like James himself, the narrator is a compulsive reader. He is expert at assessing the value of an archive—be it a precursor's private papers or his fictional works—and seizing it for his own profit. As James confesses in an 1899 letter to his friend and fellow novelist, Mrs. Humphry Ward, his own reading is always an act of theft, a compulsive and private transgression whereby the fiction of others serves as material for his own writing:

I was giving way to my irresistible need of wondering how, *given* the subject, one could best work one's self into the presence of it. And, lo and behold, the subject isn't [...] 'given' at all—I have doubtless simply, with violence and mutilation, *stolen* it. It is of the nature of that violence that I'm a wretched person to *read* a novel—I begin so quickly and concomitantly, *for myself*, to write it rather—even before I know clearly what it's about! (qtd. in Tintner, *Book* xix)

For James, reading is a form of violence, an "irresistible need" to "mutilate" or appropriate the work of others for his own advantage. In the context of *The Aspern*

Papers, James's epistolary confession has a two-fold significance. First, it aligns the author of the novella with its narrator. Both are self-described thieves or pilferers of archives. In this regard, *The Aspern Papers* serves as a self-critique, a written confession of James's culpability or guilt as a reader *cum* profiteer. As an habitual thief of the library and the dinner table, a notorious "devourer" of libraries and insatiable collector of gossip, James's authorial compulsions are mirrored in the editorial aspirations of his narrator. The unnamed editor's archival desires, social improprieties, and moral quandaries are James's own.

Secondly, James's letter points to the violence inherent in archive fever, a violence that lies at the heart of *The Aspern Papers*. In his pursuit of the Aspern letters, the narrator lies, dissembles, and intrudes. He transgresses his rightful bounds as a lodger and disrupts the carefully preserved quietude of the Bordereaux. Ultimately, his unwelcome intrusion into the private spaces of the Bordereau home triggers the sudden death of Juliana and the subsequent destruction of the papers. Juliana's mysterious death is linked to the annihilation of the archive. James shows that archive fever is a destructive passion. Though it may stem from a desire to preserve or protect, it can incite wreckage and wreak lasting havoc. As Derrida writes, "there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive" (*Archive* 19). The dialectical impulses of conservation and destruction give rise to archive fever, and indeed, to the archive itself. Without the threat of the archive's extinction, there would be no need to safeguard the remnants of the past.

Chapter Three

“A House Filled With Books”: Edith Wharton and the Spaces of Reading

In *A Backward Glance*, Edith Wharton describes the ideal library as a “great working library,” not a “book-dump” or a “dusty mausoleum of dead authors,” but a “glorious assemblage of eternally living ones” (327). Great libraries are like gardens; they must be “continually weeded out and renewed” (BG 327). Wharton’s description is based on the private library of her friend Bernard Berenson at his Italian villa, I Tatti, where she often stayed as a guest, browsing at all hours among the classics. Wharton felt at home in Berenson’s vast, carefully appointed library because it was not unlike her own, its “broad and firm foundation of books of reference constantly replenished and kept up to date” (BG 327). A famously omnivorous reader (and fanatical gardener), Edith Wharton owned a library that was the foundation of her fiction, comprising approximately four thousand books by the end of her life. Wharton’s library was a vital source of literary reference and stimulus, a meeting place for readings and animated conversation with friends, and as publicity photos suggest, a setting synonymous with her authorial persona. Even the architectural design of The Mount, Wharton’s beloved Berkshires estate, attests to the foundational role her library played in her writing life: in the northeast corner of the house, Wharton’s book-filled private library is located directly below her bedroom suite, where she wrote *The House of Mirth* and other early fiction. Like Vance Weston in *Hudson River Bracketed*, whose literary ambitions are first awakened in Elinor Lorburn’s “antiquated” library (65), Wharton regarded the library as a literary foundation, the heart of her houses and her fiction. If her writing was a “secret

garden” (*BG* 197), the library was its bed or foundation.

An ardent bibliophile, Wharton filled her houses and her novels with books and bookish types. Like Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, Wharton “prided herself on her broad-minded recognition of literature” (*HM* 68). Despite her fashionable background, Wharton revelled in her bookishness and the contradictions it produced. As she notes in “Memories of Bourget Overseas,” her striking taste for books, her wide-ranging reading, and her tranquil private library at Land’s End were unexpected in Newport, with its “sumptuous” dinner parties, sporting events, and “Casino life” (Wharton, *Uncollected* 214). French writer Paul Bourget was particularly struck by the contrast:

Yet what especially surprised and interested him, he later told me, was finding in this ultra-frivolous milieu a house filled with books. He expected it so little that he returned, with his wife, as often as possible, enchanted by the contrast between the peaceful library of Land’s End [...] [and all that] constituted the Newport ‘season.’ [...] In Newport it was not yet necessary to appear to be interested in ideas. (*Uncollected* 214)

As a symbol of her passion for literature and her fervent interest in ideas, Wharton’s library set her apart from the “ultra-frivolous milieu” in which she circulated. She delighted in the distinction of owning “a house filled with books” in an upper-class society preoccupied with sport, gambling, and socializing. Moreover, Wharton’s friendship with Bourget and his wife was incited by her book-filled house. “It is,” writes Wharton, “thanks perhaps to my library and my Venetian consoles that we were immediately at ease with each other, and that I do not remember having had to go through with them that tedious initial stage which so often precedes true understanding”

(*Uncollected* 215). Wharton's library signalled her seriousness as a reader and writer. As a woman, she regarded her library as the first source of "true understanding" or common ground between herself and the coterie of writers and intellectuals she befriended, the key to that "illustrious fraternity of writers" (*Uncollected* 213).

Wharton's affinity for books and libraries and her enthusiasm for literary cultivation are borne out in her fiction, where scenes set in libraries are vital to plot, theme, and imagery. Libraries play a central role both formally and thematically in her work. As with Henry James, the library is not merely a backdrop or set-piece but a formative space in Wharton's fiction. Libraries, as architectural spaces and psychological signifiers, are analogous to the self. As a space that houses books, the library is the domain of interiority—an interior of interiors. Moreover, libraries embody the relationship between the self and others. Marilyn Chandler suggests that private, domestic spaces serve as "introductions to [fictional] characters and as indices of their tastes, values, and habits as well as of their place in a complex network of social relations" (156). Given its indexical function, the library is the interior space *par excellence*, a reflection of the identity of its owner. In *The Custom of the Country*, the expensively bound books in Elmer Moffatt's library are inaccessible, locked away behind bars. A gaudy museum, Moffatt's library testifies to the ambitions of the *nouveau riche*. In *The House of Mirth*, the Trenors' Bellomont library is a setting for flirtation. No one reads the books; instead, couples meet there to be alone. In *Summer*, the small public library where Charity Royall serves as reluctant librarian is a claustrophobic "prison-house" (8). Its dusty, tomblike space mirrors Charity's sense of paralysis within the limiting boundaries of North Dormer. While Wharton sometimes portrays libraries in a

negative light, using their walls of books as a metaphor for confinement, the library can also represent an opportunity for diversion, escape, or innovation. Newland Archer busies himself with his books when he needs to shake off the stifling social conventions of Old New York, and Ethan Frome retreats to his makeshift “study,” a private, paper-strewn sanctuary, to escape his unhappy marriage. In *The Age of Innocence*, Ellen Olenska’s drawing-room is “scattered” with books (103). Since the drawing-room is a place where books are usually considered “out of place” (103), Olenska’s unconventional use of this space signals her indifference to social convention and her own sense of dislocation within Old New York society.

The library is also a place of intrusions in Wharton’s fiction: Lily Bart intrudes on an unexpected tête-à-tête between Lawrence Selden and Bertha Dorset in the Trenors’ Bellomont library in *The House of Mirth*. A jubilant May Archer announces her pregnancy to Newland in his gentleman’s library, dramatically pre-empting his confession of feelings for her cousin. Lucius Harney enters the Honorius Hatchard Memorial Library after hours in *Summer*, prompting Charity Royall to surprise even herself by declaring, “This is my library” (30). These intrusions suggest that the library is not only formative, but transformative, a space in which the self undergoes an enriching renovation or awakening. Indeed, the “illuminating incidents” that Wharton describes in *The Writing of Fiction*, those incidents that “reveal and emphasize the inner meaning of each situation” (109), regularly take place in libraries. Recalling James’s “house of fiction,” Wharton regarded these incidents as “the magic casements of fiction, its vistas on infinity. They are also the most personal element in any narrative, the author’s most direct contribution; and nothing gives such immediate proof of the quality of his

imagination—and therefore of the richness of his temperament—as his choice of such episodes” (*Writing* 109). The library is the natural site of illumination or enlightenment. Reading, Wharton suggests, brings one closer to the truth, and not simply universal or historical truths, but also personal truths. While Wharton’s library episodes are often scenes of tranquility or rest, these scenarios almost always involve men alone, reading or thinking. When a woman is introduced to the scene, the library becomes a site of unpredictability or conflict. The capacity for illumination in a library is the direct result of its heterogeneity, its inclusion of all realities or possibilities. As such, the library is a locus of modernist revisionism in Wharton’s fiction, particularly in terms of gender and class. Traditionally a male space, the library is a contended terrain, a site of “erotic peril” and “contested identity” (Crow 160). Like Virginia Woolf, whose *A Room of One’s Own* calls for the inclusion of women in the library, Wharton is interested in questions of equal access to libraries and other private spaces for women. In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer declares that “Women ought to be free—as free as we are” (41). It is no coincidence that he does so within the comfortable confines of his nineteenth-century gentleman’s library.

Wharton’s fiction thus responds to her early experiences as a woman in the traditionally male space of the library. She felt at times like an intruder in that space, and this sentiment is reflected in the library intrusions that she stages in her fiction. Famously called an “angel of devastation” by Henry James, Wharton was seen as “a dazzling intruder, *la femme fatale*, the golden pheasant invading the barnyard” (Lubbock 2). Her descent on James’s quiet, cloistered life at Lamb House was, by Percy Lubbock’s account, “magnificent, it was Napoleonic; but how little she understood the life of the

literary hermit, its dedication to solitude and silence, its sacrifice to its task! She a writer, a novelist, a colleague of the great old craft?" (1). Lubbock mistakes Wharton's exuberance for a lack of literary seriousness, but he does help to explain why library intrusions are so central to her fiction. Wharton's (usually male) readers regard the library as a bunker where they can retreat from social and familial obligations and conflicts. Alone in his library, the gentleman reads, writes, or thinks in peace. Nevertheless, interruptions of those activities trigger self-awareness. Just as Wharton took pleasure in swooping in on James in his library and taking him for rides in her motor-car, her female characters encroach on the library, dramatically altering and updating its atmosphere and its occupants.

In "Dearest Edith," Janet Tanner characterizes Wharton's friendship with James in terms of the presence of his books in her library. After he had died, "and so disappeared, there was still, for her, her famous round library in the Rue de Varenne, with its mounting tier of his works and, amidst them, the marble bust of their friend and author, the master American, James" (J. Tanner 190). As Tanner intuitively, Wharton conceived of James as a spirit who haunted her library, living on in his books. She located him centrally in her library, and her books respond to his in striking ways. In James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), Merton Densher flatteringly compares Kate Croy to an "uncut" library:

All women but you are stupid. How can I look at another? You're different and different—and then you're different again. No marvel Aunt Maud builds on you—except that you're so much too good for what she builds *for*. Even 'society' won't know how good for it you are; it's too

stupid, and you're beyond it. You'd have to pull it uphill—it's you yourself who are at the top. The women one meets—what are they but books one has already read? You're a whole library of the unknown, the uncut. (222)

James's metaphor of a woman as a library of uncut pages suggests that she is at once unreadable or inexhaustible—the embodiment of an elusive heterogeneity—and yet susceptible to objectification. As Ellen Eve Frank observes in *Literary Architecture*, James's female characters are often compared to inanimate objects such as furniture or art. His "houses of fiction" are furnished with women who have been classified as collectibles (Frank 195), including Isabel Archer, who reads books while surrounded by old pieces of furniture at her grandmother's house, and who is likened to a Titian by Ralph Touchett. Like Lily Bart's in *The House of Mirth*, Kate Croy's beauty is the source of financial speculation. Her father takes pleasure in considering its "tangible value" (*Wings* 25). At the beginning of the novel, when she waits for her father in his rooms, James's narrator states that Kate "wasn't chalk-marked for auction" (*Wings* 6), and yet the suggestion that she is "auctionable furniture," an "inanimate thing like the Poynton spoils," is "difficult to avoid" (Frank 195). Wharton takes up James's ambiguity about the relationship of women to objects or goods by examining what it means to identify a woman with a book or a library. Her fiction explores what happens when a female character becomes synonymous with "auctionable furniture," or with books in the "big sales," as in the *tableaux vivants* scene in *The House of Mirth* (10).

Wharton also shares James's interest in—and anxieties about—archives and the way they shape outcomes and lives. Love letters are central to *The House of Mirth* and

Summer. Moreover, Wharton's short story, "The Muse's Tragedy," is strongly reminiscent of *The Aspern Papers*. Lewis Danyers thinks of his friend Mrs. Memorall as "a volume of unindexed and discursive memoirs, through which he patiently plodded in the hope of finding embedded amid layers of dusty twaddle some precious allusion to the subject of his thought" (Wharton, "Muse" 34). Like Juliana Bordereau, Jeffrey Aspern's muse, Mrs. Memorall, whose name hints at her connections to the past, is the link to Mary Anerton, the mysterious muse of Vincent Rendle's famed sonnets. Like James, Wharton conceives of archives as a gateway to the past and, as "unindexed" material, the source of speculation.

Books and architecture were chief among Wharton's "ruling passions" (Lewis 160). Her life and her fiction were profoundly shaped by what she called her "taste for books" and the hours she spent in libraries (Wharton, *Novellas* 1082). From her earliest memories of learning to read in her father's library, to the "poetry evenings" she hosted in the gray-walled library at Pavillon Colombe, Wharton found in the library an idyllic sanctuary or "secret retreat" (*BG* 70), a place perfectly suited to her "passionate inner life" (Wharton, *Novellas* 1091). In "Life & I," she recalls her first explorations in her father's library, and her strikingly sensual response to books:

I can see now where almost every volume stood, from the beautiful old Swift & Fielding & Sterne in eighteenth century bindings (from my grandfather's library) to the white vellum Macaulay, with gold tooling & red morocco labels! I can *feel* the rough shaggy surface of the Turkey rug on which I used to lie stretched by the hour, my chin in my hands, poring

over one precious volume after the other, & forming fantastic conceptions of life from the heterogeneous wisdom thus absorbed. (*Novellas* 1083-4)

A haven for Wharton's early "adventures with books" (*BG* 70), and for her "making up" (*BG* 35), Wharton's father's library was the embodiment of heterogeneity. The eight hundred books comprising his New York library were the mainstay of Wharton's education, a schooling that was largely self-directed, although Lucretia Jones forbade her daughter to read contemporary fiction, an edict the author later regarded as a blessing. For the shy, awkward, and isolated Edith Jones, access to the books in her father's library was an "untold boon" (*Novellas* 1083). Books were the source of a lifelong love of words, her "chief intellectual sustenance" (*Novellas* 1084), and the foundation of a literary oeuvre that returns repeatedly to the reader's passionate, almost obsessive, relationship with books. According to Hermione Lee, Wharton, like Virginia Woolf, "took an intense pleasure as a child in her father's library. She read her way through a lonely and rather unhappy childhood, and began her collection in her teens. She took refuge from a difficult marriage in books. She built her friendships on conversations about and exchanges of books. Many of her books are gifts from other writers, from family, friends and admirers" ("Foreword" ix).

Like Newland Archer and Lawrence Selden, Wharton possessed an encyclopaedic taste for reading. "Life & I," an autobiographical essay, resembles a library catalogue documenting the books Wharton read in her father's library and the wide-ranging scope of her appetites: the discovery of Faust while "ferreting about" in her brother's bookshelves was an "epoch-making" encounter (*Novellas* 1086); Goethe was a "great ocean" into which she "plunged with rapture" (1086); she happened upon Coleridge,

Sainte Beuve, Racine, and Ruskin (1084); and longed for “*more*” Ford and Marlowe and Webster (1084). Not surprisingly, Wharton lists Chambers’s *Encyclopaedia of English Literature*—that “admirable storehouse of great prose & poetry”—as the first book of real importance to her (*Novellas* 1084). As Wharton implies, encyclopaedias are miniature libraries. Even as a girl, she had a taste for heterogeneity.

Edith Jones of New York led a “double life” (Lubbock 13). In one sense she was, like Lily Bart, “the ornament of her circle” (Lubbock 13), living the public life of a well-heeled socialite, and in another she lived the intensely private, solitary life of an insatiable reader. Reading freed her, at least temporarily, from the conventions of Old New York and provided access to a secret life of “dreams & visions” (*Novellas* 1083). “She was,” Lubbock asserts, “all that was right and regular in her smooth clan-plumage, but the young hawk looked out of her eyes” (13). Throughout her life, Wharton habitually pillaged the libraries of her friends, departing with “a cargo of books” (Lubbock 120), and in her memoir she confesses to a “ferment of reading” (*BG* 73). This phrase appropriately conveys the passionate excitement or agitation that books provoked in her. In a fascinating portrait of Wharton as a reader, Lubbock emphasizes the aggressive, almost violent, love she had for her books:

Edith, it strikes me, took the same line with the books in her library as with the plants out of doors. No doubt the ways of true love are many with both, and her way with books was that of a lover indeed, but of a lover by no means tender to caprice. Her books were all around her in the house, they had the run of the place from floor to floor, she couldn’t exist without them; but her rule was sovereign still. [...] [A]t bedtime, or whenever she

went to rest, she clasped her book, the newest, the latest on the table,
where the inflowing stream made its fresh deposit almost daily.

Sometimes it was thought that the book had a scared look as she carried it
off, as though it knew what it was in for. (Lubbock 184-5)

Books, in this sense, were more than company; they were uncharted terrain, sparring partners, “mental nourishment” (*Novellas* 1085). Wharton could not exist without them. Like Vance Weston in *The Gods Arrive*, a novelist who harbours a “ravenous desire to learn more and more—to learn, all at once, everything that could be known on every subject” (45), Wharton read rapaciously as a way to accumulate knowledge. As she observes in *The Writing of Fiction*, “To know any one thing one must [...] know something of a great many others” (19). This desire for knowledge was perhaps most evident in the notoriously quick speed of her reading. In fact, Wharton’s “lightning assault” (Lubbock 185) made her friends question whether she had really read a book or not: “it wasn’t humanly possible, they said, that she could have covered the ground in the time. Some even put it more coarsely: she called it reading, but it was violating, gutting, savaging a book, to use it as she did” (Lubbock 185).

As a self-styled “omnivorous reader” (*BG* 65), Wharton made quick use of that reading in her fiction. She “rifled the ages with impartiality” (Lubbock 13), turning references from the classics (and just as often, references *to* the classics) into a source of rich literary allusion. Wharton read not as a scholar but as a novelist. She read self-consciously, seeking, as Vance Weston does in *The Gods Arrive*, to learn “the old material” and then to refurbish it in her fiction: “all the big geniuses have managed to express themselves in new ways with the old material” (*GA* 182). The trope of the library

was thus a way for Wharton to articulate her modernist theory: literature must look backward in order to move forward. Like a library, literature is heterogeneous and founded on the classics; it is always a collection or accumulation. As Helen Killoran suggests, Wharton's objective was not to take humanity apart but to "put it together" (*Edith* 193), and this approach ironically aligns her with both Henry James and other late-nineteenth-century novelists, as well as with "allusive" high modernists such as Woolf, Joyce, and Forster:

While Wharton believed in tradition and cultural continuity, her goal to bridge the world, the generations, and put together the thousand-and-one pieces of the past was similar to the goal of the allusive modernists, who wished to do the same, though often they also wished to wipe out the past and start over. But Wharton's allusive puzzle creates a technical bridge that spans the literary historical gap between Henry James and many of the modernists, between Europe and America, between sexes, and between grandparents, and between parents and children. (193)

Like her most influential precursors, George Eliot, Honoré de Balzac, and Henry James, Wharton employs literary realism, and particularly scenes set in libraries, to "put together" the past, to forge connections between the past and the present, and to develop an original approach to her craft. "True originality," she observes in *The Writing of Fiction*, "consists not in a new manner but in a new vision" (18). By conceiving of the library as a site of innovation, Wharton makes the old new.

Like the "booktalk" of Stephen Dedalus and his cohort in *Ulysses*, Wharton shared with her friends a passion for talking about books. Indeed, the heterogeneity of her

friendships reflects that of her library. As Louis Auchincloss observes, Wharton “collected friends as an art lover might assemble a diversified group of paintings representing the best of different periods but harmonized by a common excellence” (“Introduction” xiv). Wharton took a keen interest in the private libraries of her friends, viewing the library as a telling indicator of its owner’s personality, interests, and background—an observable record or display of one’s reading history. As she recollects in *A Backward Glance*, certain libraries in particular stood out, including Theodore Roosevelt’s house, Sagamore, which “was like one big library” (316), and Charles Norton’s Shady Hill library, with its “noble background of books” against which Norton’s “ascetic features so full of scholarly distinction, acquired their full meaning” (154). Wharton was most relaxed when talking of books with friends. Lubbock recalls how she would sit comfortably in her *bergère*, and as the conversation turned to books, “her eyes warmed, her face relaxed, and she seemed to shake off and push aside everything that didn’t matter as she reached forward to the subject of the talk” (80). Just as Wharton’s friends nurtured the exchange of ideas, Wharton’s fiction features communities of readers and writers. Cultural conversation or exchange is vital to her characters, as M. Riviere tells Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence*: “Ah, good conversation—there’s nothing like it, is there? The air of ideas is the only air worth breathing” (201).

Wharton’s Literary Architecture

Wharton painstakingly crafted interiors to encourage intellectual stimulation and exchange. In both her real and fictional houses she privileged libraries and other spaces

for reading and writing. As Lee notes, “Libraries take pride of place in her designs for houses, and in all her homes...books were at the heart of the house” (“Foreword” x). According to Scott Marshall, “The library was the most photographed room in the house, which indicates its overall importance in the Whartons’ time” (86). In 1904, *Berkshire Resort Topics*, a local newspaper, reported that “Mrs. Wharton’s literary tastes naturally lead to the conclusion that her library must be one of the most interesting rooms in the house” (qtd. in Marshall 83). Wharton’s library served a public function: it advertised her literary credentials, indicating that she was a serious woman of letters, and it helped to put a public face on what was for her the intensely private act of writing. As Renee Somers suggests, the library at The Mount was also important because it was “a visible resurrection of the intellectualism that families such as the Vanderbilts threatened to destroy with their rapacious cottage-building and their libraries that were for show” (127). Wharton’s well-known quip—“The XYZ’s have decided, they tell me, to have books in the library” (qtd. in Marshall 86)—zeroes in on this Gilded Age posturing.

In *The Writing of Fiction*, Wharton conceives of literature as architecture. The short story is “a temporary shelter” compared to “the four-square and deeply-founded monument which the novel ought to be” (75). Novels are monuments founded on the classics. If Wharton imagines her novels as architectural phenomena, her oeuvre, by analogy, is a “house filled with books.” By comparing architecture to literature, writers like Wharton “dematerialize the more material art, architecture, that they may materialize the more immaterial art, literature” (Frank 7). Moreover, like Ruskin, Wharton ascribes a moral or ethical dimension to architectural spaces, and particularly libraries. Her fiction exemplifies what John Clubbe calls “an ethics of architecture” (543). Interiors reflect and

shape character, and this is particularly true in *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*.

A number of scholars have noted the pervasiveness of books and libraries in Wharton's novels and short stories, and particularly her ghost stories. These scholars include Charles L. Crow, Renee Somers, Kathy Fedorko, Gloria Erlich, Sarah Luria, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, and John Clubbe. Fedorko draws a connection between Wharton's Gothic aesthetic and the "startling, disorienting, and often erotic discoveries that take place in libraries" (4). Wharton's "spectral library" (Fedorko 54) is a supernatural world where intellectual knowledge is transformed into "intuitive, uncanny awareness" (Fedorko 4). In Wharton's revision of the Gothic tradition, books, archives, and libraries are a portal to the past. Fedorko cites "The Angel at the Grave," "The Eyes," "Afterward," "Pomegranate Seed," *Summer*, and *The Age of Innocence* as instances where Wharton figures the library as the natural site of awareness or epiphany, a place in which characters make important "self-revising discoveries" (Fedorko 144).

Gloria Erlich's *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* picks up on the erotic aspect of libraries in Wharton's fiction and traces it back to Edith's childhood experiences in her father's library. According to Erlich, Wharton's "emotional center" was her father's library (32); it initiated her lifelong association of books with bodies. Books and libraries are "libidinized" in Wharton's fiction (Erlich 35). Moreover, several critics have noted how space is gendered in Wharton's texts, and how this raises questions of access to private spaces. In *The Female Intruder*, Carol Wershoven regards female characters such as Lily Bart and Ellen Olenska as "intruders" or outsiders in their societies, the source of crucial self-realizations in the men they encounter. Taking up

Wershoven's notion of the female (and sometimes male) intruder, I connect the theme of intrusion to Wharton's modernist innovation of the library. Library intruders, I suggest, exemplify the transformative forces of modernity.

Similarly, in *Edith Wharton as Spatial Activist and Analyst*, Somers contends that spaces "produce and enforce clearly demarcated social, economic, political, intellectual and even gender-based boundaries" (3). Somers draws attention to the relationships that exist between characters and their "built environments" (3). Space—particularly orderly domestic space—interacts with gender, social mobility, and cultural access in Wharton's fiction: "For Wharton, ordered domestic interiors, landscapes and other spaces are not just stage settings or backdrops for human interaction. Rather, they impose upon us as much as we impose upon them" (Somers 3). Like Somers, I regard the library as an active or transformative space and not simply a backdrop. As Somers points out, Wharton's characters frequently "read" rooms to discover what the space might reveal about their partners, friends, or potential mates. Given that the library is a space in which reading happens, I argue that Wharton's library scenes are fundamental examples of this phenomenon. The nature of a private library as a space speaks volumes about the nature of its owner: Gus Trenor's den library where he bullies and threatens Lily Bart is the antithesis of Lawrence Selden's cozy book-lined study.

References to books and libraries in these critical works are brief and usually secondary to the critic's main concerns. By contrast, I accentuate the centrality of these tropes in Wharton's novels and stories in order to call attention to the vital role that books, libraries, and bibliophiles play in her fiction, and to the way that space constitutes identity. Libraries generate meaning, and particularly in relation to questions of gender,

class, memory, money, and property. Wharton's fiction establishes new meanings for libraries as cultural and intellectual spaces, and thus ascribes new functions to the library. Additionally, I read private book collections and libraries as a shared passion, a gathering ground for a community of readers, and the site of accumulated sentiment or nostalgia to which characters often return. I subsequently argue that Wharton's descriptions of bibliophiles such as Lawrence Selden, Newland Archer, Ellen Olenska, Elinor Lorburn, and Vance Weston are candid self-portraits that exemplify her passion for books and reading, and her belief in the value of literary study and cultivation.

Not surprisingly, Wharton pokes fun at non-readers and book collectors who regard the content of a book as secondary to its material form, such as Percy Gryce in *The House of Mirth*. Nevertheless, as she indicates in *The Decoration of Houses*, Wharton was acutely conscious of the "impressive effect" a private library could make: "The housing of a great private library is one of the most interesting problems of interior architecture. Such a room, combining monumental dimensions with the rich color-values and impressive effect produced by tiers of fine bindings, affords unequalled opportunity for the exercise of the architect's skill" (151). A great library is "monumental" not simply because of its dimensions, but because of the aesthetic impact it makes on the viewer. The heterogeneous colours and textures of books make them decorative objects. In *The House of Mirth*, Lawrence Selden and Lily Bart are dangerously attached to the material beauty of books. A novel concerned equally with architecture and literature, with ethics and aesthetics, *The House of Mirth* provides an index of the different kinds of libraries and book collectors in Wharton's fiction, and charts the intricate relations between culture and capital, character, and commodity.

“The Art of Accumulation”: Beauty and Book Collecting in *The House of Mirth*

Books and beauty are synonymous in Wharton’s fiction. The bibliophile’s aesthetic enjoyment of fine books is often linked to his appreciation of a beautiful woman; the presence of one enhances the pleasure of the other. In “New Year’s Day,” a novella published in 1924, Wharton’s narrator, a young man freshly graduated from Harvard, develops an infatuation with Lizzie Hazeldean, a married woman who is something of a legend to him and his generation. He recalls standing before a wall of bookshelves in her drawing-room one evening, overcome by the beauty of her books:

I have spoken of books; even then they were usually the first objects to attract me in a room, whatever else of beauty it contained; and I remember, on the evening of that first ‘jolly supper,’ coming to an astonished pause before the crowded shelves that took up one wall of the drawing-room. What! The goddess read, then? She could accompany one on those flights too? Lead one, no doubt? My heart beat high. (287)

In the eyes of her bookish would-be suitor, Lizzie’s celebrated allure is enhanced by her supposed bibliophilia and knowledge of books. Books are, the narrator admits, the first things to attract him. Overwhelmed by the combined beauty of her person and her books, the narrator imagines a love affair with his idealized “goddess” that would perfectly fuse his desire to learn the arts of love with his thirst for learning itself. For this student of beauty, a beautiful woman who reads is a rare and valuable thing; she materializes an ideal. Like a rare book, Lizzie Hazeldean, whose name suggests the merging of a warmly tinted book cover (“hazel”) with erudition (“dean”), holds out the promise of the ultimate aesthetic pleasure: beauty within set off by beauty without. The young man is crushed to

discover, however, that Lizzie “did not read. She turned but languidly even the pages of the last Ouida novel” (287). The narrator finds fault not only with how Lizzie reads but also with what she reads: she is not a serious reader because she reads the novels of late-nineteenth-century best-selling author Ouida, the pen-name of Marie Louise de la Ramée. Lizzie’s “languid” indifference to books breaks her spell over the young man and casts her and her library in a new light. He learns that her “rich and varied” library (287) was assembled not by her but by her late husband, Charles Hazeldean, a “born reader” (240). In his new appraisal of the books, a collection “evidently assembled by a sensitive and widely-ranging reader” (288), the narrator transfers his infatuation with Lizzie Hazeldean back to the books, reading them as the embodiment not of her beauty but of her dead husband’s bibliophilic spirit.

In *The House of Mirth* (1905), Lawrence Selden, another avid reader, is similarly attuned to the beauty of books and the seductive draw of beautiful women. He, too, places books first among his attractions. Like Wharton’s other bookish dilettantes, Selden is happiest in libraries in the company of attractive women. *The House of Mirth* opens with his sighting of Lily Bart, the perfect answer to the “American craving for novelty” (HM 6). Her “arrest[ing]” figure is glimpsed in the crush of suburban commuters at Grand Central Station in New York (4), her “vivid head” set in relief against the “dull tints of the crowd” (4). Lily’s remarkable beauty renders her a “conspicuous” novelty (4). The singular impression she makes on Lawrence is not lost on nearby commuters who “lingered to look” at her despite their haste (3-4). In contrast to the “shallow-faced girls in preposterous hats, and flat-chested women struggling with paper bundles and palm-leaf fans” (5), Lily is a rare sight—a beautiful, stylishly dressed, poised and yet “girlish”

woman of twenty-nine (4). "Was it possible," Selden wonders, "that she belonged to the same race? The dinginess, the crudity of this average section of womanhood made him feel how highly specialized she was" (5). In noting the "specialized" nature of Lily's beauty, Selden shows himself attuned not only to her effect as an aesthetic object, a pleasing spectacle, but also to her deliberate and calculated campaign to present herself as such. As Selden rightly assumes, the impact of Lily's beauty is no accident. After eleven years of "late hours and indefatigable dancing" (4), she has become a specialist in the art of personal publicity, a "dazzlingly well-preserved veteran" of the New York marriage market (Showalter 39).

When the novel begins, Lily is at the height of her powers—and her problems. Widely regarded as a beauty, she is newly orphaned and living in the care of a wealthy though miserly aunt. Plagued by debt and troubled by the encroaching threat of spinsterhood, Lily resolves to marry a wealthy man. As the product of an Old New York society preoccupied with tradition and fixated on material gains, Lily understands how to make the most of her assets, as Selden observes. Lily's "discretions interested him almost as much as her imprudences: he was so sure that both were part of the same carefully-elaborated plan. In judging Miss Bart, he had always made use of the 'argument from design'" (5). Selden rightly deduces that Lily "designs" or tailors her appearance, her conversation, and her actions to suit the men whose attentions she most covets. Under the discerning gaze of spectators like Selden, she is transformed into an object of beauty, an artifact or collectible of rare aesthetic qualities:

As she moved beside him, with her long light step, Selden was conscious of taking a luxurious pleasure in her nearness: in the modelling of her little

ear, the crisp upward wave of her hair—was it ever so slightly brightened by art?—and the thick planting of her straight black lashes. Everything about her was at once vigorous and exquisite, at once strong and fine. He had a confused sense that she must have cost a great deal to make, that a great many dull and ugly people must, in some mysterious way, have been sacrificed to produce her. (5)

Lily is a commodity produced for the sole purpose (and pleasure) of visual consumption. Selden perceives that the qualities distinguishing her from other women are “chiefly external” (5), and yet he acknowledges that a “coarse texture will not take a high finish” (5). Was it possible, he asks himself, “that the material was fine, but that circumstance had fashioned it into a futile shape?” (5). While his sensitivity to Lily’s appearance suggests a deeper understanding of what lies beneath her “fine glaze of beauty” (5), Selden insists on seeing her as “material” or goods that cost “a great deal to make.” Moreover, his discernment of the “futile shape” of Lily’s life strongly foreshadows her tragic fate, in which he and his library play a central part.

As Lawrence Selden’s appraisal suggests, Lily Bart’s beauty—and her fate—is entwined with speculation in *The House of Mirth*. Her fortunes are tied to the specular and speculative business of books and book collecting, and to the fickle or fluctuating marriage market. “It was characteristic of [Lily],” Selden observes, “that she always roused speculation” (3). Lily stirs up speculation in both senses of the term: she is the object of gossip and rumours that ultimately lead to her dramatic social fall, and she becomes unwittingly mixed up in market speculations or deal-making. Wharton plays on this double sense of speculation in the novel, suggesting a thematic connection between

the money markets and the marriage market, between business and matrimony, books and brides. She takes a similar approach in *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence*, but *The House of Mirth*, with its contrasting study of Lily's principal suitors and their vastly different libraries, is Wharton's most explicit linking of the business of book collecting with the marriage prospects of her protagonist. Lawrence Selden, a poor bibliophile with exquisite taste, welcomes Lily into the private oasis of his shabby gentleman's library. Percy Gryce, a rich, eligible bachelor and book collector, has money to spare but lacks "imagination" (20). His collector's library, which he prizes because it brings him acclaim, is locked away in a "fire-proof annex that looked like a mausoleum" (22). These bibliophiles and their libraries are foils; the disparate spaces of their libraries, and their dissimilar ownership of books, offers a glimpse of two possible futures for Lily Bart.

"You know," says Judy Trenor conspiratorially to Lily at the outset of the novel, "they say he has eight hundred thousand a year—and spends nothing, except on some rubbishy old books. And his mother has heart-disease and will leave him a lot more. *Oh, Lily, do go slowly*" (45). According to Judy Trenor's speculations, Percy Gryce has a reputation for two reasons: his money and his Americana. Gryce collects rare books about American history and culture. He is also the man Lily intends to marry. Percy has moved recently to New York with his mother, after inheriting his uncle's distinguished book collection. As his claim-to-fame, and the main outlet of his expenditure, the "Gryce Americana" is both the perfect target for Lily's marital designs, and her nemesis. She resolves to find a way to "identify herself" with this source of Percy's vanity, to "be to him what his Americana had hitherto been: the one possession in which he took sufficient

pride to spend money on it" (49). Lily hopes to supplant the pre-eminent position of the books in Percy's favour and to become his most treasured possession. She wants to be as coveted, as "useless and expensive" (Veblen 149) as they are. "[Y]ou know I am horribly poor—and very expensive," Lily tells Lawrence Selden in his library. "I must have a great deal of money" (10). By marrying Gryce, however, Lily risks becoming as "rubbishy" and irrelevant as his books.

What does it mean to be "expensive"? What is the cost of being a commodity? What happens when a woman "identifies" herself with a rare book collection, when her value is equated with collectibles? Wharton contends with these questions in *The House of Mirth*, exploring the dangers inherent in classifying and commodifying others, or in perceiving individuals against a particular "background" (*HM* 11) and considering them indistinguishable from it. She characterizes this tendency as a form of social debasement in *A Backward Glance*, recalling the impulse that first spurred her to write the novel: "In what aspect could a society of irresponsible pleasure-seekers be said to have [...] any deeper bearing than the people composing such a society could guess? The answer was that a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals. The answer, in short, was my heroine, Lily Bart" (207).

Transformed into a commodity, Lily is the instrument of Wharton's critique of New York society, its careless "frivolity" and tendency to "debase" individuals by assigning them a price.

In *The House of Mirth*, Wharton explores the inner workings and dealings of New York society, and in particular the encounter of the Old New York leisure class with an

emerging business class. Like Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), *The House of Mirth* considers the intersections of the social and the economic, examining how one comes to bear on the other. In this world, old money meets new money. Members of the rising business class, such as Simon Rosedale, place "Wall Street under obligations which only Fifth Avenue could repay" (*HM* 228). Wharton thus maps a dynamic relationship between Wall Street and Fifth Avenue. She explores what Lillian S. Robinson calls "the culture of capitalism" (341)—the way that money becomes part of the fabric of life, determining how people live, whom they marry, what they wear, what they read, and what they buy or invest in. Money shapes characters and their fates in *The House of Mirth*. Social interactions (and particularly sentimental relations) are figured as accounting or banking transactions. Rather than a love story, Diana Trilling calls the novel "always and passionately a money story" (qtd. in Dimock 81). Money, not love, rules in this world.

Despite their obvious compatibility, Lawrence Selden cannot afford to marry or "collect" Lily. He considers her too costly, so she remains on the market. As a result, Lily's conflict is characterized as a dread of homelessness or itinerancy. She tries unsuccessfully to reconcile her desire for freedom—more specifically, for a home and a life of her own (like Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence*)—with her need for financial security. She wants to be taken out of circulation, yet she resists being treated like an object that will be shelved in some mausoleum-library. The architecture of particular houses and libraries thus plays a central role in *The House of Mirth*. Lily wrestles with her fate in three key library scenes: the first and last take place in the comfortable privacy of Selden's gentleman's library, and the second occurs in the Trenors' lavish Bellomont

library. The difference between these two libraries dramatizes Lily's conflict. Selden's modest gentleman's library represents the promise of freedom from her social obligations and restrictions, a space that draws out the "real" Lily. The Trenor library, conversely, signifies the frivolity, excess, and empty materialism that pervade New York high society and ensnare Lily. This library is a private space that has been made public, a stage setting for romantic rather than intellectual pursuits. As sites of sentimental transactions, places that embody personal freedom or imprisonment, libraries thus serve as the fitting background for Lily's struggle.

The first interior setting in the novel is Lawrence Selden's book-filled private library, where he and Lily retreat from the bustle of Grand Central Station. The striking contrast between the two scenes—the quiet inconspicuousness of the library providing a welcome respite from the glaring publicity of the station—heightens Lily's sense of the injustice of her situation. As a woman, she is denied the enviable freedom Selden enjoys in his gentleman's library, an inviting, private space lined with books and "littered" with papers (7). The library's "shabby" aesthetic suggests that it is well used by its proprietor as a refuge for reading, thinking, and reposing:

He ushered her into a slip of a hall hung with old prints. She noticed the letters and notes heaped on the table among his gloves and sticks; then she found herself in a small library, dark but cheerful, with its walls of books, a pleasantly faded Turkey rug, a littered desk, and, as he had foretold, a tea-tray on a low table near the window. A breeze had sprung up, swaying inward the muslin curtains, and bringing a fresh scent of mignonette and petunias from the flower-box on the balcony.

Lily sank with a sigh into one of the shabby leather chairs.

“How delicious to have a place like this all to one’s self! What a miserable thing it is to be a woman.” (6-7)

An accurate model of the nineteenth-century gentleman’s library, Selden’s study borrows elements from Wharton’s father’s library, including the “Turkey rug” on which a young Edith Jones read for hours (Wharton, *Novellas* 1084). In Lily’s appreciative gaze, Selden’s library is an idyllic space, a place “all to one’s self.” Anticipating Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, with its call for private spaces for women, Lily’s envious reaction is a response not only to the charm and tranquility of Selden’s library, but also to the freedom it signifies. In Wharton’s time, women were excluded from the private sphere of the gentleman’s library; theirs was the more public domain of the drawing-room. Keenly conscious of her lack of privacy, Lily feels this exclusion most acutely within the safety and seclusion of Selden’s library. She is, paradoxically, inside the library when she refers to her exclusion from it.

While in the library, Lily asks her host about book collecting and the value of collections such as the Gryce Americana. Although the discussion is outwardly about books and the rare book market, Lily is actually interested in the marriage market. Books, in this sense, are her cover. They offer a pretext for her musings on marriage and freedom:

“You collect, don’t you—you know about first editions and things?”

“As much as a man may who has no money to spend. Now and then I pick up something in the rubbish heap; and I go and look on at the big sales.”

She had again addressed herself to the shelves, but her eyes now swept them inattentively, and he saw that she was preoccupied with a new idea.

“And Americana—do you collect Americana?”

Selden stared and laughed.

“No, that’s rather out of my line. I’m not really a collector, you see; I simply like to have good editions of the books I am fond of.” (10-11)

Though Selden speaks of books, his words hold a second meaning for Lily: unlike Percy Gryce, a man of significant wealth, Selden is not a collector. Just as book collections like the Gryce Americana are “out of [his] line” or league, so too are women like Lily; he can afford neither. The irony of the scene is that it is set in Selden’s library, but he does not have the capital to invest in collectibles. He buys his books second-hand and seeks out “sales.” In contrast to Percy Gryce or the Trenors, Selden reads rather than collects. For him, Lily is not simply a commodity with a decorative exterior. Selden’s preference for “good” rather than “fine” editions suggests that he can distinguish between books as beautiful objects and books as intellectual content. Similarly, he can see Lily as more than mere ornamentation. Nevertheless, with his old prints and shabby furniture, Lawrence Selden is a man “who has no money to spend” (10). Wharton thus contrasts Selden and Gryce as potential marriage partners based on their different dealings with books. Though poor and dilettantish, Selden demonstrates an authentic affiliation with culture, a real love for the books in his well-worn library. Percy Gryce, the epitome of the hoarding, self-important collector, does not fare as well. He is the quintessential miser as well as that most heinous of bibliophiles—a collector who acquires books he does not read. Selden sardonically spells this out to Lily: “I don’t suppose the buyers of

Americana sit up reading them all night—old Jefferson Gryce certainly didn't" (11).

This merging of the marriage market and the business of book collecting is pervasive in *The House of Mirth*. Though Lily and Lawrence talk about books, book collecting, and the rare book market, they implicitly discuss Lily's marriage prospects, her strategy for securing a husband, and the marriage market. Indeed, Selden's observation that "It seems to be the mere rarity that attracts the average collector" (11) is an unspoken warning to the enterprising Lily. The "average" collector, Selden implies, is like the average man; he wants something not for its intrinsic qualities but because by possessing it other men cannot. This unflattering characterization of men as acquisitive collectors is borne out by the male characters in the novel: Gus Trenor collects debts in the hope of keeping Lily indebted to him; Simon Rosedale collects influential friends and business associates, as well as art collections, to enhance his social standing in New York society; and Percy Gryce collects Americana because it brings him celebrity. Though Lawrence Selden enjoys the spectacle of Lily's beauty as much as these men ("As a spectator, he had always enjoyed Lily Bart" [4]), he is not in the market for collectibles.

In Selden's library, Lily's beauty is blended with the beauty of the books. Just as Selden took pleasure in Lily's beauty at the train station, Lily gazes at his books appreciatively, considering them with the same impersonal or appraising eye: "She began to saunter about the room, examining the bookshelves between the puffs of her cigarette-smoke. Some of the volumes had the ripe tints of good tooling and old morocco, and her eyes lingered on them caressingly, not with the appreciation of the expert, but with the pleasure in agreeable tones and textures that was one of her inmost susceptibilities" (10). This allusion to the "tints" of bindings recalls the earlier description of Lily's beauty as a

vivid contrast to the “dull tints” of the crowd (4). The exceptional—and material—quality of her beauty is aligned with the pleasing “tones and textures” of finely made books. Moreover, Lily and Lawrence share a “susceptibility” or attunement to beauty. Wharton suggests that aesthetic appreciation lends itself to a sense of autonomy or self-determination. Beauty affords access to one’s “inmost” qualities, and to the cultivation of “personal freedom” (68), which may be experienced most intensely in the secluded space of the library.

As an interior designed for introspection and quiet contemplation, the library amplifies intimacy. In the close quarters of his library, Selden experiences Lily’s beauty most intimately, in direct contrast to the public display of the *tableaux vivants* scene. The sight of her posed against a wall of books seems to him the very definition of beauty: “It was so pleasant to sit there looking up at her, as she lifted now one book and then another from the shelves, fluttering the pages between her fingers, while her drooping profile was outlined against the warm background of old bindings” (11). Like Lizzie Hazeldean’s, Lily’s presence heightens the beauty of the books, while the books provide the perfect context or “background” for her beauty. This library scene is ironic, however, and particularly in its marked absence of reading. Selden’s absorption in Lily’s beauty is at odds with the intimacy of the setting and the latent potential for mutual understanding that the library promises. The book that Lily leafs through—but does not read—is a first edition of La Bruyère, the seventeenth-century French moralist known for his psychological sketches and maxims.⁸ John Clubbe suggests that this scene, rather than accentuating the intimacy between Lily and Lawrence, highlights their persistent

⁸ In his catalogue of Edith Wharton’s library, George Ramsden notes that Wharton “sometimes introduced her own books into novels” (Ramsden xix). Like Lawrence Selden, Wharton had a prized first edition of La Bruyère in her library.

difficulty in understanding each other (544). Selden's profound knowledge of books is contrasted with Lily's browsing. For all his careful reading, however, Selden does not "read" Lily as he reads his books; instead, he is content to look at her as the bibliophile gazes on a finely bound first edition. She is a book whose pages he "flutters" but does not read.

In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton identifies books as both "an ornament and an investment" for the serious book collector (266). Lily Bart serves this dual function in *The House of Mirth*. Like a rare book, she has ornamental beauty that has a marketable value. But Lily may be the rare book that no one can afford to own. No businessman willingly risks his fortune to invest in her. Women like Lily were regarded as possessions that could be procured in the market economies of late nineteenth-century New York society. Sought after to augment a man's social position, these precursors to today's "trophy wife" often found themselves shelved like precious, unread books upon marriage. According to Thorstein Veblen, whose *Theory of the Leisure Class* was published in 1899, six years before the publication of *The House of Mirth*, a woman's conspicuous beauty stood as a symbol of her husband's wealth. Leisure class wives attested to the financial strength of their husbands, and thus played an important role in displaying their assets: "In order to gain and to hold the esteem of men, it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put in evidence" (Veblen 36). A beautiful, well-dressed wife was the perfect proof of a man's money and thus his power. As Lee confirms in her biography, Wharton was familiar with the notion of conspicuous consumption, "steeped" as she was in the writings of Veblen, Charles Darwin, and Herbert Spencer (199). Wharton first uses the term "conspicuous" in the opening scene of

the novel to describe the impression Lily makes on Lawrence Selden and the commuters at Grand Central Station (4). She employs it again at the start of Book Two, when Selden, holidaying in Monte Carlo, watches a “conspicuously conspicuous group of people” loitering in front of the Casino, a small crowd that includes Carry Fisher, the Stepneys, and the Brys (184). Selden, the consummate spectator, observes that these well-dressed New Yorkers are like “performers” whose “show had been staged regardless of expense” (184).

In this regard, Lily is a victim of the relentless materialism of her society and its “ethos of exchange” (Dimock 64). Caught up in an economic system that prizes novelty and is founded on spectacle, Lily learns that, like a rare book, her value lies not only in her novelty but also in her rarity or scarcity. Rarity is the essential quality in collecting. If something is not deemed rare, there is no need to collect it. Selden warns Lily that “your real collector values a thing for its rarity” (11). Lily immediately perceives how she might apply this principle to her designs on Percy Gryce, and to her self-fashioning as a rare commodity. Referring to the Gryce Americana, she asks, “they fetch fabulous prices, don’t they?” (11). Lily knows that she too could “fetch” or obtain a “fabulous price” in marriage because she too is fetching or enticing. Rarity is thus tied to beauty in *The House of Mirth*. As the quality that first catches the collector’s eye, beauty implies rarity and novelty. Beauty, as Lily’s mother reminds her, has to do with being seen, and being seen likewise ensures the marketability of beauty: “People can’t marry you if they don’t see you—and how can they see you in these holes where we’re stuck?” (35). Lily needs to be seen to be collected, yet the scarcer she makes herself the more valuable she is as a

collectible. As Simon Rosedale observes, "It was perhaps [Lily's] very manner of holding herself aloof that appealed to his collector's passion for the rare and unattainable" (113).

A prime opportunity for Lily to make herself conspicuous is the *tableaux vivants* scene, an event synonymous with what Selden calls the "big sales" in the world of book collecting. At the "show" (131), Lily's "flesh and blood loveliness" is put on display as a living recreation of Sir Joshua Reynolds's portrait of "Mrs. Lloyd" (134). The thrilling impression she makes on the audience is felt keenly by Lawrence Selden, who enjoys "spectacular effects" (131) and "vision-making influences" (133). Selden is so moved by Lily's beauty and its expression of her "personality" (134) that he seems to glimpse, momentarily, "the real Lily Bart" (135): "In the long moment before the curtain fell, he had time to feel the whole tragedy of her life. It was as though her beauty, thus detached from all that cheapened and vulgarized it, had held out suppliant hands to him from the world in which he and she had once met for a moment" (135). Lily's performance has the intended effect. She triumphantly markets her beauty at this "big sale," and at the same time reminds Selden of their earlier intimacy in his library.

As this scene suggests, Lily's relentlessly public life, her itinerant conspicuousness, lies in direct contrast to Selden's "inconspicuousness" (65), his private existence in his gentleman's library. The conspicuousness of Lily's beauty and its exposure at the "big sale" heralds her slide into poverty and inconspicuousness, and her abandonment to the "rubbish heap" later on (10). According to Lily's aunt, Mrs. Peniston, and her cousin, Grace Stepney, Lily has been far too successful in making herself seen: "It's a pity Lily makes herself so conspicuous," says Grace. "'Conspicuous!'" gasped Mrs. Peniston. She bent forward, lowering her voice to mitigate the horror" (124).

If Book One examines what it means to be conspicuous, Book Two considers what it means *not* to be seen. Selden tells Lily that he looks on at the “big sales,” but that he also hunts for books in the “rubbish heap.” This term surfaces again in the second scene in Selden’s library, when Lily looks back on her life and considers her descent into obscurity and destitution: “I can hardly be said to have an independent existence. I was just a screw or a cog in the great machine I called life, and when I dropped out of it I found I was of no use anywhere else. What can one do when one finds that one only fits into one hole? One must get back to it or be thrown out into the rubbish heap—and you don’t know what it’s like in the rubbish heap!” (308). As before, Lily conceives of herself as a book, but her social fall has transformed her from a rare book to one that is used or second-hand, a book that has been in circulation and is now cast into the “rubbish heap.” The tragedy of Lily’s situation is that she perceives the importance of rarity and the inherent value of her conspicuous beauty, yet perversely allows her value to be reduced until no one wants to “collect” or marry her. As soon as she becomes too accessible her value plummets. In this regard, Lily’s plight recalls those of other late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American figures such as James’s Daisy Miller and Dreiser’s Carrie Meeber, women who are similarly caught in the double bind of the marriage market. Unlike books, Lily’s beauty has an expiry date; at 29, she is perilously close to being considered past her prime.

Trapped in a system of exchange, a world of speculation and spectatorship, Lily nonetheless demonstrates her own entrepreneurial spirit. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff puts it, Lily “knows the market” (“Introduction” xxiii). She understands the system and plans to profit from the acquisitive way that men such as Gus Trenor and Simon Rosedale see her.

She acknowledges her status as “human merchandise” (*HM* 256), negotiates her fate in a series of interiors (trains, libraries, drawing-rooms, cruise-ships, kitchens), and puts her beauty on display in the *tableaux vivants* scene. Lily recognizes and enjoys the impact of her beauty, and is gratified when other women of her class, such as Mrs. Bry or Carry Fisher, pay “court” to her: “it proved that she was not above a certain enjoyment in dazzling them by her fineness, in developing their puzzled perception of her superiorities” (*HM* 113). According to Judy Trenor, chief among these superior traits is Lily’s ability to read people and to adapt her conversation to flatter and suit their interests: “you’re wonderful about getting up people’s subjects” (45), Judy tells her at Bellomont. Lily cannily collects information about collectors in order to market herself as the perfect “scenery” or “background” for the well-heeled connoisseur, like a rare book collection he will want to acquire and then comfortably ensconce in his library. Like Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country*, Lily is an untiring opportunist and a shrewd judge of character. Lily, the narrator tells us, has a “power” in handling men (85).

In fact, Lily’s entrepreneurship suggests that she has more in common with Simon Rosedale than she might care to admit. As she confesses to Lawrence Selden, big parties bore her but she must go: “It’s part of the business—you forget!” (12). Marriage is Lily’s business or “career” (45), her vocation. In “Debasing Exchange,” Wai Chee Dimock describes Lily’s understanding and exploitation of the market economies in which she circulates, the “logic” of exchange she adopts in order to survive (73): “Of all the characters, Lily Bart has the most puzzling and contradictory relation to the marketplace. [...] [S]he is busy marketing herself throughout most of the book, worried only about the price she would fetch. [...] And yet, her repeated and sometimes intentional failure to

find a buyer [...] makes her something of a rebel" (64). Lily's rebellious relation to the market makes her an unpredictable commodity, and thus a risky investment for potential buyers.

In response to the encroaching pressures of her steadily mounting debt, Lily develops her own business plan. She elucidates this plan for Selden in his library, explaining the value of dressing well, attending parties, and generally showing oneself to the greatest possible advantage: "a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it. Who wants a dingy woman? We are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop—and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership" (*HM* 12). Lily cultivates an aesthetic context for her beauty, one that recalls the "background" of books in Selden's library (11). Her social "success" depends to a large extent on her clothing, which, like a finely bound book, is meant to attract the eye and produce pleasure. Lily alludes to the relationship between social convention and clothing in Selden's library by directly associating books with beauty: "My aunt is full of copy-book axioms, they were all meant to apply to conduct in the early fifties. I always feel that to live up to them would include wearing book-muslin with gigot sleeves" (9). "Book-muslin," a delicate cotton fabric used for women's party dresses (*HM* 330), is also used for the covers of books in bookbinding. This alignment of clothing with bookmaking explicitly connects Lily's beauty with the beauty of books, and emphasizes its constructed quality. Dresses, like book covers, are an essential element of display. A woman's business, and her fate, is thus tied up with fashion and design. In "On Books and the Housing of Them" (1890), William E. Gladstone draws the same connection

between book-bindings and dresses, suggesting that the intrinsic value of the classics warrants a correspondingly fine exterior: "Noble works ought not to be printed in mean and worthless forms, and cheapness ought to be limited by an instinctive sense and law of fitness. The binding of a book is the dress, with which it walks out into the world. The paper, type, and ink are the body, in which its soul is domiciled" (385). Lily understands that fine or valuable things must look the part. To obtain financial security, she thus fashions herself as a valuable investment to potential "partners." As Selden wryly observes, "there must be plenty of capital on the lookout for such an investment" (12).

Capital and collectors are indeed plentiful in *The House of Mirth*, but Lily, despite her beauty, is still regarded as a risky investment. In contrast to Bertha Dorset, who is married and thus financially and socially secure, Lily is poor and remains on the fringes of society. She is vulnerable to the vagaries of two, interrelated forces—the "power of money" and the sway of "social credit" or social standing (*HM* 261): "She had, in short, failed to make herself indispensable; or rather, her attempt to do so had been thwarted by an influence stronger than any she could exert. That influence, in its last analysis, was simply the power of money: Bertha Dorset's social credit was based on an impregnable bank-account" (*HM* 261). The dynamics of social credit are linked to business, and particularly to risk and investment in *The House of Mirth*. Social credit implies that an individual has a social worth or value that is subject to the same kinds of fluctuations as the money markets. Like financial credit, one's social credit can rise or fall. The scheming Bertha Dorset has "banked" a great deal of social credit; she is untouchable, thanks to powerful friends and a ruthless manipulation of the marriage market. Lily's social credit is not "impregnable." In her risky dealings with Gus Trenor, she not only

exposes herself to social scandal but she fails to make herself “indispensable” to him or to Simon Rosedale.

Lily risks, paradoxically, too much and not enough. Her reputation is tied to the vicissitudes of the market: as soon as her social credit plummets—thanks, in part, to the interference of Bertha Dorset—so does her value as a marketable commodity. After her stock drops, Rosedale does not want to marry her. Echoing the motto of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, “The Woman Pays,” Wharton suggests that Lily Bart pays, in social credit, for her transgressions. After unexpectedly meeting Rosedale outside of Selden’s apartment, she wonders why must “a girl pay so dearly for her least escape from routine?” (15). This compulsory expenditure sets her apart from other characters in the novel, and particularly from Percy Gryce, Simon Rosedale, Lawrence Selden, and Bertha Dorset, who are wholly absorbed in speculating and collecting and yet manage to avoid “paying” for their indulgences: “Despite being poor, in debt, disinherited, an outsider in a world of financiers and market manipulators, speculators and collectors, Lily is the one who must pay again and again for each moment of inattention, self-indulgence, or rebellion” (Showalter 47).

Lily’s assets balance her social deficit to some extent. Her mother considers Lily’s beauty “the last asset in their fortunes” (*HM* 34) after the financial ruin and subsequent death of Mr. Bart. Like a fanatical collector, Mrs. Bart shrewdly hoards and contemplates her daughter’s beauty, regarding it as her rightful possession: “She watched it jealously, as though it were her own property and Lily its mere custodian” (34). Conscious of her allure from an early age, Lily understands that it requires skilful handling and negotiating in order to garner a high price: “To a less illuminated

intelligence Mrs. Bart's counsels might have been dangerous, but Lily understood that beauty is only the raw material of conquest, and that to convert it into success other arts are required. [...] [I]t did not take her long to learn that a beauty needs more tact than the possessor of an average set of features" (34). Lily perceives her beauty as a "possession" that she retains as a kind of collateral: "Her beauty itself was not the mere ephemeral possession it might have been in the hands of inexperience: her skill in enhancing it, the care she took of it, the use she made of it, seemed to give it a kind of permanence" (49). Lily, always conscious of her marketability, wrongly judges the "permanence" of her aesthetic value. Like the Gryce Americana—a collection of antiquarian books—she is increasingly portrayed as "an unmarketable commodity" (*HM* 20). As Jennie A. Kassanoff argues, Lily is "not so much a circulating commodity as she is a rare museum piece, desirable precisely because she is out of circulation" (315). Lily is thus caught within this paradox: she is the rare antiquarian object that is forced out of the library or museum and into circulation in the market. Her rarity, the very quality that inspires the collector's desire for acquisition, precludes her marketability.

Besides her beauty, Lily's other assets are her cleverness, her resourcefulness, and her knowledge of books. She is savvy, observant, and "self-possessed" (*HM* 51). Even when cornered by Gus Trenor in his newspaper-littered den, Lily measures "every word and gesture" (145), conscious of "another self" that was "sharpening her to vigilance" (145). Lily is also a reader, and her reading of fiction is figured as an investment of sorts, a way to gain knowledge of life that she can apply as needed. Shortly after her father dies, for instance, Lily finds herself wishing she could have "exchanged with him a few of those affecting words which an extensive perusal of fiction had led her to connect with

such occasions” (33). Lily’s broad reading of fiction furnishes her with an understanding of social conventions, and provides a kind of sentimental education. Books “lead” her to compare or “connect” what she reads with her own feelings and experiences. Moreover, reading helps her to identify with her father and his bookish interests, and thus encourages a “filial instinct” towards him (33).

Ultimately, however, Lily’s reading seems to encourage the same kind of passivity or spectatorship that hinders Lawrence Selden and other Wharton characters. Her “instinct” or affection for her father, “finding no active expression, remained in a state of spectatorship, overshadowed by her mother’s grim unflagging resentment” (*HM* 33). Couched as they are in a context of books and reading, these might be Wharton’s own regrets. She too lost a poetry-loving father at a young age, and had to bow to her mother’s uncomprehending and critical view of her father’s literary sensibilities. One of Mrs. Bart’s complaints against her husband is that he reads too much, like the bookish lawyer Ralph Marvell in *The Custom of the Country*: “It had been among that lady’s grievances that her husband—in the early days, before he was too tired—had wasted his evenings in what she vaguely described as ‘reading poetry’; and among the effects packed off to auction after his death were a score or two of dingy volumes which had struggled for existence among the boots and medicine bottles of his dressing-room shelves” (*HM* 34-5). Mr. Bart’s books serve as a material reminder of his failings as a husband and provider, and embody the literary bond forged between father and daughter. Mrs. Bart transfers her resentment to his books since she can no longer direct it at him; she takes revenge against him by selling them off, effectively thwarting the bookish bond between Lily and her father.

Like Wharton, Lily regards her father's library as the "source" (*HM* 35) or standard for her own literary tastes and refinement. This notion of a paternal source for one's fondness for culture is linked to beauty and to its ideal function or purpose in *The House of Mirth*. Lily equates her beauty with a more general or universal beauty, as something connected to the "ennobling" qualities of books and paintings:

There was in Lily a vein of sentiment, perhaps transmitted from this source, which gave an idealizing touch to her most prosaic purposes. She liked to think of her beauty as a power for good, as giving her the opportunity to attain a position where she should make her influence felt in the vague diffusion of refinement and good taste. She was fond of pictures and flowers, and of sentimental fiction, and she could not help thinking that the possession of such tastes ennobled her desire for worldly advantages. (*HM* 35)

Lily inherits this love of culture from her father. Her love of books is tied to her love of him. She also inherits her father's idealism (his "idealizing touch"), and this makes her ashamed of her mother's "crude passion for money" (35). Lily desires "worldly advantages," but this entails more than money. She believes in the power of aesthetic beauty, and dreams of sharing her good taste with others. This belief explains her attraction to the bookish aesthete, Lawrence Selden.

Selden, who resembles Wharton's long-time friend Walter Berry, shares Lily's love of reading. Berry, as Lubbock recalls, "was an insatiable reader, a true glutton of books; he was a hard worker, with a wide acquaintance among men of learning and letters and affairs" (43). Like Berry, a lifelong bachelor, lawyer, collector, and

connoisseur, Lawrence Selden is known for his literary “cultivation” (*HM* 65). His reputation for reading is a trait that draws Lily to him even as it sets him apart from general society, as it does for James’s Isabel Archer: “His reputed cultivation was generally regarded as a slight obstacle to easy intercourse, but Lily, who prided herself on her broad-minded recognition of literature, and always carried an Omar Khayyam in her travelling-bag, was attracted by this attribute, which she felt would have had its distinction in an older society” (65). Lily associates Selden with her father’s generation and with an old-fashioned or gentlemanly cultivation and propriety. Whereas Lawrence’s reputed bookishness discourages small-talk, Lily does not leave home without *The Rubáiyát*, which was translated by Edward FitzGerald in 1859. Like a prop, this book gives her a fashionable hint of the exotic yet encourages social intercourse because it implies that she reads what others read. Set apart by her beauty, Lily uses books to make herself seem more approachable.

In the same way that Lily’s “specialized” beauty separates her from the crowd, Selden’s cultural “superiority” is reflected in his physical appearance, and distinguishes him from other men: “It was, moreover, one of his gifts to look his part; to have a height which lifted his head above the crowd, and the keenly-modelled dark features which, in a land of amorphous types, gave him the air of belonging to a more specialized race, of carrying the impress of a concentrated past. [...] [Lily] admired him most of all, perhaps, for being able to convey as distinct a sense of superiority as the richest man she had ever met” (65). Thanks to his wide-ranging reading, Selden carries the “impress of a concentrated past.” Reading, in this regard, is cultural transmission. Through reading, Selden inherits a series of traditional values passed on from an older, gentlemanly order.

Unlike Simon Rosedale and Gus Trenor, who embrace modern business values and whose wealth is monetary, Selden embodies old-fashioned, bookish, or academic principles. He is “rich” in refinement. Reading affords him a kind of solitary, dilatory pleasure that lies in direct contrast to the frenetic business acquisitions of the Wall Street businessmen. Simon Rosedale plans to buy a house on Fifth Avenue that is already furnished with “a picture-gallery with old masters” (121). He wants his collections ready-made so that he can entertain “all of New York” (121), all the while advertising his wealth and good taste. In this regard, Rosedale is like Elmer Moffatt in *The Custom of the Country*, whose gaudy, gilded library and rare editions make him another Wharton collector who buys his collections outright and who regards culture as simply another form of capital.

With his old-fashioned approach to books and collecting, Selden may have more in common with Percy Gryce, the owner of an antiquarian collection, than with Simon Rosedale, the avaricious businessman. As Susan Stewart observes in *On Longing*, the aesthetics of antiquarianism is antithetical to the aesthetics of mercantilism (153). The former is concerned with the preservation of the past, while the latter is interested in the “extraction” of rare goods for the purposes of “exchange”: “The antiquarian is moved by a nostalgia of origin and presence. [...] But the mercantilist is not moved by restoration; he is moved by extraction and seriality. He removes the object from its context and places it within the play of signifiers that characterize an exchange economy” (Stewart 153). Stewart’s discussion of collecting as a form of consumerism, a kind of “aesthetic consumption” (Stewart 166), is relevant to *The House of Mirth*. Simon Rosedale exemplifies collecting as mercantilist acquisition, an activity motivated not by a love of

culture but by a love of accumulation. In this regard, he and Percy Gryce share a common ground as collectors: both acquire collections that were assembled by someone else. As Stewart observes, this is not considered the proper way to collect because collection seeks its narrative of engagement in the marketplace: “it is not acceptable to simply purchase a collection *in toto*; the collection must be acquired in a serial manner” (166).

Stewart reminds us of Jean Baudrillard’s distinction in *The System of Objects* between collection and accumulation. For Baudrillard, accumulating objects is a lower-order activity than “collecting proper” because it is less concerned with culture than with consumption:

At the simplest level, matter of one kind or another is accumulated: old papers are piled up, or quantities of food are stored. This activity falls somewhere between oral introjection and anal retention. At a somewhat higher level lies the serial accumulation of identical objects. As for collecting proper, it has a door open onto culture, being concerned with differentiated objects which often have exchange value, which may also be ‘objects’ of preservation, trade, social ritual, exhibition – perhaps even generators of profit. [...] And though they remain interrelated, their interplay involves the social world outside, and embraces human relationships. (103)

As an acquisitive yet judicious reader and interior decorator, Wharton evidently privileged collecting over undifferentiated accumulation. In *The House of Mirth*, however, she explores the commercial underpinnings of collecting, which she calls “the art of accumulation” (*HM* 23), by examining what it means to treat human relationships

as business transactions. Collecting proper is thus replaced by the “art” of accumulation—a distortion or parody of the typically high-minded aesthetic aims of the collector. Businesslike speculation and consumption supplant traditional connoisseurship; the commercial stands in for the interpersonal. Lily Bart is viewed more as a commodity than as a woman by commercially minded men such as Simon Rosedale and Gus Trenor.

Even Lawrence Selden, the conservative collector, is a speculator of sorts. Despite his cultural refinement, he “shows more speculative interest than he would like to admit” (Dimock 69). His dilettantish inclinations extend to the realm of business and investments, where, as Dimock notes, “the investor picks up where the spectator leaves off” (69): “For Selden also happens to be a connoisseur, an investor in aesthetic objects [...] [He] remains a spectator when he cannot afford to buy, but he is not averse to pocketing little tidbits when they can be had for a small price” (69). Accumulating goods, or “pocketing tidbits,” is the name of the game in *The House of Mirth*. Everything, and everyone, has a price, as Lily herself shrewdly observes: “Money stands for all kinds of things—its purchasing quality isn’t limited to diamonds and motor-cars” (71).

The Collector’s Library: The Gryce Americana

Speculative interest in objects is tied to “purchasing quality,” or capital, in *The House of Mirth*. In other words, not all collectors are created equal. Lawrence Selden tells Lily that he is not a “real” collector because he does not have the means to make collecting more than a hobby. Real collectors are “in the market”; they are not dilettantes or dabblers. Real collecting is a form of investment, and is thus tied to risk. Lawrence Selden, the epitome of the dilettante, is non-committal. He admires what he calls “the

decorative side of life" (70) and wants to remain free, particularly free of risk. He is a man "who had renounced sentimental experiments" (69), preferring instead the safety of spectatorship. As Dimock observes, Selden's idea of love is contractual, a form of exchange (70). He will not risk sentimental attachment unless his investment has a guaranteed return. When Lily asks him if he wants to marry her, he replies: "No, I don't want to—but perhaps I should if you did!" (73).

This speculative gamesmanship is a familiar theme for Wharton's bookish bachelors, and calls to mind Jamesian dilettantes such as Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller*, the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, and Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady*. In Wharton's short story, "The Dilettante," published two years before *The House of Mirth*, Thursdale bears a striking resemblance to James's most sinister collector, Gilbert Osmond. Like Osmond, Thursdale cultivates the perfect woman *qua* object, revealing "the dilettante's irresistible craving" to regard his friend, Mrs. Vervain, as "a work of art" in his possession (Wharton, *Short* 21). Like Lawrence Selden, Thursdale excels at a kind of sentimental evasiveness that leaves him free yet binds others to him: "in seeking to avoid the pitfalls of sentiment he had developed a science of evasion in which the woman of the moment became a mere implement of the game" (21).

Women like Mrs. Vervain, Madame Merle, and Lily Bart are tools, "mere implements" of the collectors who seek to possess them. They are also "tooling" in the sense that they are seen as ornamentation—objectified beauty that satisfies the collector's dilettantish craving for aesthetic pleasure and possession. Wharton uses these terms ("tools" and "tooling") to elaborate on the possessive relationship the dilettante has to his objects in "The Touchstone" (1900). The heterogeneous library of Barton Flamel, a

collector of fine books and rare manuscripts and letters, manifests a “comprehensive dilettantism” (Wharton, *Collected* 179). Flamel’s apartment is full of “lines of warm-toned morocco” (179), and this background of books “seemed the visible expression of its owner’s intellectual tolerance” (179). Books are Flamel’s “chief care” (179), the most prominent aspect of his living space and his personality. When Stephen Glennard observes that Flamel has “a splendid lot of books” (179), the collector admits that he finds himself as “irresistibly” drawn to talking about his collection as he is to collecting itself:

“They’re fairly decent,” the other assented, in the curt tone of the collector who will not talk of his passion for fear of talking of nothing else; then, as Glennard, his hands in his pockets, began to stroll perfunctorily down the long line of bookcases—“Some men,” Flamel irresistibly added, “think of books merely as tools, others as tooling. I’m between the two; there are days when I use them as scenery, other days when I want them as society; so that, as you see, my library represents a makeshift compromise between looks and brains, and the collectors look down on me almost as much as the students.” (179-80)

Books are “scenery” or “tooling” for Flamel, passively beautiful objects that he likes to look upon; they are also “society” or “tools,” a source of entertainment or edification. His library attests to the “comprehensiveness” of Flamel’s dilettantism. The product of his inveterate and wide-ranging collecting, Flamel’s library symbolizes his tolerant or “compromising” mind. His library announces that he is a man who specializes in generality. In this regard, Flamel is like Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, who hopes,

through reading, to become “that most limited of all specialists, the ‘well-rounded man’” (4).

The word “dilettante” is linked to the Latin word *delectare*, which means “to delight” (“Dilettante”). A dilettante is one who delights in the fine arts, someone who cultivates an amateur’s interest in a variety of subjects without pursuing those interests seriously or systematically (as a professional would). Ralph Marvell in *The Custom of the Country* comes from a long line of gentlemen whose “desultory dabbling with life” (48) is a kind of socially sanctioned and “cultivated inaction” (48). The knowledge possessed by dilettantes is often seen as superficial or cursory, a showy affectation of familiarity rather than profound understanding. “Dilettantism,” according to Allan Hepburn, “is a form of misapprehension, a pretense of appreciation” (39). The collector’s desire to be “comprehensive” in his collecting is analogous to the free-wheeling impulse of the dilettante. Collectors are dilettantes of a kind, just as the dilettante is a collector of specialities. Both are motivated by the urge to accumulate.

Wharton shows a keen interest in collectors in her short stories and novels, and particularly those she wrote between 1900 and 1913, including *The Valley of Decision* (1902), “The Daunt Diana” (1905), *The Reef* (1912), and *The Custom of the Country* (1913). The collector is male in Wharton’s fiction, and his relationship to women is often defined by his relationship to material culture, as Hepburn suggests: “Wharton, by classifying identities according to taste—‘dilettante,’ ‘connoisseur,’ ‘collector’—demonstrates the complex effects that material culture has on women and their relations to identities wholly determined by, or in opposition to, material goods” (26). Wharton’s characters express themselves through commodities (Hepburn 27), and thus are

preoccupied not only with accumulation but also with questions of classification. In *The House of Mirth*, the acquisitive Simon Rosedale eyes Lily “as though he were a collector who had learned to distinguish minor differences of design and quality in some long-coveted object” (300).

Rosedale is a precursor to another American collector, the fabulously wealthy social climber Elmer Moffatt in *The Custom of the Country*. Known in newspaper headlines as “the greatest collector in America” (365) and “the billionaire Railroad King” (366), Moffatt possesses what E. M. Forster calls “a familiarity with the outsides of books” (*Howards* 92). Like Jay Gatsby’s impressive Gothic library of fine books, a library “probably transported complete from some ruin overseas” (Fitzgerald 45), Moffatt’s library is meant only for show. When Paul Marvell arrives at Moffatt’s house on a school holiday, he finds himself alone in his stepfather’s imposing *hôtel particulier*. As the son of bookish lawyer and poet Ralph Marvell, Paul Marvell genetically craves reading. Hoping to alleviate his sense of isolation, he seeks out the library: “The habit of solitude had given him a passion for the printed page, and if he could have found a book anywhere—any kind of a book—he would have forgotten the long hours and the empty house. But the tables in the library held only massive unused inkstands and immense immaculate blotters: not a single volume had slipped its golden prison” (363). Like museum pieces, Moffatt’s books, with their “splendid” bindings, are locked away in bookcases “closed with gilt trellising” (363). When Paul reaches up to remove a book from the shelf, a servant rushes in to tell him that the books are “too valuable to be taken down” (363). In this gallery of conspicuous goods, the materiality of books is reinforced because they are locked away and thus unreadable. Moffatt’s books are valued not for

their content but for what they symbolize: a surfeit of money. That he cannot touch Moffatt's books foils Paul's understanding of books as company. Despite his affection for the boy, Moffatt and his library only amplify Paul's sense of cultural and affective deprivation. At the end of the novel, Paul must satisfy himself with an archive of a different, yet equally insufficient, sort: Mrs. Heeney's scrapbooks of newspaper clippings chart his mother's sentimental history and his stepfather's meteoric rise to wealth and notoriety, and absurdly testify to the flimsy, makeshift, and composite nature of Paul's new life.

Altogether too familiar with the showy homes of the rich Newport vacationers and their gaudy displays of material culture, Wharton shares F. Scott Fitzgerald's preoccupation with the distinction between real and fake books and libraries, referring derisively to what she describes as a "bookless library" in her novella, "The Spark" (Wharton, *Old* 169). The narrator observes Hayley Delane, his wife Leila, and Bolton Byrne playing poker in the Gatsby-like library of Jack Alstrop: "There they sat, as I had so often seen them, in Jack Alstrop's luxurious bookless library (I'm sure the rich rows behind the glass doors were hollow), while beyond the windows the pale twilight thickened to blue over Long Island lawns and woods and a moonlit streak of sea" (169-70). The narrator's parenthetical scorn testifies to Wharton's knowing scepticism about the authenticity of the library and the associated authenticity of its owner's literary sensibilities. Meant as a sweeping indictment of the empty materialism of the collector and his Gilded Age, Wharton's satire betrays not the author's anxiety about writing books that no one will read (Wharton was, after all, a best-selling novelist), but rather a bibliophilic lament for the collector's perplexing indifference to the riches inside a book.

Hollow books, Wharton implies, produce hollow minds.

Collectors like Rosedale and Moffatt consider their collections social investments that visibly express their vast wealth. Percy Gryce's collection of Americana performs much the same function. Presumably an allusion to the library of New York's most well-known collector, J. P. Morgan, Gryce's collection of Americana is "considered the finest in the world" (*HM* 11). Just as Thursdale regards Mrs. Vervain as an object or "implement," and Barton Flamel sees his books as extensions of himself, objects in *The House of Mirth* are not only prized for their aesthetic value but for their exchange value. Like Lawrence Selden, Percy Gryce is a dilettante of sorts. When Lily sets her sights on marrying Gryce, a man whose only distinguishing quality is his ownership of an important collection, she quickly identifies his books as the sole source and "outlet" of his egoism (and thus his expenditure), and plans her strategy accordingly:

She knew that Mr. Gryce was of the small chary type most inaccessible to impulses and emotions. He had the kind of character in which prudence is a vice, and good advice the most dangerous nourishment. But Lily had known the species before: she was aware that such a guarded nature must find one huge outlet of egoism, and she determined to be to him what his Americana had hitherto been: the one possession in which he took sufficient pride to spend money on it. She knew that this generosity to self is one of the forms of meanness, and she resolved so to identify herself with her husband's vanity that to gratify her wishes would be to him the most exquisite form of self-indulgence. (49)

Wharton highlights Lily's canny knowledge in this passage ("she knew," "she was

aware," she "had known"), implying that this knowledge is not acquired only from books. Like Charity Royall in *Summer*, Lily reads people. As this brilliant précis of the collector's mindset suggests, Percy's bibliophilia is really a form of self-love or narcissism ("I love my books because they are mine"). In a Freudian sense, books are the condensation and displacement of an inner life; they mirror the desires and fears of the self. Nonetheless, as physical entities, books are not identical with inner life. Because they have their own material presence, books inadequately capture and substantiate inner life.

Lily thus mistakenly desires to displace Gryce's library. Though she competes with the books for Gryce's attention, she can never displace them because she is not a book. Nevertheless, she "identifies herself" with Gryce's Americana, fantasizing about what it would be like to be such an indulgence. Vowing to become an irresistible collectible by embodying its qualities, Lily fashions herself as a rare, high-priced commodity. Just as Gryce enjoys spending money on his books, so too will he want to spend money on her. Lily intends to secure this transaction by pretending to share his interest in antiquarian books. For devising this scheme, Lily is perhaps guilty of the same kind of sentimental dilettantism as Lawrence Selden, and the same "art" of accumulation as Percy Gryce, Simon Rosedale, and Gus Trenor. Like Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country*, Lily models herself after successful collectors and accumulators.

Like Elmer Moffatt and his magnificent but farcical museum-library, Percy Gryce and his mausoleum-library is the target of Wharton's satire. Famously well-read, well-travelled, and culturally conversant herself, Wharton "disapproves of...collecting that manifests only cultural acquisition without cultural erudition" (Hepburn 29). Having

inherited his library, Percy can take no credit for his fine taste in books. “Mr. Gryce’s interest in Americana had not originated with himself: it was impossible to think of him as evolving any taste of his own. An uncle had left him a collection already noted among bibliophiles; the existence of the collection was the only fact that had ever shed glory on the name of Gryce, and the nephew took as much pride in his inheritance as though it had been his own work” (*HM* 21). Any reference to the Gryce Americana brings Percy pleasure and encourages his cultural complacency. Shy and retiring in person, he revels in the “printed mention of his name, a pleasure so exquisite and excessive that it seemed a compensation for his shrinking from publicity” (21). Percy’s problem is that he lacks “imagination,” not “opportunity” (20), whereas Lily’s problem is the inverse—she lacks opportunity but is full of ploys and schemes to advance her position. In this regard, Lily and Percy are foils: the very notoriety or publicity she craves is made available to Percy through his books. Just as she wishes to be that rare commodity on which a collector will spend his money, Percy identifies himself with his library of rare books to enhance his own self-importance. Reading brings him “exquisite” and “excessive” pleasure, but not because he loves printed material in the same way as Isabel Archer, Hyacinth Robinson, Newland Archer, or Woolf’s Orlando; rather, he reads to see his own name in print, and to be associated with the “glory” or historical significance of his books. Indeed, Percy’s “pride” in his books is akin to that of an author. In this sense, collecting is a surrogate for authorship: the next best thing to writing them himself is to have possession of the books and to be associated with their importance.

Unlike Lawrence Selden, Percy Gryce is no serious reader. Because he reads only journals that allude to his library, reading is merely a means to indulge his self-

importance:

To enjoy the sensation [of seeing his name in print] as often as possible, he subscribed to all the reviews dealing with book-collecting in general, and American history in particular, and as allusions to his library abounded in the pages of these journals, which formed his only reading, he came to regard himself as figuring prominently in the public eye, and to enjoy the thought of the interest which would be excited if the persons he met in the street, or sat among in travelling, were suddenly to be told that he was the possessor of the Gryce Americana. (*HM* 21)

Just as Charity Royall asserts ownership of the Hatchard Library in *Summer*, Percy Gryce thrills to his role as “possessor” of the Gryce Americana. It makes him conspicuous in the same way that Lily’s beauty makes heads turn. Moreover, it guarantees the archival legacy of the Gryce family, as well as Percy’s historical importance. Like the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, Percy desires a paper trail that will link him to an important literary legacy in perpetuity. In the end, he wants all books to be about him. While Gryce may not be remembered for any personal achievements, owning a library of significance is no small claim to fame. As guardian of an historically significant collection of artifacts, Percy’s personal importance is assured.

Rather than rely on her feminine wiles, Lily uses her newly gleaned knowledge of Americana and her understanding of the collector’s temperament to compel Percy Gryce’s attention:

There was, however, one topic she could rely on: one spring that she had only to touch to set his simple machinery in motion. She had refrained

from touching it because it was a last resource, and she had relied on other arts to stimulate other sensations; but as a settled look of dullness began to creep over his candid features, she saw that extreme measures were necessary.

“And how,” she said, leaning forward, “are you getting on with your Americana?”

His eye became a degree less opaque: it was as though an incipient film had been removed from it, and she felt the pride of a skilful operator.

“I’ve got a few nice things,” he said, suffused with pleasure, but lowering his voice as though he feared his fellow-passengers might be in league to despoil him. (20)

Like Barton Flamel, Percy Gryce cannot resist talking about his books. His passion for them is an animating force. Under the flattering influence of Lily’s “exaggerated interest” (21), he becomes “eloquent” (20). Almost as gratifying as ownership is the opportunity to establish his expertise, to bask in the display of his cultural capital: “He felt his confused titillation with which the lower organisms welcome the gratification of their needs, and all his senses floundered in a vague well-being, through which Miss Bart’s personality was dimly but pleasantly perceptible” (21). Percy perceives Lily, like his books, as merely a means to indulge his sense of superiority.

Like Lily’s beauty, Percy’s knowledge of Americana is a unique feature, something that sets him apart. Though he loves to talk of his books, he also wants to restrict who hears because he hopes to corner the market. Cultural capital, in this case, is snobbery founded on the ignorance of others. The limited amount others know about

Americana throws Percy's knowledge into "relief," just as Lily's striking face is set off against the crowd at Grand Central Station:

It was the one subject which enabled him to forget himself, or allowed him, rather, to remember himself without constraint, because he was at home in it, and could assert a superiority that there were few to dispute. Hardly any of his acquaintances cared for Americana, or knew anything about them; and the consciousness of this ignorance threw Mr. Gryce's knowledge into agreeable relief. The only difficulty was to introduce the topic and to keep it to the front; most people showed no desire to have their ignorance dispelled, and Mr. Gryce was like a merchant whose warehouses are crammed with an unmarketable commodity. (20)

Like the antiquarian books themselves, Percy's knowledge of Americana is an "unmarketable" commodity because there is very little demand for it outside of a small coterie of collectors. The books are also "unmarketable" in the sense that they are not for sale; unlike Lily, Percy is rich enough to store or hoard his goods without having to put them on the market. His wealth affords him a kind of self-sufficiency or inviolability. He is "at home" in his expertise just as Lawrence Selden is at home in his gentleman's library.

Percy likes to be thought refined and well-read without actually being those things. With this portrait of a collector, Wharton satirically indicts the leisure class and its desire to be considered worldly or intellectual without spending the time or effort to become so. Reading books is an unfashionably solitary and time-consuming leisure activity; collecting books, however, is an efficient and ostentatious way to advertise one's

cultural scope. Modernity and big business insist on efficiency and speed over the unhurried pleasures of reading. In the “new” New York, business aspirations replace gentlemanly erudition. The twentieth-century businessman has no time to linger in the library as his father and grandfather did. The nineteenth-century gentleman’s library has become passé, used only by old-fashioned bachelors like Lawrence Selden and the conventional Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence*. Unlike Lawrence and Newland, Percy Gryce spends “all his week days in the handsome Broad Street office where a batch of pale men on small salaries had grown grey in the management of the Gryce estate, and where he was initiated with becoming reverence into every detail of the art of accumulation” (23). An appreciation of leisure, as well as the finer points of books, art, and aesthetics, has been replaced by a modern “reverence” for accumulation. Collecting objects is akin to amassing millions: what matters is not the quality of an individual piece but the conspicuousness of quantity, which is amplified by the totality of the collection.

Percy’s initiation into the worlds of collecting and accumulation is a rite of passage for the young inheritor of the Gryce fortune. The Gryce family exemplifies the merging of old and new money in America’s Gilded Age. Their estate is made up of “the fortune which the late Mr. Gryce had made out of a patent device for excluding fresh air from hotels” (22), as well as Jefferson Gryce’s “large property” in New York (22).⁹ The Gryce legacy is a combination of cash and collectibles, giving Percy and his mother the old New York cachet of the Gryce name and the liquid assets of the *nouveau riche*. Mrs. Gryce is a shrewd businesswoman in her own right. For her charitable donations, she subscribes only to “Institutions” whose “annual reports showed an impressive surplus”

⁹ Despite its modern appeal, Percy’s father’s invention, like his son’s mausoleum-library, depends upon the elimination of freshness. Like his son, the elder Gryce seeks a controlled environment that runs counter to the organic vitality and dynamism Wharton endorses in the novel.

(22). Like many of her upper-class peers, Mrs. Gryce is “impressed” by surplus; she knows that money makes money. Collecting is thus bound to accumulation for the Gryces. Percy’s collection of Americana is emblematic of the Gryces’ vast wealth, property, and social status. As a stockpile of assets, the library conspicuously advertises its owner’s rightful place in the annals of the Gilded Age.

“A Rush of Memories”: Romance in the Archives

Another conspicuous library in *The House of Mirth* is the Trenors’ Bellomont library. The first, intimate scene between Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden in his modest gentleman’s library is contrasted with this second library scene, where, as guests at the Trenors’ country estate, Bellomont, Lily and Lawrence meet again in the library. This time, however, they are not alone; the circumstances are different, and the library in which they encounter one another reflects that difference. Like the Gryce Americana, the library at Bellomont is a family heirloom, a testament to the Trenors’ aristocratic Dutch ancestry:

The library was almost the only surviving portion of the old manor-house of Bellomont: a long spacious room, revealing the traditions of the mother-country in its classically-cased doors, the Dutch tiles of the chimney, and the elaborate hobgrate in its shining brass urns. A few family portraits of lantern-jawed gentlemen in tie-wigs and ladies with large head-dresses and small bodies, hung between the shelves lined with pleasantly shabby books: books mostly contemporaneous with the ancestors in question, and to which the subsequent Trenors had made no perceptible additions. (59)

The books in the Trenors' library are as ancient as the Trenor ancestors. Like the portraits and furniture, the library is an archaic throwback to the traditions of a former time, place, and people. Unlike its original owners, the inheritors of the library do not use it for its original purpose; no one reads the books in the Trenors' library: "The library at Bellomont was in fact never used for reading, though it had a certain popularity as a smoking-room or a quiet retreat for flirtation" (59). On Sunday morning, Lily goes in search of Lawrence Selden rather than meeting Percy Gryce to accompany him to church as she had planned. Given his bookish proclivities, Lily assumes that she will find Selden in the library. She does find him there, but he is engaged in a discreet tête-à-tête with married Bertha Dorset. Lily's library intrusion interrupts this scene of flirtation.

Carol Wershoven describes the female intruder as "the woman who is in some way outside of her society; she is different from other women, whether because of her background or lack of social status or because she has violated some social taboo. She is Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence*, Judith Wheeler in *The Children*, Sophy Viner in *The Reef*" (14). Lily's outsider status is highlighted in this scene in the library. She hesitates on the threshold before entering the room, conscious of the impact her unexpected presence will have on the couple:

Lily paused as she caught sight of the group; for a moment she seemed about to withdraw, but thinking better of this, she announced her approach by a slight shake of her skirts which made the couple raise their heads, Mrs. Dorset with a look of frank displeasure, and Selden with his usual quiet smile. The sight of his composure had a disturbing effect on Lily; but

to be disturbed was in her case to make a more brilliant effort at self-possession.

“Dear me, am I late?” she asked, putting a hand in his as he advanced to greet her. (59)

The theatrical nature of Lily’s intrusion is intentional. She wants Bertha to be confused about her relationship with Lawrence, and so her question is purposefully ambiguous (“am I late?”). She means to ask if she is late for church, but she implies that she is late for an engagement with Selden. Lily’s affected “self-possession” compensates for the feeling that she is an interloper, and for the fact that the scene she was expecting is nothing like the one that she finds. Instead of reading, Selden’s attention is “engaged” with Bertha. His book lies undisturbed on his lap, a symbol of his unusual preoccupation with something other than books in a library.

Indeed, the idle book serves as a kind of clue: how one reads its presence determines how one reads the scene. In one sense, the book has a prop-like quality; it is an object that makes the scene more realistic, and therefore belongs in Selden’s dilettantish repertoire. It rests on his lap to suggest that his loitering in the library is legitimate or justifiable; he is using it for its original purpose. The book implies that he was reading when Bertha happened upon him in the library, and that their encounter is purely accidental. In another sense, the book embodies Selden’s state of mind, providing a clarifying indication of his true feelings. The book, which falls from his lap when he rises at Lily’s unexpected appearance, contradicts the intended effect of Selden’s ever-present composure. The dropped book is evidence that Lily is not the only one who is “disturbed” by the scene. According to Wershoven, the female intruder in Wharton’s

fiction “embodies or develops values that Wharton approves of, values that are not associated with any time period but that are lacking in the particular society of the novel” (15). As the fumbled book suggests, Lily acts as a kind of moral censor or arbiter in this scene. She shakes Selden out of his complacency and forces him to consider not only his purpose in the library, but also his feelings for her. When Lily leaves the library, ostensibly to make her way to church but really to entice Selden to follow, she moves at a slow pace, “a fact not lost” on him as he stands in the doorway, “looking after her with an air of puzzled amusement” (60).

As in the fiction of Henry James, the library is a source of awareness or truth in Wharton’s fiction, a site that triggers important “shocks” of emotion and insight (*HM* 60). In this library scene, Lily learns that Lawrence Selden’s affair with Bertha Dorset might not be “all over” (43), as she had earlier presumed:

The truth is that she was conscious of a somewhat keen shock of disappointment. All her plans for the day had been built on the assumption that it was to see her that Lawrence had come to Bellomont. She had expected, when she came downstairs, to find him on the watch for her; and she had found him, instead, in a situation which might well denote that he had been on the watch for another lady. Was it possible, after all, that he had come for Bertha Dorset? (60)

Like Isabel Archer, who is attuned to the “scenic” or theatrical nature of life and seems at times conscious that she is a character in a novel, Lily attempts to read the scene or “situation” for what it may “denote” or reveal about Selden’s feelings for her. Wharton’s emphasis on Lily’s awareness of her own thoughts and feelings (she is “conscious” of a

“shock of disappointment”) implies a connection between the library setting and a heightened self-consciousness. Lily’s attempt to read Selden’s mind—*had* he been on the watch for Bertha?—evokes several interesting textual metaphors that are appropriate to the library context. To “read” someone’s mind is to think of the self as a text and the mind as a book, as in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, where the Prince promises to retain his father’s memory in “the book and volume of my brain” (1.5.103). Like the reader of a novel, Lily interprets the scene for what it may denote or signify about the mental state of its characters. She also manifests a striking awareness of her own mental states and their changeability.

If the library is an appropriate setting for mind-reading, it also furnishes the perfect context for questions of property or ownership. As this scene suggests, the library heightens the sense of rivalry between Lily and Bertha. Wharton describes Bertha as “pale with temper” when Lily, “her antagonist,” takes “a certain pleasure in prolonging her distress” (60). “Competition” puts Lily “on her mettle” (61). When Bertha speaks of Selden, who remains markedly silent in this scene, she does so with “a little air of proprietorship” (60). Lily, however, is conscious that Selden has come to Bellomont at least partly to see her: “she reflected that Selden’s coming, if it did not declare him to be still in Mrs. Dorset’s toils, showed him to be so completely free from them that he was not afraid of her proximity” (61). In a remarkable reversal of the female objectification typical of the novel, Lawrence Selden is regarded as property or goods in this scene. He has more in common with the inert book lying on his lap than he might care to admit.

Throughout chapter five, with its intriguing library scene and surprising reversal of values, Wharton emphasizes the material and the textual, the ways that reading and

writing are telling metaphors for the human psyche. We learn that Lily, like Newland Archer, is a “keen reader of her own heart” (54). Like Newland and Isabel Archer, Lily sees the world through a lens of textuality. She performs a fascinating reading or textual “classification” (55) of her acquaintances in this chapter: there is Carry Fisher, who has a “general air of embodying a ‘spicy paragraph,’” and “young [Ned] Silverton, who had meant to live on proof-reading and write an epic, and who now lived on his friends and had become critical of truffles” (55). Like a novelist, Lily is sensitive to the “picturesque” potential of other characters in the novel, even as she laments their “vacuity” and the trivial nature of their lives (55): “Under the glitter of their opportunities she saw the poverty of their achievement. It was not that she wanted them to be more disinterested; but she would have liked them to be more picturesque” (55). Lily’s critical engagement with the world around her, and her writerly insights, align her with the figure of the author. By classifying other characters in terms of text, she gives voice to Wharton’s own self-consciously bookish point of view. Writing for Wharton is a kind of “book-making,” and is thus always tied to the material, an act that bridges texts and books, paragraphs and proof-reading.

The relationship between textuality and materiality persists throughout the novel, and particularly in the intrigue surrounding an archive of love letters and its fate in the final library scene. Like James’s *The Aspern Papers*, *The House of Mirth* is concerned with the revelatory possibilities of archives. Love letters leak sentiment and betray affiliations. When Mrs. Haffen, the char-woman of the Benedick, pays a call to Lily Bart, she produces a letter torn in two, written in Bertha Dorset’s hand and addressed to Selden. The letter “told a long history” (104) of the relationship between Bertha and

Lawrence, and Lily knows that “the possessor of [George Dorset’s] wife’s letters could overthrow with a touch the whole structure of her existence” (104). This document is part of a collection of letters that Mrs. Haffen pilfered while cleaning Selden’s rooms. The survival of these letters is at odds with Selden’s painstaking discretion, his desire to preserve a kind of personal obscurity or inconspicuousness, as Mrs. Haffen herself acknowledges:

“Some of the gentlemen got the greatest sight of letters: I never saw the like of it. Their waste-paper baskets’d be fairly brimming, and papers falling over on the floor. [...] Mr. Selden, Mr. Lawrence Selden, he was always one of the carefulest: burnt his letters in winter, and tore ’em in little bits in summer. But sometimes he’d have so many he’d just bunch ’em together, the way the others did, and tear the lot through once—like this.” (103)

These loose-leaf archives testify to the abundance of illicit affairs between the bachelors of the Benedick and married women such as Bertha Dorset. The sheer excess of all that incriminating evidence, combined with the distastefully businesslike tactics of Mrs. Haffen, provokes in Lily a feeling of disgust, as if she suffered “personal contamination” (104). Though the indiscretions are not hers, she identifies with the threat of exposure, and imagines Selden’s anxiety at being found out. She knows that he “would wish the letters rescued, and that therefore she must obtain possession of them” (105). Like the negotiations of Lily and Bertha over Selden in the Bellomont library, Lily and Mrs. Haffen “duel” over a price for the letters (107): “The idea of bargaining for [them] was intolerable to [Lily], but she knew that, if she appeared to weaken Mrs. Haffen would at

once increase her original demand” (106). Having won the letters, Lily determines to destroy them to protect Selden’s reputation. She accomplishes this in the final scene between them, which takes place, appropriately, in Selden’s library. Archives thus generate and testify to romance in Wharton’s fiction. As in James, archives and libraries are dialectical sites of conservation and destruction. An archive that burns may be a mark of material forfeiture, but it is also a sign that sentiment endures.

Lily Bart’s second and final visit to Lawrence Selden’s gentleman’s library functions as a tragic bookend or sequel to the first library scene in *The House of Mirth*. Though the setting is the same, Lily has changed. Her experiences with poverty and isolation make her see Selden’s library through different eyes:

The scene was unchanged. She recognized the row of shelves from which he had taken down his *La Bruyère*, and the worn arm of the chair he had leaned against while she examined the precious volume. But then the wide September light had filled the room, making it seem a part of the outer world: now the shaded lamps and the warm hearth, detaching it from the gathering darkness of the street, gave it a sweeter touch of intimacy. (304-5)

Whereas the library once represented a sanctuary from the “outer world” and the hounding demands of conspicuousness, a place in which she and Selden had “talked jestingly of her future” (306), it now seems “detached” from that world, like Lily herself. Her impression of the library reflects her attitude or outlook; the library is a gauge by which she determines her state of mind.

When she pauses on the threshold, Lily is “assailed by a rush of memories” (304). Feeling that she no longer has a future, she perceives the library as a site of memory, a place tied to her fond memories of Selden, their conversations, and “the vision of that other afternoon when they had sat together over his tea-table” (306). Lily has kept a “vision” or picture of the library with her since first seeing it: “The library looked as she had pictured it. The green-shaded lamps made tranquil circles of light in the gathering dusk, a little fire flickered on the hearth, and Selden’s easy-chair, which stood near it, had been pushed aside when he rose to admit her” (304). Lily still sees the library as a tranquil, welcoming place, but the possibility of taking refuge in it seems even more remote than it did during that first visit. Now, it only reminds her of the injustice of her suffering and the vast distance between her and its proprietor.

Lily’s altered outlook on the library is tied to her growing sense of futility. She reads the library as a signifier of her fate, a fate to which she feels more and more consigned. The intimacy and tranquility of the library heightens her hopelessness and loneliness. She is “shut out” (307) from the private space of the library just as she is barred from greater intimacy with Selden by his maddening “constraint” (306). The library, as Selden’s double, intensifies Lily’s sense of alienation: “But the sense of loneliness returned with redoubled force as she saw herself forever shut out from Selden’s inmost self” (307). Selden’s “inmost self,” like his library, is ultimately off-limits to Lily. As a bastion of male leisure, freedom, and interiority, the library represents all that remains beyond Lily’s grasp. She feels a “death-pang” of hope (307) while in the library, a feeling that foreshadows her imminent death.

Not accidentally, Lily’s prescience, her “strange state of extra-lucidity” (306),

occurs in the library. Libraries and other book-filled or paper-strewn dens, studies, and sitting rooms are epiphanic spaces in Wharton's fiction. According to Kathy Fedorko, the library is the natural site of the "process of understanding" that characterizes Wharton's Gothic style (493): "In Wharton's Gothic, startling, disorienting, and often erotic discoveries take place in libraries, as intellectual knowledge is expanded by intuitive, uncanny awareness" (4). Like Ellen Moers, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, Fedorko tracks the "Female Gothic" tradition, and particularly the entrapment of women within domestic spaces and their subjection to patriarchal authority. These themes are central to many of Wharton's ghost stories, such as "The Eyes," "Pomegranate Seed," "Afterward," where female characters feel trapped within gentleman's libraries, or intrude on male readers in their libraries in a bid to understand them better. Similarly, in her novels, Wharton's female characters often exhibit an enhanced ability to read or intuit the subtleties of another's thought, emotion, or intention while in the library. The library setting acts as an inducement of, and an appropriate context for, understanding.

Lily Bart's "supernatural lucidity of [the] brain" (322) makes her feel an "intense longing to dispel the cloud of misunderstanding that hung between [herself and Selden]" (305) during their second encounter in his library. Lily's former desire to understand books and people is now replaced by a "passionate desire to be understood" (306). She is overcome or "mastered" by an "inner urgency" to reveal herself to Selden (307). Disclosure becomes a form of freedom, an unburdening of the self. The customary banter that they shared in earlier library scenes is supplanted by a sense of urgency and clarity, an impulse to get to the "heart of the situation" rather than "linger in the conventional outskirts of word-play and evasion" (306). For the first time, "the external aspect" of their

situation—the social world in which they are both trapped—“vanish[es]” (309) completely, if only temporarily. Like other characters who “face essential, often startling, realizations in libraries, Lily becomes lucidly aware of who she is and what she needs while in Selden’s library” (Fedorko 493).

Wharton implies that the library, conducive to seeing someone whole, is a private space designated for reflection and comprehension. The conspicuous presence of books and the heterogeneity of a book collection hold out the promise of comprehensive knowledge. In *The Reef*, Anna Leath makes the painful discovery of George Darrow’s affair with Sophy Viner in her “spacious book-lined” sitting room (150). Filled with “all the tokens of her personal tastes,” Anna’s room is a “retreat” she goes to in order to be alone (150). In the same way that Lily associates Selden’s library with him, George tells Anna that her room is “just like you—it is you” (151). Anna’s sitting room is both the locus of romantic engagement and conflict between herself, George Darrow, Sophy Viner, and Owen Leath, and a private space to which she withdraws to recover from these encounters. Like Anna, who stubbornly pursues the truth about George’s affair with Sophy, Lily insists on revealing herself to Selden in his library: “Whether he wished it or not, he must see her wholly for once before they parted” (*HM* 307). Lily’s “extra-lucidity,” in this regard, takes on an encyclopaedic quality. It transcends place and time, and has a unifying or connecting function: in the library Lily realizes that she “had saved herself whole from the seeming ruin of her life” (307).

The library is a self-contained world—a site of wholeness or totality—outside of time. Not simply a storehouse of materiality, Selden’s library is a realm of interiority, a site of “remembrance” and of shared “confidences” (*HM* 308). When she finds herself

back in the library, Lily is reminded of her former life and plans: “[S]he had been distracted by the whimsical remembrance of the confidences she had made to him, two years earlier, in that very room. Then she had been planning to marry Percy Gryce—what was it she was planning now?” (308). For Lily, Selden’s library is the natural setting for stock-taking or reflection, as well as “self-interrogation” (308). The accumulations of the library are like those of the mind or the memory. Like a disorderly library, Lily’s mind is a jumble of accumulated memories, thoughts, and feelings: “Strive as she would to put some order in her thoughts, the words would not come more clearly” (307). As Henry Bergson posits in *Matter and Memory* (1896), memory, as an accumulation of experiences, takes on a material as well as a serial quality: “Memory [...] imports the past into the present, contracts into a single intuition many moments of duration, and thus by a twofold operation compels us, de facto, to perceive matter in ourselves, whereas we, de jure, perceive matter within matter” (73). Wharton likely read Bergson and may have been influenced by his ideas on perception, memory, and materiality, and particularly by his notion of memory as a “series” (Bergson 149), as well as his sense of matter as “pictorial,” an “aggregate of ‘images’” (Bergson 10, 9). As Lily’s remembered vision of Selden’s library suggests, memory is material. Objects and interiors are internalized in the book of the brain.

Lily’s memories are associated with—and triggered by—interior spaces and objects. Her final encounter with Selden in his library seems to release the past, to import the “atmosphere of her old life” (317), and she experiences it again vividly, even bodily, as a “lingering tremor along her nerves” (317). She recalls her first visit to Selden’s library and finds herself able to “relive it in its minutest detail” (306). Later, in her room

at the boarding-house, she feels that “her whole past was reënacting itself at a hundred different points of consciousness” (322). When she examines the contents of her closet, she discovers that an “association lurked in every fold” of her dresses (317). The material presence of her clothes reminds Lily of the “scenes” in which they had been worn (317), so that “each fall of lace and gleam of embroidery was like a letter in the record of her past” (317). Echoing her allusion to book-muslin, Wharton draws out the relationship of materiality to textuality: Lily reads the artful details of her dresses as a record of her past, a way to remember or relive it. Her collection of dresses is an archive of beauty, a trace of “the life she had been made for” (*HM* 317).

As a commemorative space, the library also provides an appropriate context for thoughts of death. Selden feels “a strange sense of foreboding” (309) in this library scene. For Lily, being in Selden’s library seems to precipitate the sudden self-awareness that leads to her determination to end her life. She wonders “if her decision had really been taken when she entered the room” (309). The library threshold represents the boundary between the external world and interiority, which also marks the divisions between self and other, past and future, life and death, freedom and imprisonment. Selden’s library is paradoxically both Lily’s prison and a paradisaal space; it reminds her of the “lost possibilities” (321) of her life and yet holds out the prospect of a permanent dwelling for “the Lily Bart” she had shared only with him (309). As she explains to him, Lily wishes to leave her “old” self in Selden’s library: “There is someone I must say goodbye to. Oh, not *you*...but the Lily Bart you knew. I have kept her with me all this time, but now we are going to part, and I have brought her back to you—I am going to leave her here. When I go out presently she will not go with me. I shall like to think that she has stayed

with you—and she'll be no trouble, she'll take up no room." (309). Curiously, Lily gives herself away as a collectible in this scene, rather than being bought. Yet in contrast to the materiality of the library, Lily's private self is intangible; unlike books, it takes up no room. Ironically, Lily's downfall is a consequence of her refusal to be treated like a rare book or collectible, and yet she is ultimately denied a library of her own. Books have the right to take up room, but she does not, or not unless she is willing to live as the conspicuous Lily Bart, the one on display in the *tableaux vivants* scene. Tragically unable to consolidate her public persona with the private Lily, she chooses the library as the appropriate site for the death of her "real" self. She hopes Selden will cherish it as he does his La Bruyère.

This painful leave-taking of hope and promise, of her dream of living "whole" in the world, is performed almost ceremonially in Selden's library. The library is a memorial to all that proved impossible or unattainable between them:

She laid her other hand on his, and they looked at each other with a kind of solemnity, as though they stood in the presence of death. Something in truth lay dead between them—the love she had killed in him and could no longer call to life. But something lived between them also, and leaped up in her like an imperishable flame: it was the love his love had kindled, the passion of her soul for his. (309)

Like her passion for Selden, Lily's experience of a private self, a self at home in his "republic of the spirit" (68), was first cultivated or "kindled" in his library. She thus finds it fitting to leave that self behind in the library, where it was first discovered.

The part of herself that Lily abandons to Selden's library has something in

common with the archive of letters that she leaves behind. At the end of this final scene in the library, Lily performs the act that ennobles her. She surreptitiously burns the archive of love letters in Selden's fireplace. According to Carolyn Steedman, since the end of the nineteenth century, the archive has been used as a "metaphor or analogy" for memory (68). As this scene suggests, Wharton was attuned to the way that archives and libraries function as sites of memory, as a means to collect or recollect the past. Unable to find a place for it in the world, Lily leaves the best part of herself behind in Selden's library. Her decision to protect him by burning his letters is a final act of love. Ironically, Lily also protects Bertha and the idea—however romantic—of illicit love affairs.

The next morning, on his way to visit Lily, Selden is filled with a "youthful sense of adventure" (324). The entrance to her shabby boarding-house is a "threshold of the untried" (324), and he feels a sense of hopefulness and expectation at seeing her again. Instead, he finds Gerty Farish who leads him to the motionless figure of Lily Bart, dead from an overdose of chloral. Distraught, Selden seeks a belated understanding of Lily's life. He rifles through her personal papers and discovers the letter he wrote to her the day after her triumph at the *tableaux vivants* scene. He keeps the letter, seeing it "as something made precious by the fact that she had held it so" (*HM* 328). As in *The Aspern Papers*, archives acquire value based on how precious they were to their original owners. Selden values the note because Lily kept it. In this regard, ownership imparts meaning or significance to objects. Like the packet of letters that she burned, the preserved letter stands as a symbol of her love for him, a vestige of the "real" Lily. Determined to maintain his inconspicuousness, Selden also takes the letter back to protect himself. Nonetheless, this memento, evidence of their own archival romance, and a marker of the

decisive moment when his “cowardice” (*HM* 328) drives him from her, seems a paltry or insignificant token compared with the “moment of love” commemorated in the final library scene. In an uncanny echoing of Lily’s realization in the library that she had “saved herself whole from the seeming ruin of her life” (307), Selden ultimately perceives their library encounter as a moment that was “saved whole out of the ruin of their lives” (329). Though belated, this shared understanding was made possible by their brief, evocative reunion in the library.

Despite having access to her private papers, Selden is ultimately unable to “unravel” the whole “story” (*HM* 329) of Lily’s life and transactions. In his belated survey of her cheque-book, bills, and letters, Selden finds that it is only in “reading” their final scene together in the library that he is able to obtain some sense of resolution: “Yes, he could now read into that farewell all that his heart craved to find there; he could even draw from it courage not to accuse himself for having failed to reach the height of his opportunity” (329). This is Lily’s final gift to Selden, the living “word” (329) of forgiveness that she leaves him with. The unnamed word which “made all clear” (329) is a last private gesture that makes him see the legitimacy of this alternative, intangible archive. Their romance was not simply “on paper” but a living archive, a lived history of shared moments in libraries and other heterogeneous spaces, such as the crowded Grand Central Station. As he kneels by Lily’s body, Selden discovers that real knowledge or understanding comes not from a book collection or a packet of papers, but from the freedom they sought to cultivate.

One of the bitter ironies of *The House of Mirth* is that the Gryce Americana is lovingly maintained and preserved in a space designed specifically for it, while Lily

never realizes her dream of having a library or a private space of her own. She has no “centre” (*HM* 319), no refuge from conspicuousness or, later, from inconspicuousness. “Privacy,” according to Wharton and Codman in *The Decoration of Houses*, “is one of the first requisites of civilised life” (22). The cultivation of understanding or interiority is made possible in private, interior spaces such as libraries and sitting rooms. Domestic space is thus tied to personal freedom in *The House of Mirth*. As S. J. Kleinberg suggests, Wharton “measured success and failure through domestic space” (qtd. in Bryden 143), which applies to Lily Bart’s tragic social fall: “In *The House of Mirth* [...] Lily Bart’s social descent takes her into smaller and more degraded architectural spaces. She moves from a house on Fifth Avenue to a small private hotel, a boarding house and, in an indication of having fallen completely out of her caste, to a conversation in a kitchen with a woman of the labouring class” (qtd. in Bryden 143).

There is an unrelentingly “rootless” quality to Lily’s life (*HM* 319). She is, as Maureen Howard contends, “eminently transient, without a setting of her own” (138). Her tragedy is that she is treated like a book but is never furnished with an appropriate context, never housed in a safe place. Worse than material poverty, she finds, is the “feeling of being something rootless and ephemeral, mere spendthrift of the whirling surface of existence, without anything to which the poor little tentacles of self could cling before the awful flood submerged them” (*HM* 319). Despite her material aspirations, Lily comes to admire Nettie Struther’s poor little “shelter” (319), and the modest yet independent life of Gerty Farish. If, as the title of the novel suggests, houses are a metaphor for the self, Lily suffers from a lifelong homelessness, both literal and figurative. She is excluded from the sheltering “traditions” and domestic inheritances that

benefit others:

She herself had grown up without any one spot of earth being dearer to her than another: there was no centre of early pieties, of grave endearing traditions, to which her heart could revert and from which it could draw strength for itself and tenderness for others. In whatever form a slowly-accumulated past lives in the blood—whether in the concrete image of the old house stored with visual memories, or in the conception of the house not built with hands, but made up of inherited passions and loyalties—it has the same power of broadening and deepening the individual existence, of attaching it by mysterious links of kinship to all the mighty sum of human striving. (*HM* 319)

The sense of community and connectivity that Lily experiences at the end of the novel—in Selden’s library, in Nettie’s kitchen—is thus tied to place. Lily’s social failure is at odds with her personal success: she comes to a belated self-understanding, a “broadening and deepening” of her individual existence, in modest, borrowed spaces.

The novel leaves several questions unanswered: Was Lily’s death the result of an accidental overdose, or did she consciously make a decision to die upon entering Selden’s library for a second and final time? Could she have escaped this fate had she been given a room and books of her own and been valued for her mind, like Isabel Archer and the bookish heroines of Jane Austen and George Eliot? Finally, was it Selden’s “spiritual fastidiousness” (*HM* 329), his tendency to read Lily as critically and objectively as he would a book, that made it difficult for him “to live and love uncritically” (*HM* 329)? Can his love of books and reading be blamed for his dangerous tendency to regard Lily as

a book?

Wharton makes a convincing case in *The House of Mirth* that Lily's rare beauty is analogous to the Gryce Americana. Like rare and expensive books, women like Lily were regarded as commodities procured in the market economies of late nineteenth-century New York to enhance a man's social position. Lawrence Selden likens Lily, whose value lies in her novelty and inaccessibility, to an "investment" and her suitors to "capital" (12). Like Barton Flamel's book collection in "The Touchstone," she serves as "scenery" for men like Trenor and Rosedale (*Collected* 180). In contrast to the Gryce Americana, however, Lily is never taken off the market. Whereas the Gryce library is stored safely "in a fire-proof annex" (22), Lily remains without a home. After the death of her parents, she enters the public domain, drifting from place to place. Though the novelty and widespread appreciation of her beauty aligns her with the Gryce Americana, Lily suffers a different fate than that of confinement to the mausoleum-like space of the Gryce estate. She soon finds her campaign for a profitable marriage at odds with her desire for a free or independent existence like that of Lawrence Selden. Despite her mother's wishes, Lily is unsuited to the frivolous life of the trophy wife; she is too unpredictable, too headstrong to be shelved or kept. In the end, this conflict proves too much for her. Because of the socially compromised position in which she is placed, by men whose business advice she takes, Lily fails to achieve either aim. Her stock drops, and she is no longer considered the valuable investment or priceless commodity she once was.

Despite the "ripe tints" of her beauty (*HM* 10), Lily is no rare book. While valuable books like the Gryce Americana are preserved in *The House of Mirth*, Lily's book-like beauty does not safeguard her from her tragic end. Unlike a library, she cannot

embody what Christine Smith calls the “fundamental antithesis—beauty and necessity” that underlies all architectural design (85). Lily’s beauty is, in a sense, memorialized or preserved in *The House of Mirth*, but she herself is not. Unable to be both beautiful and necessary, she becomes the “moment’s ornament” of Wharton’s original title (Wolff, “Introduction” xi). Like a background of books, she embellishes the lives of the men she knows, just as she beautifies the rooms that she enters. But it is not her fate to be preserved like the Gryce Americana, and perhaps such a fate would have been no better.

Chapter Four

Readers, Librarians, and Intruders in Wharton's Fiction

In *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*, Kate Flint notes the “great heterogeneity” amongst nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women readers (vii). Just as women and men read differently, or “with different priorities” (vii), distinctions between women readers can be drawn along lines of taste and class. In *The Fruit of the Tree*, Justine Brent transforms the Westmore drawing-room into a library after Bessy Westmore's death: “She sat behind the tea-table in the Westmore drawing-room, now at last transformed, not into Mrs. Dressel's vision of ‘something lovely in Louis Seize,’ but into a warm yet sober setting for books, for scattered flowers, for deep chairs and shaded lamps in pleasant nearness to each other” (473). After marrying Bessy's widower, John Amherst, Justine renovates the Westmore house to reflect her own tastes and values, and to expunge Bessy's ghostly presence. Just as they occupy rooms, readers inhabit reading styles or practices, as Diana Fuss suggests: “Readers, like texts, are constructed; they inhabit reading practices rather than create them *ex nihilo*” (qtd. in Flint 326). Women readers from this period were shaped primarily by two factors: access to books and access to personal space. As Flint argues, reading is “a means of claiming personal space” (102):

To designate certain areas specifically for reading, or to prohibit or advise against the presence of books in others, can be interpreted as attempts, deliberate or otherwise, to prescribe or limit the terms in which access to personal space was granted within the physical and ideological structures of Victorian homes. The most clearly contested areas were the library—in

those houses large enough to have one—and the bedroom. (Flint 103)

The nineteenth-century gentleman, whose library contained “the largest concentration of books in a household, acted as custodian, censor, facilitator of access to the printed word” (Flint 199). Men imposed power by permitting or withholding access to the books in their libraries. Reading was “an area in which the [male reader] could reinforce his authority and influence” (Flint 199).

Marilyn R. Chandler describes this dynamic as “the politics of space” (149). Living space, she argues, is always “significant space” (157). One can read the “semiotics” of libraries and houses (Chandler 149) to understand how space constitutes identity. As Virginia Woolf contends in *A Room of One's Own*, the conditions of luxury, privacy, and space which the gentleman's library afforded, and the “urbanity,” “geniality,” and “dignity” which are the “offspring” of those conditions (23), were largely unavailable to nineteenth-century women readers. As women sought spaces in which to read, think, or be alone, as they increasingly adopted what Woolf calls the “instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition” (*ROO* 38), the nineteenth-century gentleman's library became contested terrain. While “[l]iterature is open to everybody” (*ROO* 75), this was not always true of the library.

For Edith Wharton, who had access to her father's gentleman's library, freedom came in the form of twin pursuits: reading and writing. In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton recalls how the pages of books held a particular mystery for her, even before she was able to read: “The fact that I could not read added to the completeness of the illusion, for from those mysterious blank pages I could evoke whatever my fancy chose” (35). When she did learn to read, Wharton's parents found her poring over *Fanny Lear*, a play that was

having “a *succès de scandale* in Paris owing to the fact that the heroine was what ladies of my mother’s day called ‘one of those women’” (BG 37). From an early age, Wharton considered reading an act of liberation from others, a way to assert independence.

Reading was a self-defining act: the books that one read could make a statement, or furnish clues about the reader’s personality. After her father’s death, Wharton realized that he had read Macaulay, Prescott, and Washington Irving in his later years, but not verse, despite his “rudimentary love” of it (BG 39). This observation leads her to wonder, as Charity Royall wonders about Lawyer Royall in *Summer* (1917), “what stifled cravings had once germinated in him, and what manner of man he was really meant to be” (BG 39). Like George Frederic Jones and Lawyer Royall, Newland Archer is also a “closed book,” a reader who stifles his hunger for freedom by gorging on boxes of new books from his London bookseller. As an activity that is at once revelatory and evocative yet private or mysterious, reading constitutes a form of Freudian displacement and repression in Wharton’s fiction. The reader’s intimacy with books is often a surrogate for intimacy with the self or with others.

By the same logic, the act of *not* reading is also significant, as Wharton’s portrait of Charity Royall suggests. *Summer* is a highly unusual novel for the book-loving Wharton because of its marked absence of reading. The Honorius Hatchard Memorial Library is a symbol of cultural decay. Books are useless yet charged with meaning for Charity Royall, who is, paradoxically, a librarian who does not read. Like furniture, books require a bothersome upkeep, yet they also signify everything that remains tragically out of Charity’s reach. As a young reader, Wharton saw books as “Awakeners” (BG 91), but Charity avoids this awakening. The less she knows about the outside world

the easier it will be to accept her small-town fate. Despite her own bibliophilic proclivities, Wharton seems sympathetic to Charity's wilful dislike of books. In "The Vice of Reading," an essay she wrote in 1903, Wharton defends the non-reader, suggesting that not all readers are good readers, and not everyone loves reading: "To be a poor reader may [...] be considered a misfortune; but it is certainly not a fault. Why should we all be readers? We are not all expected to be musicians; but read we must; and so those that cannot read creatively read mechanically—as though a man who had no aptitude for the violin were to regard the grinding of a barrel-organ as an equivalent accomplishment!" (Wharton, *Uncollected* 99-100). In *Summer*, Wharton explores what happens when a "poor reader" is placed in an environment that is designed for reading, and amongst characters who value books. Charity's difficulties with language preclude any profound engagement with texts, be they books, letters, or signs. Like Wharton's "mechanical reader" (*U* 101), Charity views all books "from the outside" (*U* 101), and in her mind "books never talk to each other" (*U* 102). Charity's inability to read in the conventional way, however, is replaced by her sensitive reading of the nuances of nature, architecture, and the people around her. With this alternative mode of reading she transforms the expansive, organic world of "summer" into an encyclopaedic foil for the dusty stacks of the town library.

While Charity's illiteracy increases her sense of disconnection from the male readers in *Summer*, Ellen Olenska's love of books and reading in *The Age of Innocence* draws Newland Archer to her, despite her refusal to conform to social conventions. Ellen's eccentric drawing-room library is another library innovation. Troubled by her public conspicuousness yet without a private library to which she can retreat, Ellen

fashions a space for her reading in a setting where books are considered “out of place” (AI 103). Her hybrid library (part public space, part private space) reconfigures the nineteenth-century gentleman’s library and distinguishes her from women readers in Wharton’s earlier fiction, such as Lily Bart, who lack private spaces in which to read. Another library innovator is Elinor Lorburn in *Hudson River Bracketed*. Lorburn’s “real library” (HRB 65) is modelled on the classic gentleman’s library yet is distinguished from it because it is owned by a woman. After her death, Lorburn’s library is discovered by Vance Weston, a young male novelist. Wharton inverts the typical nineteenth-century scenario in this novel: instead of a man granting library access to a woman, a woman’s library is left to a man. Library legacies are bequeathed not by men but by women in Wharton’s later fiction, as readers such as Charity Royall, Ellen Olenska, and Elinor Lorburn claim library spaces and transform them to reflect their own personalities and values.

A Reluctant Librarian: *Summer*

Edith Wharton wrote *Summer* in 1916 while on a break from her work helping World War I refugees. In February of that year Henry James died, overcome, as Wharton recalls in *A Backward Glance*, by the “endless perspective of destruction” brought on by war (367): “It was the gesture of Agamemnon, covering his face with his cloak before the unbearable” (BG 367). Already troubled by the war, Wharton felt keenly the loss of her long-time friend and “Cherest Maître” (Powers, *Letters* 327). This loss is reflected in the quiet desperation of Charity Royall, whose first words provide a fitting introduction to the novel: “How I hate everything!” (4). Charity’s opening sentiment evokes Wharton’s

own outlook at the time of James's final illness and death. In a December 1915 letter to Gaillard Lapsley, Wharton wrote: "Yes—all my 'blue distances' will be shut out forever when he goes. His friendship has been the pride & honour of my life. Plus ne m'est rien after such a gift as that—except the memory of it" (Powers 21). The sense of enclosure that Wharton describes, the feeling of being "shut out" from vast spaces or possibilities with the loss of her friend, is echoed in Charity's resentment about being confined to the dusty stacks of North Dormer's public library. Her role as town librarian constrains her. Moreover, Wharton alludes in both texts to the librarian's keen sense of totality: Charity hates "everything," and Wharton states that "More is nothing to me" [Plus ne m'est rien] after her friendship with James. This attunement to the aggregate or collective, as well as the desire for "more," lies at the heart of the bibliophile's insatiable sensibility. In this case, however, Wharton describes how the loss of her friend deadens her appetites and limits her horizons. Only in remembering him will she be able to escape the all-or-nothing ("Plus," "rien") state of being brought on by his death. *Summer* is thus coloured by Wharton's own sense of hating "everything" during this period: the war, James's death, and the dulling or dampening of her appetites. Her portrait of Charity Royall gives voice to Wharton's own experience of loss, confinement, and disillusionment.

Given the difficult circumstances of its composition, *Summer* remains distinct from Wharton's other novels, particularly in its setting and in the characterization of its unconventional protagonist. Unlike the largely metropolitan locales of *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, *Summer* takes place in small-town New England. North Dormer is a town without the imposing institutions of New York or London. In place of museums, universities, and city libraries, North Dormer has "only a church that was

opened every other Sunday if the state of the roads permitted, and a library for which no new books had been bought for twenty years, and where the old ones mouldered undisturbed on the damp shelves” (5-6). A place devoid of culture and commerce, North Dormer has “no shops, no theatres, no lectures, no ‘business block’” (5). Like the dusty books in the library, the past remains largely “undisturbed” here. The Honorius Hatchard Memorial Library preserves the history of the town and its surrounding area, yet it is a history that no one cares to remember. The unread books, in this regard, signify nothing. Without readers, the history that books house remains uncommunicated. The library in *Summer* thus embodies the parochial bounds of small-town America. With its local history and outmoded ways, it is a world slipping into ever-increasing irrelevance. Interestingly, Wharton served as an associate manager at the Lenox Library, a small public library near The Mount, during the period 1904 to 1908. From this experience perhaps she derived the idea for *Summer*. The building, erected in 1815, originally served as a courthouse, an interesting fact given the themes of law and legitimacy that run through *Summer*. Early patrons of the Lenox Library included Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Fanny Kemble, as well as wealthy summer residents such as the Vanderbilts, Sloans, Morgans, and Westinghouses.

In line with the town’s indifference to its past and to the world outside its borders, Charity Royall despises books, or at best feels ambivalent about their imposing presence around her. In this regard, she is an unusual protagonist for Wharton. Unlike Newland Archer, Ellen Olenska, Ralph Marvell, Lawrence Selden, or even Lily Bart, Charity does not love or appreciate books *as* books. She has a natural inquisitiveness or “thirst for information” (5), but no passion for the printed page, no bibliophilic reverence for the

wonders of the library. In her introduction to *Ethan Frome*, Wharton notes how she was struck by the “deep-rooted reticence and inarticulateness” of the New England people (Wharton, *Frome* 6). Charity perfectly exemplifies these qualities: she is intelligent and imaginative, yet she has difficulty comprehending the world around her. The words that others speak are frequently “unintelligible” to her (5), and their gestures disorienting and incomprehensible (191). Moreover, the physical structures surrounding and enclosing her—the gates, walls, windows, and bookshelves that pervade the text—emblemize Charity’s deeply private, uncommunicative, and reclusive nature. Though these are stereotypical traits of the taciturn librarian, Charity does not share the librarian’s characteristic devotion to books and knowledge.

Even when given the opportunity to benefit romantically from her position, to impress upon the book-loving Lucius Harney her familiarity with the books in her charge, Charity obstinately refuses to do so. In contrast to Lily Bart, whose interest in Americana is largely a means to an end (she hopes to land a rich husband), Charity refuses to cash in on what modest cultural capital she possesses. Books play such a minor role in her affections that they are not worth the trouble of dusting, let alone reading. In fact, Charity’s “resentment” (10) about being stuck in such close proximity to books, to things she cannot understand, only heightens her animosity towards them. She holds a “special grudge” (11) against one book in particular—a history of North Dormer written circa 1840 and entitled “North Dormer and the Early Townships of Eagle County” (11). Like Wharton, who was known for her exacting rule over the books on her shelves, Charity has no patience for unruly books. She characterizes this particular volume as “a limp weakly book that was always either falling off the shelf or slipping back and disappearing

if one squeezed it in between sustaining volumes" (11). She wonders "how anyone could have taken the trouble to write a book about North Dormer and its neighbours" (11). Always conscious of the structural or architectural aspects of things, Charity dislikes the book not only for its content but also for its physical weakness, which she reads as evidence of its insignificance.

Neglectful of the past, Charity is modern in the sense that she is consumed by the present. The veneration of the past is a wasted effort, and Charity "gloomily" tells Lucius Harney during his first visit to the library that "worms are getting at" the books (9). Her feelings of antipathy or "abhorrence" (29) toward the library and the history it preserves are reflected in her language. After vowing to quit her post one evening, Charity enters the library and says aloud to herself: "I'm glad I'll never have to sit in this old vault again while other folks are out in the sun" (29). Like Marinetti and the Futurists, Charity regards the library as a "mausoleum" (33) or "prison-house" (8). It keeps her inside during the long, summer days and estranges her from the landscape she loves. Her "library days" are particularly "irksome [...] after her vivid hours of liberty" (60). Like Woolf's Mary Beton in *A Room of One's Own*, Charity perceives how "unpleasant it is to be locked out" of the library, but how it is "worse perhaps to be locked in" (*ROO* 24). The library in *Summer* is thus antithetical to freedom. As Denise D. Knight suggests, the Hatchard library "underscores the stagnancy of the town and magnifies Charity's despair" (5). The library, more than any other space in the novel, embodies Charity's sense of paralysis and discontent. In it, she feels as irrelevant, as "limp" or "weakly," as the book she most begrudges.

As a reluctant librarian, Charity articulates Wharton's own reservations about the

role of public institutions in modern life. In “Self-Reconsiderations” (1938), Wharton criticizes institutions that claim to preserve and champion the past in any holistic or comprehensive way, since their institutional function is “unrelated” to lived experience or personal history: “Museums are cemeteries, as unavoidable, no doubt, as the other kind, but just as unrelated to the living beauty of what we have loved” (*Uncollected* 279). As spaces that sanitize, structure, or institutionalize the past, museums and libraries, for all their seeming heterogeneity, collect a past that is incomplete and impersonal, a past “unrelated” to feeling or individual experience. As an irrepressible naturalist and freethinker, Charity shares Wharton’s qualms about the relevance of institutions to everyday life.

The book-bound world of the library is thus juxtaposed to the natural world in *Summer*. Charity rails against what Debra Castillo calls the “vast, inhuman impersonality of the library,” something which “cannot be encompassed by any one librarian” (114). As Borges famously depicts it in “The Library of Babel,” the library is a vertiginous, labyrinthine world of books—the bibliophile’s substitute for the universe. As a non-reader, Charity sees the library as a sterile, inhospitable landscape. Her restlessness within its walls and her intolerance of its abstractions and impersonality signal a critique. What matters to her is the organic collection of feeling, of lived experience, that remains intangible and therefore uncollectable. Because the library cannot possibly contain or catalogue the encyclopaedic impressions she forms in her encounters with the natural world, it does not house what is most relevant to her. Like Lily Bart and Ellen Olenska, Charity seeks to modify her place within the interiors she inhabits. She does so by rebelling against the laws of the library, by being what Debra Castillo calls “a historian

and a librarian in reverse" (120). This figure "seeks, not the preservation of the sacred texts, but the annihilation of a fossilized literature. He seeks to free himself from the weight of history" (Castillo 120). Charity similarly wants to escape the bounds of language, the abstractions of texts, and the burdensome weight of the past. As a domain of language and knowledge, the library's laws are the laws of words or signs. Like a massive dictionary, the library corrals the past and "force[s] memory back to linguistic distinctions" (Castillo 201).

Like Newland Archer, Charity's greatest obstacle is her sense of confinement. From her viewpoint, North Dormer "is at all times an empty place" (4), a "small place" (5). She moves in and out of a series of interiors—house, library, restaurant, parsonage—at odds with the spaces she inhabits. As its name suggests, even the town of North Dormer is characterized as an interior, a place from which one looks out, as if through a window. Wharton makes this explicit at the end of the novel when she states that Charity had been stripped of her illusions and brought back to "North Dormer's point of view" (160). Just as Charity's view is limited by the scope of the small town, so too are her prospects. She is first glimpsed stepping out of an interior, the home of her adoptive guardian, Lawyer Royall: "A girl came out of lawyer Royall's house, at the end of the one street of North Dormer, and stood on the doorstep" (3). Like James, Forster, Woolf, and Joyce, Wharton is interested in thresholds—liminal spaces between private and public experience—where the library or museum meets the street. By pausing on the doorstep, Charity seems to rest on an edge or brink. Without realizing it, she prepares for a crucial period of change in her life. The doorstep or threshold, emblematic of the present, connects the past with the future. Like Joyce's depiction of Stephen Dedalus

pausing under the portico of the National Library in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, the threshold is a transitional place wherein a character reflects on his or her relation to the past and to others. Like Charity and Stephen, characters in modernist fiction often pause on thresholds before entering libraries or studies, as if to prepare for the potentially overwhelming impact of the past.

Summer is thus a study of space and its circumscription. Buildings, rooms, gates, thresholds, and windows contain and shape point of view. The most significant interior in the novella is arguably the Honorius Hatchard Memorial Library. Instead of seeing it as an encyclopaedic or infinite world, Charity regards the library as the epitome of a “small” or circumscribed space. With its dusty, worm-ridden books, it embodies her sense of being hemmed in by the past and by her own intellectual poverty. Though full of books, the library is emblematic of North Dormer’s emptiness and smallness. Rather than opening up new realms, it closes them off, keeping Charity inside when she would rather be out in the fields. On the day she meets Lucius Harney, an architect and writer from the city, Charity closes the library early and escapes to the hills surrounding North Dormer, as if hastened into action by his unexpected arrival:

A few minutes after Mr. Harney’s departure she [...] fastened the shutters, and turned the key in the door of the temple of knowledge. The street upon which she emerged was empty: and after glancing up and down it she began to walk toward her house. But instead of entering she passed on, turned into a field-path and mounted to a pasture on the hillside. She let down the bars of the gate, followed a trail along the crumbling wall of the pasture, and walked on till she reached a knoll. [...] There she lay down

on the slope, tossed off her hat and hid her face in the grass. (12-13)

The contrast between the two worlds is striking: the library is an enclosure, a limited or locked world of shutters, keys, and gates, while the natural world represents freedom and provides an utopian space in which Charity can let down her guard and be herself.

Unlike the books in the library, nature requires no elucidation or mediation in order to be enjoyed. Charity communes with it freely, and understands it without effort: “She was blind and insensible to many things, and dimly knew it: but to all that was light and air, perfume and colour, every drop of her blood responded” (13). Tongue-tied and disoriented in the library, stymied by the contents of books, Charity responds instinctively to the natural world. Her usual inarticulateness is transformed into a sense of easy confidence, expansiveness, and a sensitivity or receptiveness to nature. She perceives “[e]very leaf, and bud, and blade” (35). This organic inventory replaces the encyclopaedic breadth she overlooks in the library. In the fields Charity enters a kind of meditative or “inarticulate” state (13). Nature stimulates and enlivens her senses, while the library dulls and deadens them. Charity’s natural home or environment is the natural world she was born into on the mountain. This hillside retreat is thus an alternative home, a private space or room of her own. Indeed, by “immersing” (13) herself in its boundless landscape and vegetation, Charity discovers an alternative library to rival that of the cramped and dusty Hatchard Library. Unlike that fusty “temple of knowledge” (12), this open-air sanctuary encompasses the whole world of “summer,” a vast realm of self-discovery, romance, and possibility.

Charity’s visual sensitivity suggests that she *is* a reader, but of a different sort. Instead of books, Charity reads the natural world, the interiors and exteriors around her,

and the people with whom she interacts. When she first meets Harney, she interprets his physical features, noting how they reveal less visible qualities of mind and temper: "His hair was sunburnt-looking too, or rather the colour of bracken after frost; his eyes grey, with the appealing look of the shortsighted, his smile shy yet confident, as if he knew lots of things she had never dreamed of" (14). Charity is sensitive to facial expressions and can detect the difference between everyday and "holiday faces" (4). She reads "the signs" of Harney's feelings for her, which she finds "manifest enough" though it was "hard to guess how much they meant" (51). Charity also reads North Dormer, "pitilessly" taking its "measure" (5). In this regard, Charity's understanding of the world is gleaned not through words but through images. As Jean Frantz Blackall suggests, she develops "a pictorial vocabulary, compounded of places, people, and symbolic objects such as the kinds of hats people wear and the color of their eyes, facial expression and its aural counterpart, intonation" (278). Charity notes the library's "white wooden columns" (7) and its "freckled steel engraving" of Honorius Hatchard (7). These visual cues impart meaning in a way that texts do not. Charity's alternative mode of reading thus exemplifies an alternative approach to Wharton's fiction: books and libraries are neither the sole, nor perhaps the ideal, means of gathering knowledge of the world. There is more than one way to read and more than one way to obtain an education.

The dynamic quality of the natural world is thus antithetical to the Honorius Hatchard Memorial Library, whose name carries a connotation of the past, as well as death, stasis, and commemoration. Charity associates the Hatchard Library with duty or obligation. She holds books responsible for her unhappiness, and particularly the books that patrons ask for, albeit rarely, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Opening of a Chestnut*

Burr, or books by Longfellow (13). These “unexpected demands came so rarely that they exasperated her like an injustice” (13). Just as Lily Bart perceives her homelessness most acutely while in Lawrence Selden’s library. The old and mainly unread library books heighten Charity’s sense of futility and entrapment and underscore the commemorative function of the library. The library is a monument to the past and to Honorius Hatchard, who provides the only “link” between North Dormer and literature, despite his minor role in American literary history. In the library, Charity sits under the engraving of “the deceased author, and wonder[s] if he felt any deader in his grave than she did in his library” (7). Like Julia Hedge in *Jacob’s Room*, who sits under the names of male writers in the domed British Museum Reading Room and feels that “[d]eath and gall and bitter dust were on her pen-tip” (119), Charity resents her responsibilities to dead authors. In the same way that Julia Hedge, Mary Beton, and Orlando stir up archive trouble in Woolf’s works, Charity’s irreverent attitude towards Hatchard evokes the problematic relation of female authors to the library and, by extension, to literary history.

Wharton explores this relationship through Charity’s reluctant custodianship of the library, a role traditionally granted to men. The idea of a female librarian is itself problematic as it raises new questions about the relation of women to the patriarchal tradition of literary classics and the institutions that produce and house them: “Can a discussion of the female librarian even be undertaken, or is it a study whose organization is based on the shakiest of premises? Beyond the most banal associations, is not the grammatical construction ‘female librarian’ itself an oxymoron?” (Castillo 265). Like Woolf, who envisions the marginalized status of women authors as “empty shelves” in a library (*ROO* 52), Wharton examines the interplay of gender, identity, and freedom in

Summer, presumably to ask why, if the library has been so central to men, is it “necessarily marginal” in the lives of women, despite the “undeniable attraction” it exerts on them? (Castillo 281).

Some of these questions have been considered in critical responses to *Summer*. Cynthia Griffin Wolff reads *Summer* as a feminist *Bildungsroman*, noting that Charity is in conflict with an older generation (Killoran, *Critical* 82). Her romance with Harney is a way to rebel against her father-figure, Lawyer Royall, the epitome of lawfulness and male authority in North Dormer. Similarly, Helen Killoran suggests that Charity’s indifference to books makes her a modern heroine. Unlike her book-minded precursors, such as Jo March in *Little Women*, Rosamund in *Middlemarch*, and Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Charity does not read (Killoran, *Critical* 83). Linda Morante describes the books in the library as “symbols of a carrion of culture” and suggests that the “asphyxiating atmosphere of this ‘old vault’ or ‘mausoleum’ of a library manifests North Dormer’s stultifying atmosphere of cultural deprivation (110)” (285). Instead of the traditional view of libraries as storehouses of cultural wealth or surplus, the library in *Summer* represents a literary wasteland, an abandoned or derelict monument to a more vibrant past.

To Charity’s chagrin, the past is a kind of religion in North Dormer. Like a church or cemetery, the Hatchard library “piously” commemorates the past. Led by the nostalgically inclined Miss Hatchard, the town holds an annual celebration called “Old Home Week.” As Honorius’s descendent, Miss Hatchard is the town’s self-appointed archivist or historian. During preparations for the yearly celebration, Miss Hatchard’s “pale prim” drawing-room becomes “the centre of constant goings and comings from

Hepburn, Nettleton, Springfield and even more distant cities" (116): "'All the old names...all the old names...' Miss Hatchard would be heard, tapping across the hall on her crutches" (116). Like a librarian, Miss Hatchard takes pleasure in enumerating or cataloguing North Dormer's various genealogical, literary, and religious "Associations" with the past (117). The history of North Dormer is tied to the history of her family, so the Honorius Hatchard Memorial Library also serves a genealogical function: it is a monument to the Hatchard family lineage, which is traced in the novel through Miss Hatchard to Lucius Harney.

For all her nostalgic zeal, Miss Hatchard falls prey to the same inarticulacy as Charity in the sobering presence of the past. In her sitting-room one day, when Charity informs her that she will not be leaving her guardian, Mr. Royall, to go away to school, Miss Hatchard finds herself unable to respond: "She looked about the pale walls of her sitting-room, seeking counsel of ancient daguerreotypes and didactic samplers; but they seemed to make utterance more difficult" (17). What is unspoken in this awkward moment of silence is Miss Hatchard's concern for Charity. She perceives Mr. Royall's unnatural interest in his charge, but her old-fashioned reserve or reticence prevents her from speaking. This scene has a modernist complexion: the past, embodied in photographs, archives, and other trappings, makes new utterance difficult. In drawing-rooms, libraries, churches, and other interiors, its onerous "counsel" is ubiquitous, but it is her own counsel Miss Hatchard seeks to impart. After unsuccessfully "invoking the daguerreotypes" (17), she falls silent and then suggests that the problem is Charity's youth: "You're too young to understand—" (17). Wharton underscores the irony of this statement in a scene two days later, when Charity demands to be appointed librarian after

the sudden death—by pneumonia—of the library’s long-time custodian, Eudora Skeff. As the timing of Skeff’s death suggests, there is something uncanny about the library and Charity’s relation to it. The Hatchard Library is tied to her fate; though she is not a natural fit as a librarian, Charity seems destined to inherit the position. Feeling “incalculably old” (20), Charity finds Miss Hatchard bafflingly uncomprehending when she explains why she wants to work outside of Royall’s house: “‘She’s got to be talked to like a baby,’ she thought, with a feeling of compassion for Miss Hatchard’s long immaturity” (20). Miss Hatchard’s predilection for the past and its formality or reserve is another adversarial force Charity must battle in order to protect herself.

In his 1919 review of *Summer*, T.S. Eliot called Wharton the “satirist’s satirist” (qtd. in Killoran, *Critical* 79). Much of Wharton’s satire is directed at this old-fashioned fetishization of the “sentimental” or nostalgic (115), and particularly at the library that honours Honorius Hatchard:

Honorius Hatchard, in the early years of the nineteenth century, had enjoyed a modest celebrity. As the marble tablet in the interior of the library informed its infrequent visitors, he had possessed marked literary gifts, written a series of papers called “The Recluse of Eagle Range,” enjoyed the acquaintance of Washington Irving and Fitz-Greene Halleck, and been cut off in his flower by a fever contracted in Italy. (7)

With this comically romanticized account of North Dormer’s reclusive writer-hero, Wharton blends the fictional history of the town with historical figures such as Washington Irving and the lesser-known Fitz-Greene Halleck. History, and particularly literary history, she implies, is always partly a fabrication or trumped-up story. The

library, which houses Hatchard's fictitious writings alongside those of nineteenth-century American writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Edward Payson Roe, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (13), is home to both real and invented literary figures. Wharton clearly revels in blurring the boundaries between established American literary history, with its illustrious line-up of writers (mostly male), and a revisionist history of her own making. Just as Charity Royall alters the course of the Hatchard Library by demanding a position there, Wharton rewrites the history of American literature by introducing fictitious figures. This satirical portrait of American literary history likely grows out of Wharton's indebtedness to her precursors, whose books she first read in her father's library. As she admits in *A Backward Glance*, Wharton had her own genealogical connections to Washington Irving: "Washington Irving was an old friend of my family's, and his collected works, in comely type and handsome binding, adorned our library shelves at home" (34).

Summer's reluctant librarian is also a reluctant reader. Charity's sole attempt at reading follows her first trip outside of North Dormer, to Nettleton, during which she develops a "thirst for information that her position as custodian of the village library had previously failed to excite. For a month or two she dipped feverishly and disconnectedly into the dusty volumes of the Hatchard Memorial Library; then the impression of Nettleton began to fade, and she found it easier to take North Dormer as the norm of the universe than to go on reading" (5). Charity's vivid encounter with the city and its cultural attractions stimulates her curiosity and sets off her feverish reading binge. After the initial thrill of these experiences wears off, however, Charity is reminded once more of the provincial or outmoded nature of life in North Dormer. Overwhelmed by the

futility of her reading, which has shown her a “universe” she will likely never experience (5), Charity wilfully denies her appetite for books. Like Lily Bart’s decision to marry a rich husband, Charity’s determination not to read is a choice, but one she feels compelled to make. The library reinforces Charity’s sense of imprisonment and her dearth of choices and opportunities. By falling in love with Lucius Harney, she attempts to escape the laws of language, convention, and tradition that besiege her in the library.

Love and Law in the Library

Unlike *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, *Summer* features a male intruder in the library rather than a female one. This is an uncommon occurrence in Wharton’s fiction, where female outsiders such as Lily Bart, Ellen Olenska, and Sophy Viner force a “representative member of society, usually a male, to re-examine his world, which often results in shattering his complacency” (Wershoven 14). These intruders teach the protagonist about “alternative ways to live, exposing him to options and attitudes that may puzzle or attract him, and that he may reject because he, too, is trapped and afraid to change” (Wershoven 14). In *Summer*, Wharton inverts this paradigm by introducing city-educated Lucius Harney, an outsider to North Dormer, to the secluded village. Charity initially sees Harney as a “stranger” (5), someone who represents the larger world of Nettleton, Springfield, and beyond, and who brings with him the possibility of wider knowledge and experience. She imagines that “he knew lots of things she had never dreamed of” (14). Harney dusts off North Dormer’s dormant past and similarly enlivens its librarian. Unlike Charity, he feels at ease in the library, comfortable with books, and curious about the town’s history. As the descendent of Honorius Hatchard, Harney is

associated with the institutional history of the library. His “feeling for the past” (117) is a kind of birthright or inheritance, which makes Charity regard him with suspicion when they first meet.

Like the archive-stalking narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, Harney visits the library because he is “hunting” (11) for books on “the old houses about here” (10). His determination to uncover North Dormer’s once-vibrant past recalls James’s young scholar’s obsession with exposing the buried love affair between Juliana Bordereau and Jeffrey Aspern. Just as James’s narrator sees Juliana as the gatekeeper to Aspern’s archive, Harney hopes that Charity will direct him to textual sources that will confirm his suspicion about North Dormer’s past: “This place must have had a past—it must have been more of a place once” (11). An architect and history buff, the well-read and well-mannered Harney embodies both the specialist’s appreciation of the past and the civilizing forces of the city. He spends much of his time in North Dormer “drawing and measuring” (40) the old houses. Like the scientist-hunter in Sarah Orne Jewett’s “The White Heron,” Harney threatens to introduce these foreign modes of appraisal and appropriation to North Dormer and its sleepy library, a world Charity understands and in which she wields a certain kind of authority.

For that reason, Harney’s intrusion in the library inadvertently sets off Charity’s strongest expression of feelings about it. During a scene in which he enters the library after hours, Harney’s sudden appearance brings out Charity’s territorial instincts. He provokes her formerly dormant feelings of ownership of the library, as well as the librarian’s flair for authority:

Charity stood before him, barring his way. "You can't come in. The library ain't open to the public Wednesdays."

"I know it's not; but my cousin gave me her key."

"Miss Hatchard's got no right to give her key to other folks, any more'n I have. I'm the librarian and I know the by-laws. This is my library." (30)

Already angered by the suggestion that she has been neglecting her duties, and apprehensive about what she assumes is her imminent dismissal, Charity invokes not only her role as the library's protector, but her knowledge of its laws. Her resentment of Harney's unwelcome entrance trumps, at least momentarily, her resentment about being stuck in the library. His intrusion kindles her sense of proprietorship. For the first time, Charity identifies herself with the library and with her role as its custodian or keeper. Given her earlier umbrage towards the library, Charity's passionate identification with her prison-house suggests that she might conceal an alternative attitude towards it: as an orphan caught in a complicated position as Lawyer Royall's charge, Charity sees the library as a safe place, a provisional home. Like Lily Bart and Ellen Olenska, Charity, as an outsider, hungers for a different life, for access to experiences outside of the library or drawing-room. However, as Lucius Harney's intrusion makes clear, she too longs for the security and shelter of a private space of her own.

Charity's desire to be left alone in the library evokes Wharton's childhood memory of reading in her father's library. In *A Backward Glance* she recalls not wanting other children to "intrude on my privacy, and there was not one I would not have renounced forever rather than have my 'making up' interfered with. What I really preferred was to be alone with Washington Irving and my dream" (35). The library

furnished a space in which Wharton could read uninterrupted, in quiet intimacy with books and authors. Charity shares Wharton's dislike of library intrusions and her wish to avoid interference in the library. Like Newland Archer, she associates libraries with solitude and privacy. After Lucius Harney breaks her solitude, he instigates conflict in Charity's situation with Lawyer Royall by shaking her out of her complacency. His presence and his different perspective awaken Charity to the sense of her own entrapment. He releases her from imprisonment in the library, at least for a time, and helps her to experience life and love first-hand. Harney's arrival is thus a welcome intrusion as it provides an opportunity for change. His appearance in the library is figured as a door opening onto an alternative point of view:

Suddenly the door opened, and before she had raised her eyes she knew that the young man she had seen going in at the Hatchard gate had entered the library.

Without taking any notice of her he began to move slowly about the long vault like room, his hands behind his back, his short-sighted eyes peering up and down the rows of rusty bindings. At length he reached the desk and stood before her.

“Have you a card-catalogue?” he asked in a pleasant abrupt voice; and the oddness of the question caused her to drop her work.

“A *what?*”

“Why, you know—” He broke off, and she became conscious that he was looking at her for the first time, having apparently, on his entrance, included her in his general short-sighted survey as part of the furniture of

the library. (8)

Like any book-besotted reader in a library or bookstore, Harney's absorption in books distracts him. Wharton implies, however, that his book-blindness, his "short-sighted" survey of the library, is evidence of a general narrowness of view and a lack of foresight. Too wrapped up in his research, Harney fails to anticipate the impact his involvement with Charity will have. Indeed, at first he fails to see her at all, mistaking her for furniture. When he notices her attractiveness, however, he suddenly perceives her as something potentially more interesting than the books: "The fact that, in discovering her, he lost the thread of his remark, did not escape her attention, and she looked down and smiled. He smiled also" (9).

Like the unexpected discovery of a book he wants to read, Harney associates Charity's surprising beauty with his love of books, and with his pleasure in being in a library. Her natural beauty is offset by the background of books, just as Lily Bart's is in *The House of Mirth*. Given Harney's "feeling" for the past, Charity's role as custodian of the library is part of her appeal. Though it takes place mostly outside of the library, their archival romance is an extension of the intimacy that they first experience there. Their letters to each other document the development of their relationship and attest to the intimacy that was kindled in the library.

That intimacy, which is consummated in a small, abandoned house outside of the village, leads Charity back to the library after Harney's departure. Like May Archer in *The Age of Innocence*, who surprises Newland in his library with the news of her pregnancy, Charity first realizes that she is pregnant while working in the library:

One day as she sat alone in the library [...] the walls of books began to spin around her, and the rosewood desk to rock under her elbows. The dizziness was followed by a wave of nausea like that she had felt on the day of the exercises in the Town Hall. But the Town Hall had been crowded and stiflingly hot, and the library was empty, and so chilly that she had kept on her jacket. Five minutes before she had felt perfectly well; and now it seemed as if she were going to die. (151)

Without any assurance of a future with Harney, who is engaged to the sophisticated Annabel Balch, Charity's consciousness of her pregnancy appears as a terrifying, solitary experience in an environment that she already finds disorienting. As a repository of legitimacy, the library is an inhospitable realm for the illegitimate Charity, whose child, born out of wedlock, will also be illegitimate.

With the departure of Lucius Harney, Charity is enclosed once more within the suffocating borders of North Dormer. This return to her former life is signalled, predictably, by a library scene. Just before Charity and Mr. Royall are married, they wait in "a room full of books" at the clergyman's house (189). While Charity sits "obediently" (189), stunned into submission, Mr. Royall paces the room. The clergyman's private library recalls the Hatchard Memorial Library. Both are rooms full of books in which Charity waits, and both spaces heighten her sense of ignorance, enclosure, and stasis. Wharton frames the novel with these two libraries, suggesting that a book-filled room is a kind of inescapable prison-house for Charity, a place in which she is held against her will. Like the "long vault-like room" in the Hatchard Library, the chapel in which she and Royall are married is a "long vaulted room" (190). The minister reads from the Bible, but

Charity fails to catch most of his words. Her “dazed mind” (190) drifts instead to the scene at the mountain where she saw her mother’s dead body. Libraries in *Summer* thus lie in direct opposition to life and to the natural world. As man-made temples of knowledge, they are monuments to the accumulations of a past that remains foreign to Charity. The resentment that she feels towards the library as an institution is like her resentment of Lawyer Royall. As a representative of the law, the kind of authority Charity loathes and fears for its capacity to limit her freedom, Royall, too, is an institution against which Charity rebels.

More than a love story between Charity Royall and Lucius Harney, *Summer* traces the power struggle between Charity and her guardian, a covert battle for her independence that takes place in a series of interiors. “In spite of everything,” Wharton writes, “lawyer Royall ruled in North Dormer; and Charity ruled in lawyer Royall’s house” (14). Christine Rose observes that a “summer,” in architectural terms, is “a large horizontal supporting beam or girder, such as a lintel. Lawyer Royall is surely that sort of force in the novel” (Rose 291). Royall’s centrality to the story is upheld by Wharton’s own statement in a letter that the novel is really about Lawyer Royall: “*He’s the book*” (qtd. in Rose 291). Wharton underscores the material aspects of *Summer* by identifying Royall with “the book” (and not “the story”). The bookish Royall is the heart of the book. But what kind of a book is he? And why is he so central to the story?

Like Lucius Harney, Mr. Royall is a man accustomed to books. His address during the Old Home Week celebration testifies to his extensive reading. It is a speech composed of “fragments of sentences, sonorous quotations, allusions to illustrious men” (130). Royall also shares Harney’s feeling for the past. He prizes the old houses Harney

studies, and takes pride in North Dormer's ties to literary history. Harney's arrival in North Dormer stirs up Royall's sense of regret and failure, his awareness of missed opportunities in the remote and uncultivated world of North Dormer. Just as Harney awakens Charity to an alternative point of view, his arrival incites Royall to reconsider his past.

As Royall's name suggests, he holds a kingly or authoritarian role in the North Dormer community. This position is directly related to his education, which distinguishes him from the rest of its residents. Just before their wedding, Charity reflects on Mr. Royall's speech. She remembers how it had shown her

a glimpse of another being, a being so different from the dull-witted enemy with whom she had supposed herself to be living that even through the burning mist of her own dreams he had stood out with startling distinctness. For a moment, then, what he said—and something in his way of saying it—had made her see why he had always struck her as such a lonely man. (189)

Mr. Royall's cultivation is the source of his "distinctness" and his loneliness. Like Charity, he is caught within the borders of the small town, having left a burgeoning law practice in Nettleton as a young man. Charity perceives that "something bitter had happened to him" (18), but the circumstances of his past remain a mystery. All Royall will say on the matter is that his wife "made [him] do it" (18), and that he was "a damn fool ever to leave Nettleton" (18). One possible explanation is that the Royalls left Nettleton because Mrs. Royall became pregnant before they were married, which would help to explain Lawyer Royall's desire to marry the pregnant Charity: given his own

unhappiness, he does not want history to repeat itself. This premise is supported by the uncanny association of Royall and Lucius Harney in the text, and especially by Royall's close identification with the young city-dweller: Charity "divined that the young man symbolized all [Royall's] ruined and unforgotten past" (45).

In direct contrast to Lawyer Royall's name, Charity's name suggests a generosity and leniency in judging others. As an orphan (in modern parlance, a "charity case"), Charity has no choice about who will raise her, where she will live, or what her life (at least while under her guardian's care) will be like. She is dependent on the goodwill and judgement of others, particularly that of her adoptive father. Charity's name attests to her humble beginnings as well as her indebtedness to her guardian, a theme that permeates the novel and contributes to Charity's final sense of enclosure or entrapment. "She knew," writes Wharton, "that she had been christened Charity [...] to commemorate Mr. Royall's disinterestedness in 'bringing her down' [from the mountain], and to keep alive in her a becoming sense of her dependence" (15).

Charity feels neither affection nor gratitude for her guardian, but "she pitied him because she was conscious that he was superior to the people about him, and that she was the only being between him and solitude" (16). Royall's superiority is tied to his knowledge of books and the law. Like Peter Kien in Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*, Royall's intellectuality sets him apart and contributes to his solitude. He turns to his books as a way to assuage his sense of isolation, but this only alienates him further. Like the book-crazed Kien, Royall is perilously out of touch with those around him. Wharton has described this kind of bookish seclusion before. In "Copy" (1901), a successful middle-aged writer ("the novelist of her age") finds her literary success worrisome and isolating:

“Don’t talk to me about living in the hearts of my readers! We both know what kind of a domicile that is. Why, before long I shall become a classic! Bound in sets and kept on a top bookshelf—brr, doesn’t that sound freezing? I foresee the day when I shall be as lonely as an Etruscan museum!” (qtd. in Dwight, *Extraordinary* 66). The writer’s anxiety about becoming a classic, about being “bound” or “kept” on a shelf is like the reader’s fear of alienation in an uncultivated environment.

Sandra Gilbert calls *Summer* a novel of “renunciation and resignation” enacted in the library (qtd. in Killoran, *Critical* 83). Charity sits under the bust of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, war, medicine, commerce, and the arts. Ovid called Minerva the “goddess of a thousand works,” and the Romans believed that she was not born in the usual way but rather sprang fully armed from the brain of her father. As the daughter of Jupiter, the god of light and sky, protector of the state and its laws, Minerva was literally in the shadow of the *dies pater*, or “shining father.” The supreme god of the Roman pantheon, Jupiter was responsible for distributing laws and ordering the universe. Wharton clearly alludes to this mythological tradition in *Summer*. Lawyer Royall is a Jupiter figure to Charity’s Minerva. Known as “the biggest man in North Dormer (14), and a “magnificent monument of a man” (17) to Charity, Lawyer Royall “ruled” in the town (14).¹⁰

If Charity ultimately submits to Lawyer Royall’s law, it is, paradoxically, that same law or authority which allows her to preside over the library, traditionally a space associated with male authority. As a Minerva figure, Charity rules in Royall’s house and in the library. Charity, who “knew her power” (14), creates her own laws in the library.

¹⁰ This father-daughter pattern complicates their marriage, making it appear incestuous.

Summer thus revises Wharton's childhood perception of her father's library as a "kingdom" (BG 43) or primarily male domain. With her subversive, ambivalent authority, Charity breaks into the library and transforms it under her rule. Her incursion is analogous to Wharton's revision of American literary history: with her refreshing irreverence towards the sanctity of the library, Charity renovates the traditionally masculine site of cultural authority and legitimacy.

"A Reversal of Values": *The Age of Innocence* and *Hudson River Bracketed*

The Age of Innocence is Edith Wharton's backward glance at Old New York, a sumptuous world of leisure and luxury: dinner parties and balls, opera houses, brownstones, gentlemen's libraries, and museums. Published in 1920, the novel earned Wharton the Pulitzer Prize, and its critical and commercial success have been ascribed to the convincing portrait it presents of a colourful period in nineteenth-century American life. Like *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence* is a sweeping cultural analysis, and the authenticity of its atmosphere is the result of considerable archival research: Wharton recruited her sister-in-law Minnie Jones to "research the back files of the New York *Tribune* and in the Yale University library in order to verify certain facts about the 1870s" (Dwight 224). The age Wharton describes is that of her childhood and adolescence, much of which was spent in her father's library. The novel thus reflects both Wharton's bookish nostalgia for the traditions of a bygone era, and a determination to break out of the gentleman's library, a space that too easily encouraged complacency and hypocrisy.

Wharton's protagonist, Newland Archer, shares this dual point of view, and can

thus be considered an amalgam of Wharton and her conservative, bookish father, George Frederic Jones. Archer is a staunch “book-lover” (AI 138) who gives voice to Wharton’s frustration with the narrow intellectual scope of her Old New York set. This was a group interested in “elegant dining, fashion and money,” where “[f]ew, like George Frederic Jones, enjoyed reading literature” (Somers 64-5). Taste, like class, is a social marker in *The Age of Innocence*. Wharton makes a distinction between “fashionable” and “literary” society in New York: the Mingott-Manson tribe cares only about “eating and clothes and money” (32-3). “[I]lliterate,” Catherine Mingott had “never opened a book” (101, 102). In contrast, the Archer clan is “devoted” to “the best fiction” (33), and define themselves by their good taste in books: Newland’s mother and sister read Ouida’s novels “for the sake of the Italian atmosphere” (33), but think poorly of Dickens, who “had never drawn a gentleman” (33); Newland’s “boyhood had been saturated with Ruskin” (69), and he “had read all the latest books” (69). Like Edith Jones in her father’s library, Newland regards reading as a form of escape from the strictures of society, and particularly the suffocating obligations of family and class. He also reads to correct his taste along the moral principles laid down by Ruskin, just as his mother and sister read Dickens but not Thackeray, who is considered too fashionable (33).

A number of critics have commented on the striking materiality of the novel, noting, as Millicent Bell does, that “the décor of material existence—the interiors of houses, the minutiae of costume, the paraphernalia of work and leisure—are supremely important because they symbolize the qualities of period and class” (295). As in *The House of Mirth*, architectural interiors reveal psychological interiors in *The Age of Innocence*. A library or drawing-room exemplifies its owner’s ethos: “The idea is that

from private and even intimate spaces, we can learn about a person's ethos and philosophy of life. Perhaps we can even learn about that person's desires, hopes and fears. In short, a person's aesthetic is revealed within the rooms in which she frequently resides: her décor, furnishings and management of space can be 'read' to reveal her sense of self" (Somers 84). Wharton assigns meaning to place in the novel, and particularly to the revelatory quality of domestic interiors. In his introduction to the novel, R.W.B. Lewis writes: "The exploitation of place as a basic fictional resource was something Edith Wharton had learned from James (and admired in Proust), and in none of her novels is her mastery of this resource more striking" (Wharton, *Age* xiv). As in *The House of Mirth* and *Summer*, scenes set in libraries and drawing-rooms exemplify the principal themes of *The Age of Innocence*, and particularly the struggle between the private desires of the individual and the "collective interests" (AI 111) of the social tribe.

In many ways, *The Age of Innocence* is Wharton's response to James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. Like Isabel Archer, Newland Archer longs for an unconventional life. His name, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff observes, is a play on two Jamesian protagonists, Isabel Archer and Christopher Newman (qtd. in Dwight 223). Instead of the circumscribed fate of the lady, Wharton portrays the "melancholy fate" of the gentleman (AI 124). An alternative title for the novel might have been *The Portrait of a Gentleman*, as Wharton depicts Newland Archer framed in a series of interiors, reading or thinking. In a conversation Archer has with the writer Ned Winsett, Winsett argues that Archer is part of a dying breed of gentlemen whose values preclude the possibility of active engagement in the world: "you've got no centre, no competition, no audience. You're like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house: 'The Portrait of a Gentleman.' You'll

never amount to anything, any of you, till you roll up your sleeves and get right down into the muck. That, or emigrate” (124). Archer’s ineffectuality and sense of confinement are tied to his old-fashioned and dilettantish love of books. Like Hamlet, the gentleman reads and ruminates but does not act: “A gentleman simply stayed at home and abstained. But you couldn’t make a man like Winsett see that” (125).

The gentleman’s library is a site of intellectual pursuit, introspection, and “masculine disengagement” (Somers 82). Newland Archer retreats to his book-lined study when he wants to be alone. Like Laurence Corbett’s library in Wharton’s short story, “The Lamp of Psyche,” the gentleman’s library is a male space that projects an “aura of impenetrability” (Somers 82). Women are not forbidden to enter the library, but Newland does not welcome their presence, as his irritable reaction to his sister’s interruption of his reading of Swinburne suggests (84). “Serious reading” is an exclusively male activity pursued in the gentleman’s library (Flint 103). Moreover, men’s libraries in *The Age of Innocence* embody an older order of gentility and social custom. At the Beauforts’ annual ball, the men loiter in the library, smoking, talking, and putting on their dancing-gloves, before joining the line of guests meeting Mrs. Beaufort, who presides over the threshold of the drawing-room (21). Wharton implies that the dictates of gender reinforce the divisions of domestic space and vice versa. When Mr. Sillerton Jackson has dinner with the Archers, the women, “according to immemorial custom” (41), retire to the drawing-room to work on their embroidery. While “this rite [is] in progress” (41), the men lounge in the library. When their discussion turns to Countess Ellen Olenska, Archer surprises everyone by passionately defending her right for freedom: “Women ought to be free—as free as we are” (41). As Archer himself

acknowledges, such declarations are easy to make within the comfortable confines of the gentleman's library. It is one thing to declare women free, and quite another to help them become so. In this regard, Archer feels trapped by "the inexorable conventions that tied things together and bound people down to the old pattern" (AI 43). The library enhances chivalry and other forms of gentlemanly propriety, but outside of that space, what good do fine sentiments serve?

As in *The House of Mirth* and *Summer*, Wharton explores the question of personal freedom and the double standard that exists for men and women in *The Age of Innocence*: if experience is gained primarily from life and not from books, how is the sheltered character to learn of life firsthand without being judged immoral? Despite the privacy and introspection afforded by his gentleman's library, Newland Archer suffers the same unhappy fate as Lily Bart, Charity Royall, and Ellen Olenska: bound by the limits of conventional society, his freedom is "sacrificed" (AI 111) to the collective. Like Charity Royall, who is constrained by the borders of her small town, Archer finds New York claustrophobic, despite its vast size and heterogeneity. The city is an enclosure, a "small box" of conventions and constraints: "the New York of literary clubs and exotic restaurants, though a first shake made it seem more of a kaleidoscope, turned out, in the end, to be a smaller box, with a more monotonous pattern, than the assembled atoms of Fifth Avenue" (AI 125). Marriage, too, represents a narrowing of experience, so that what Archer feels in his library is not freedom but entrapment: "But once he was married, what would become of this narrow margin of life in which his real experiences were lived?" (126). His gentleman's library resembles a prison, not a sanctuary.

Fittingly, Archer ruminates on these questions while in his book-lined study,

where his observations take on a noticeably textual quality. He sees marriage as part of an “elaborate system of mystification” (AI 45), wherein individuals are encouraged to sacrifice private aspirations and cultivate blind allegiance to the status quo. Marriage is antithetical to freedom since it signals an end to personal autonomy. Archer, who had enjoyed a “freedom of experience” (AI 46) before his marriage, is conscious that this was not possible for his future wife. Unlike May, Newland is not “a blank page” when they marry: “He could not deplore (as Thackeray’s heroes so often exasperated him by doing) that he had not a blank page to offer his bride in exchange for the unblemished one she was to give to him” (46). Like Isabel Archer, Newland demonstrates a marked self-consciousness about his status as a fictional character while in the library. As if influenced by the material presence of books, he compares himself—favourably—to the heroes in Thackeray’s novels, whose moral dishonesty and hypocrisy he condemns. Though May and Newland’s relationship is founded on a shared reading of the classics (7), books do not demystify the puzzling dictates of society, nor unbind the oppressive bonds of marriage.

Archer’s library thus embodies his sense of personal satisfaction mixed with regret. In this room, “most of the real things of his life had happened” (344). The library sets the scene for “family confabulations” (344): his wife announces the news of her pregnancy to him there; their first son is baptized and takes his first steps in the library; Theodore Roosevelt, then the Governor of New York, pays a visit to Archer in his library, encouraging him to enter politics; and he and May discuss their children’s futures there. These experiences are all tied to the lives of others, however, and Archer feels that he had somehow missed “the flower of life” (347). As a married man, Newland Archer

has been shelved like a book. Unlike Lawrence Selden, who is free to pursue his flirtations with married women, Archer lives out his freedom through his books.

At the end of the novel, Archer sits alone in his library, looking back on his life. His library, which has been renovated or “done over” (347) by his eldest son, with “English mezzotints, Chippendale cabinets,” and electric lights (347), still houses his old Eastlake writing-table, an object “he had never been willing to banish” (347). Like his outdated writing-table, Archer is part of a former era. A product of Old New York conventionality, his life testifies to his belief that “one can’t make over society” (111). Yet neither he nor his gentleman’s library, that bastion of patriarchal authority and tradition, is immune to the renovating forces of modern life. The ringing of a telephone interrupts this final library reverie: calling from Chicago, Dallas urges his father to travel to Europe with him. Archer can no longer take refuge in his gentleman’s library. Modernity and the demands of family intrude on the book-lined space.¹¹

With her desire to elude the grip of the past and the oppressive demands of convention, Countess Ellen Olenska represents another modernizing force in the library. Her foreign tastes and her eccentric relationship to books and interior design counter Newland’s conformity and Americanness. At her home in the “Bohemian” quarter of New York (103), Ellen’s innovative drawing-room library, a place where books are usually “out of place” (103), signals her indifference to convention, her sense of displacement from Old New York society, and her wish to “reverse the values” that govern that world (103). In the frankness of her speech, the difference of her dress, and

¹¹ Wharton, like Virginia Woolf, acknowledges the inevitable (though not necessarily unwelcome) incursion of new technologies in the library. In “How It Strikes a Contemporary,” Woolf writes: “The telephone, which interrupts the most serious conversations and cuts short the most weighty observations, has a romance of its own” (298). Telephones interrupt reading, but like books they also connect readers.

the exotic design of her home, Ellen Olenska is “heedless of tradition” (104). The expression of personal taste and the willingness to do away with the past liberates her. “I want to be free,” she tells Archer. “I want to wipe out all the past” (108). Even though she does not physically intrude on Archer in his library, Olenska is a female intruder in a figurative sense. She intrudes on Archer’s thoughts while he is in his library, “dangerously” upsetting his equilibrium: “The case of the Countess Olenska had stirred up old settled convictions and set them drifting dangerously through his mind” (43).

In his library, Newland feels particularly “oppressed” (45) by the matriarchal influences that shape the system in which he, May, and Ellen are all caught. He blames the “conspiracy of mothers and aunts and grandmothers and long-dead ancestresses” (45) that preserves and transmits the archaic values of Old New York. In Ellen Olenska’s book-strewn drawing-room, however, he feels that those values are somehow “reversed”:

She herself had no fears of [literature], and the books scattered about her drawing-room (a part of the house in which books were usually supposed to be ‘out of place’) [...] had whetted Archer’s interest with such new names as those of Paul Bourget, Huysmans, and the Goncourt brothers. Ruminating on these things as he approached her door, he was once more conscious of the curious way in which she reversed his values, and of the need of thinking himself into conditions incredibly different from any that he knew if he were to be of use in her present difficulty. (103)

Wharton inverts the traditional scenario of a man guiding a woman’s reading, as Newland does with May. By introducing Newland to “new names” in literature, Ellen updates or renovates his relationship to culture. “Struck” by the exotic décor and “atmosphere” of

her library (70), Archer's customary self-consciousness "vanishe[s]" (70). With red damask on the walls overhung with pictures of "the Italian school," Ellen has transformed "Medora Manson's shabby hired house" into "something intimate, 'foreign,' subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments" (70).¹² Archer is "bewildered" by the paintings on her walls (69), and notes that only two Jacqueminot roses had been placed in a vase, despite the fact that "nobody ever bought less than a dozen" (70).

Like something out of a novel, Ellen's drawing-room library presents a puzzle or mystery, a text that Newland tries to "analyse" (70) for any "clue" (70) that would explain the source of its foreignness. Ellen's home is "intimate and sensuous, like Ellen herself" (Fedorko 93). In it, she is free to express herself and to be alone. Like Lily Bart, Ellen's public conspicuousness makes her long for private spaces: "Is there nowhere in an American house where one may be by one's self?" she asks Archer (132). Ellen's desire for privacy prompts her to conceive of her drawing-room—customarily a public space in which women take social calls—as a private library. Her books are not on display so much as they are at hand. Intimacy, not publicity, is what Ellen craves. She likes her house for "the blessedness of its being here, in my own country and my own town; and then, of being alone in it" (73). Littered with books from Wharton's own shelves, Ellen's drawing-room library represents an ideal alternative to the drawing-room or library proper. As photographs of Wharton's own houses confirm, there were books in all her drawing-rooms, "though her mother had considered them 'out of place' there" (Ramsden xxvi).

¹² Ellen's aunt, Mrs. Manson Mingott, sets a family precedent for Ellen's architectural innovations. In "flagrant violation of all the New York proprieties" (27), Mrs. Mingott receives visitors in her sitting-room (which is adjacent to her bedroom) on the main floor of the house. Moreover, she "had bodily cast out the massive furniture of her prime, and mingled with the Mingott heirlooms the frivolous upholstery of the Second Empire" (26).

Initially, Newland Archer finds fault with Ellen Olenska's idiosyncratic taste and improprieties: "He hated to think of May Welland's being exposed to the influence of a young woman so careless in the dictates of Taste" (15). Ultimately, however, Ellen presents a model of social, cultural, and architectural innovation that modifies Newland's view of himself, his social circle, and his gentleman's library. As the scattering of books in her drawing-room suggests, "Ellen doesn't split off the intellectual part of herself" from the emotional, spiritual, or physical parts (Fedorko 93). She is a serious, forward-looking reader. In this regard, Ellen embodies a freedom and unity of self that Lily Bart, Lawrence Selden, Charity Royall, and Newland Archer are unable to achieve. As Susan Goodman suggests, "If Wharton's heroes destroy themselves, like [Ralph] Marvell, or permanently retreat to their libraries, like Newland Archer, her exiled heroines have the chance of securing a space reminiscent of her own" (Goodman 106). Ellen Olenska, who personifies Wharton's "European associations and her aura of the exotic and the cultivated" (Wharton, *Age* xi), is, with the exception of Elinor Lorburn in *Hudson River Bracketed*, possibly the only Wharton character perfectly happy in her library.

Women's houses and libraries proliferate in Wharton's later fiction, and female characters such as Ellen Olenska, Halo Spear, and Elinor Lorburn transmit cultural knowledge and artifacts. At stake is not so much access to libraries and other private spaces for women, as in *The House of Mirth*, but the renovation of those spaces to reflect the different priorities of women. As Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own*, "masculine values [...] prevail" (73-4) in life as in fiction. One book is deemed important by a critic "because it deals with war," but another is considered insignificant because it describes "the feelings of women in a drawing-room" (*ROO* 74). When Newland visits Ellen at her

New York home, she asks him what he thinks of her “funny house” (72). Similarly, in Wharton’s *Hudson River Bracketed*, Halo Spear describes her cousin Elinor Lorburn’s nineteenth-century Gothic library as “a funny library” because it is “antiquated, like the house” (65). Just as Ellen “reverses” or renovates Newland’s outmoded values with her “funny” or unconventional house, Elinor Lorburn’s queer, old-fashioned library awakens the “iconoclastic” writer (3), Vance Weston, to the qualities of a “real library” (65). Wharton slyly inverts literary models and values in these novels to reclaim the library as a female space.

In *Hudson River Bracketed*, the archetypal gentleman’s library is owned by a woman and symbolically bequeathed to a man. A “real library,” Wharton implies, is oblivious to gender differences. A woman might own a real library—one founded on a “standard” (BG 52) of literary classics by Goethe, Ruskin, Swinburne, Swift, Shakespeare, Milton et al. (BG 67)—as easily as a man. Like the “background of books” (BG 52) on which Wharton founded her own literary career, the exemplary library is the writer’s working library. Such a library would house, like Lawrence Selden’s, a collection of “good” rather than “fine” editions of the essential books. Reading, not bibliolatry, is the purpose of a “real” library; transformation, rather than reverence, its objective.

At the heart of *Hudson River Bracketed* and its sequel, *The Gods Arrive*, is a nineteenth-century house called the Willows. Once the beloved, book-filled and wisteria-laden home of Elinor Lorburn, the house sits empty until Vance Weston arrives and, like Lucius Harney in *Summer*, brings Lorburn’s dormant library to life. Before Weston’s arrival, the library sat unused, its books and furniture like museum pieces. As decreed by

Lorburn's "funny will" (49), the house must be kept "just the way she left [it]" (50). Her relatives air the house and dust the knickknacks every few weeks, but no one had lived there since she died. As Vance Weston discovers, Lorburn's bibliophilic spirit uncannily haunts the library: her portrait hangs on the wall; the poem she was reading when she dies (Coleridge's "Kubla Khan") is left open where she laid it, her reading glasses resting on the page (60). When Weston picks up the book and sits down in Lorburn's armchair, he begins reading where she had left off. By continuing her interrupted reading, Weston inherits Lorburn's love of poetry and the classics, and binds himself to the past. He senses that the book was "something for *him*—something that intimately belonged to him" (61).

In Lorburn's uncanny library, Vance finds that reading joins him to a series. Like Woolf's "common reader," he feels less like an iconoclast than a collaborator. Books are shared property even while they seem to "intimately belong" to the reader. Vance's receptiveness to what he calls "the Past" (*HRB* 59) is, as Kathy Fedorko suggests, the result of his "willingness to face and assimilate [...] both his literary, intellectual heritage and his personal, primal past" (129-30). His openness is even more remarkable because his guide to that past is a woman. Vance hears Elinor's voice as a "haunting sonority," as if she is speaking to him while he reads (57). Creativity has "maternal origins" (Fedorko 141) in *Hudson River Bracketed*. A male writer inherits a female reader's love of literature. Wharton thus inverts the relationship she had to her father's library: rather than the site of the paternal, the library is the space of a maternal spirit. Vance Weston's reading pays homage not only to the past but also to the deceased reader; her books are her vestiges. Moreover, the custodian of Elinor Lorburn's library is Halo Spear. Like

Charity Royall, Halo provides Vance with access to the books and, consequently, to “self-awareness” (Fedorko 144).

Elinor Lorburn’s library legacy thus symbolizes Edith Wharton’s authorial legacy: both leave books behind. Wharton’s literary oeuvre is a vestige of the “real” Edith Wharton, just as Lily Bart leaves her “real” self behind in Lawrence Selden’s library. Wharton also left the legacy of her real library: after her death, her large and valuable library, comprising approximately four thousand books on literature, philosophy, art history, and architecture, was divided between William Tyler, the son of Elisina and Royall Tyler, and Wharton’s godson Colin Clark, the son of British art historian Sir Kenneth Clark (H. Lee 666). Like Elinor Lorburn, who leaves her beloved home to her nephew, Wharton’s library was bequeathed to men of a later generation. William Tyler inherited books on art, archaeology and history, and the literary books (as well as some books on history, philosophy, religion, science, travel, and gardening) were left to Colin Clark, who presumably would not need books on art given his father’s profession (Ramsden xv-xvi). Tragically, in November 1940, the books left to Tyler were destroyed in the Blitz (H. Lee 666). The remaining books, however, have made their way back to The Mount in Massachusetts, where they once again line the shelves of Wharton’s library.

Whether sanctuary or prison-house, the library is a haunted or spectral space in Wharton’s fiction. Libraries, like the past, are heterogeneous and alive with associations. In “Tendencies in Modern Fiction,” Wharton disparages the work of the new novelists—she mentions Woolf and Joyce—for their “rejection of the past” (*Uncollected* 170). Unlike those high modernists, she does not believe that “every new creation can issue

only from the annihilation of what preceded it" (*Uncollected* 170). While Wharton, like James, has been accused of an intractably old-fashioned outlook, her defence of the past and its centrality to literary production needs no further vindication than that furnished by her fiction. The one thing that Wharton, like James and Forster, is unable and unwilling to banish from the library is the inexorable tyranny of the past: "the accumulated leaf-mould of tradition is essential to the nurture of new growths of art, whether or not those who cultivate them are aware of it" (*Uncollected* 170).

“A Sense of Property”: Books and Furniture in the Fiction of E. M. Forster

In an essay entitled “In My Library” (1949), E. M. Forster describes the contents and arrangement of his private library at King’s College, Cambridge. At the centre of the library is a free-standing bookcase that Forster inherited from his grandfather, Reverend Charles Forster: “It has in its front a little projecting shelf supported on two turned pillars of wood, and it has a highly polished back. Some say it is a converted bedstead. It stood in a similar position in the middle of his study over a hundred years ago—he was a country clergyman. Bedstead or not, it is agreeable and original and I have tried to fill it with volumes of gravity, appropriate to its past” (*Two Cheers* 309). Among these volumes are books authored by Forster’s grandfather (“Have you read my grandfather’s works? No? Have I read them? No”), as well as works by Tacitus, Homer, Milton, and Arnold (*TC* 309). Forster also inherited books from his aunt, Laura Forster, an independent, intellectual woman who was a “great reader” and an acquaintance of Charles Darwin: “I kept what I liked best, and enough to remind me of her cultivated and attractive personality” (310). These include works of “good prose” by Trollope, Jane Austen, Charlotte Yonge, and Malory, as well as “sound biographies of sound Victorians” (310). In addition to these “ancestral influences,” Forster gives a brief catalogue of other books in his collection—works by Shakespeare, Gibbon, Jane Austen, Anatole France, Marcel Proust, and Andre Gide (310). Forster’s most prized book is not a work of fiction, however, but a French book that belonged to his grandfather:

This is a great encyclopaedia of fifty-two volumes—the *Biographie Universelle* of 1825. Each volume bears his dignified bookplate with our family arms [...]. It is in bad condition—all the backs off—but it is a useful work of reference of the leisurely type, and makes excellent reading. There is

nothing slick about it. It dates from the days before the world broke up, and it is a good thing occasionally to go back to these days. They steady us. (310)

Forster's faith in the solid and steadying influence of the past is embodied in his grandfather's well-built bookcase and its "volumes of gravity." These cherished objects, like the family bookplate, are physical cues that connect Forster to his predecessors. Their presence in his library prompts Forster, who considers himself "contemporary," to "linger" in the past and to value its material legacies (*TC* 310).

In this essay, Forster hints at a compelling relationship between books and furniture, a connection he develops to great effect in his fiction. As Nicholson Baker suggests in *The Size of Thoughts*, books "require furniture, in the form of bookshelves, but they are themselves furniture as well" (193): "books, if we are fortunate enough to own any, should be out there somewhere, visible, shelved in motley ranks or heaped on tables as nodes of compacted linearity that arrest the casual eye and suggest wealths of patriarchal, or matriarchal, learnedness" (192). As in the fiction of James and Wharton, books furnish rooms in Forster's fiction. Indeed, the provenance of that catchphrase from Anthony Powell's 1971 novel, *Books do Furnish a Room*, likely comes from Powell's reading of *Howards End*. Leonard Bast is crushed by a falling bookcase at the end of Forster's novel. Similarly, Powell's Bagshaw is nicknamed "Books-do-furnish-a-room Bagshaw" (or "Books" for short) after he drunkenly overturns a glass-fronted bookcase while trying to verify a quotation from *The Golden Treasury*. As this "massive piece of furniture," and "volume after volume," descended on him, he supposedly quipped: "Books do furnish a room" (32). Powell makes two contradictory points with this comic scene: reading books, he implies, is a dangerous and a futile endeavor; it is unwise to forget that books are furniture. But his joke is based on intertextual allusions to other books; the scene reprises the notorious, climactic scene of

Forster's *Howards End* and nods towards English literary history by referring to *The Golden Treasury*, a popular anthology of English poetry published in 1875. The more books you read, Powell suggests, the more jokes you will get. Books are thus furniture in the double sense that they are "out there," physically taking up space in bookcases and libraries, and visibly testifying to what Pierre Bourdieu terms "cultural inheritance" (*Distinction* 76).

Forster demonstrates a striking attentiveness to books, libraries, and reading in his fiction. In *Howards End*, *The Longest Journey*, *Maurice*, and *A Room with a View*, books help Forster to articulate his contemporary ambivalence to culture and to explore the implications of cultural inheritance. Characters are frequently identified by their different relations to books, and these relations signify the characters' attitudes toward culture: as readers, Leonard Bast and the Schlegels value books in *Howards End*, whereas non-readers such as Henry and Charles Wilcox make no distinction between books and other home furnishings. Business, not books, matters in their world. As ubiquitous markers of culture and cultural knowledge, as well as objects that take up space, books thus distinguish characters, classes, and value systems in Forster's fiction.

Readers are at risk of being flattened by the potentially crushing weight of books, especially the awe-inspiring and angst-inducing deluge of books waiting to be read. This ambivalent relationship to books and book culture lies at the heart of Forster's fiction. He anticipates the problematic divide between culture as a use value and culture for its own sake that Bourdieu maps out in *Distinction*. Books are "useful works of reference," but they also "steady us" by evoking the past. Even if we do not read them, we must keep them as material reminders of our connections to the past. The books and furniture in Forster's library, his "ancestral influences," signify his cultural inheritance:

Every material inheritance is, strictly speaking, also a cultural inheritance.

Family heirlooms not only bear material witness to the age and continuity of the lineage and so consecrate its social identity, which is inseparable from permanence over time; they also contribute in a practical way to its spiritual reproduction, that is, to transmitting the values, virtues and competences which are the basis of legitimate membership in bourgeois dynasties. What is acquired in daily contact with ancient objects, by regular visits to antique-dealers and galleries, or, more simply, by moving in a universe of familiar, intimate objects [...] is of course a certain 'taste,' which is nothing other than a relation of immediate familiarity with the things of taste. (Bourdieu 76-7)

Bourdieu's ideas on cultural "continuity" or inheritance and his sense of the intimate relation between owners and their objects are exemplified in Forster's fiction, particularly in *Howards End*. The inheritance of family heirlooms—books, furniture, houses—fosters connections among family members. Culture and family feeling entwine in *Howards End*. Books are bound to interiors, to bookcases, rooms, and houses; likewise, families are bound to each other through books, furniture, and houses. Cultural taste has a material quality to it, as well as genealogical affiliations. "Familiarity" with objects suggests not only the inheritance of taste but also an "immediate" familiarity or intimacy with one's ancestors. Books are put on display to suggest learnedness but also to advertise family ties. His grandfather's bookcase stands at the centre of Forster's library; it matters little if he reads the books it houses. Bourdieu's conflation of taste with familiarity implies that we like what we know best. In this regard, cultural connoisseurship is never impervious to the spectre of inheritance.

Forster's sense of books and furniture as vital transmitters of cultural values is thus held in tension with his view of books *as* furniture, as bourgeois indices of taste and lineage.

As Bourdieu suggests, “daily contact with ancient objects” ensures the perpetuation of cultural tastes or values. Books, therefore, have “snob value” (Baker 159). Readers in Forster’s novels are nearly all middle class; the book is thus a “middle-class totem” (Baker 198). In an essay entitled “Middle-Class,” first published in *New Age* in 1909, Arnold Bennett outlines his rationale for disliking the middle class, including its “sincere religious worship of money and financial success,” its “intense self-consciousness” as a class, and its “grim passion for the *status quo*” (91, 92). Forster likely read Bennett’s essay and shared many of his views, especially his distaste for middle-class snobbery or cultural superiority. Bennett writes: “It is called the middle-class, but it ought to be called the upper-class, for nearly everything is below it” (Bennett 89). Bennett, who was born “slightly beneath” the middle class, maintains that one may gain entrance into it “with certain modifications” of one’s deportment (90): “I think its deportment is in many respects worthy of imitation. [...] But the philosopher in me cannot, though he has tried, melt away my profound and instinctive hostility to this class” (91).

Like Bennett, Forster disapproves of the tendency to treat books and other cultural artifacts as props or markers of correct bourgeois “deportment” and pedigree. In *A Room with a View*, Cecil Vyse slams Sir Harry Otway for his “gentility” and his “sham aesthetics” (98). Conversely, Forster implies that artifacts saved from the past legitimate class status and cultural snobbery: Forster’s own gentility and cultural pedigree are assured because he preserves his grandfather’s books and furniture. Similarly, in *Howards End*, Leonard Bast, a lower-class social climber, self-consciously uses books to gain entry into the middle class. His genuine love of reading, however, belies his attempts to treat culture exploitatively and bonds him with the sensitive, well-read, middle-class Schlegels. Caught between his impulse to regard books as bourgeois cultural capital—to raise himself by reading Ruskin—and his

private sense of books as quixotic conduits to “the unknown” (*HE* 99), Bast perfectly embodies Forster’s conflictual relationship to culture.

In *Worlding Forster*, Stuart Christie suggests that Forster explores the “textualization of everyday experience” in his work (74). Indeed, his *Commonplace Book*, a miscellaneous collection of literary quotations, observations, and notes published after Forster’s death, reveals not only a “preponderance [...] of entries relating to books” (*Commonplace* xv), but a mind fascinated with a vast range of subjects: religious fantasies, dreams, Mahler, the weather, moods, boredom, animals, astronomy, death, women, homosexuality, and old age. At the end of an entry on reading *Anna Karenina* for a second time, Forster notes, disjointedly, “My gouts [sic] better” (253). According to Christie, Forster’s *Commonplace Book*, a “seemingly haphazard catalog of his sights and impressions across forty-three years, stands as a type of antinovel in its own right, an unorganized *Ulysses* that shares the latter’s obsession with intertextuality, sense response, and dreams in an unruly encyclopaedic form” (Christie 70). Like Joyce, Forster is preoccupied with the universal or encyclopaedic. Books house or accommodate the encyclopaedic in Forster’s fiction. They connect interiors with exteriors, minds with bodies. Books bridge classes and families, as well as the past and the present.

As purveyors of the encyclopaedic, ordinary or everyday objects are tied to the extraordinary in Forster’s fiction. In *Howards End*, Leonard Bast’s umbrella is a mark of his bourgeois aspirations. When Helen Schlegel mistakes it for hers and leaves the concert with it, the umbrella connects them, despite their different classes. In the same way, books are often involved in coincidences and other accidental encounters in Forster’s texts. In *A Room with a View*, a novel written by Miss Lavish “work[s] mischief” by chronicling the details of a private love scene between Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson (187). More mischief

is caused when Cecil Vyse, Lucy's fiancé, unwittingly reads the scene aloud to Lucy and George to demonstrate that the novel, like "all modern books," is badly written (183). When they go in for tea, the book is accidentally left behind. When Cecil returns to retrieve it, this gives George another opportunity to kiss Cecil's betrothed, Lucy. The chapter, entitled "The Disaster Within," begins and ends with reference to this seemingly harmless "red book," a novel within the novel whose content uncannily mirrors the secret truth of Forster's narrative (172). Indeed, the book, despite its passive, "motionless" appearance in the garden, where it "lay sunning itself upon the gravel path," serves as an active agent that helps to bring about the eventual union of Lucy and George (173, 172).

Just as books connect people, books also connect books through intertextual allusions. Culture is thus a serial or nodal phenomenon. As Leah Price and Seth Lerer attest, discussions of intertextuality often ignore the material aspects of books, the sense that literary works are bound to the physical objects that house them. We are, Forster suggests, inescapably connected to the past and to each other, and culture reminds us of these allegiances. In "Does Culture Matter?" (1940), Forster defines culture as the "little knowledge about books, pictures, tunes, [and] runes" that we have inherited from our ancestors (*TC* 113). This "old stuff" is not "merely books, pictures and music, but the power to enjoy and understand them. If the power is lost the books, etc., will sink down into museums and die" (112). Culture, for Forster, is both the artifact and the knowledge it conveys. Like Margaret and Helen Schlegel in *Howards End*, Forster sees the value in preserving cultural artifacts, with the proviso that they be preserved in living contexts, not museums, like Wharton's "living library." He keeps his grandfather's books but does not read them, just as the Schlegels store their father's books like unused furniture: "But there were all their father's books—they never read them, but they were their father's, and must be

kept" (*HE* 118). Like Margaret Schlegel, Forster wants to preserve the past and all its trappings, and yet feels an urge to do away with them altogether. The trouble with culture, he suggests, is that it forces us to question what to keep and why: "Our problem, as I see it, is this: is what we have got worth passing on?" (*TC* 112).

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Forster did not believe that culture should be discarded simply because it is old or out-dated. As he writes in "In My Library," he considered his own private library a "successor" to the long, illustrious tradition of libraries:

Only at night, when the curtains are drawn and the fire flickers, and the lights are turned off, do [my books] come into their own, and attain a collective dignity. It is very pleasant to sit with them in the firelight for a couple of minutes, not reading, not even thinking, but aware that they, with their accumulated wisdom and charm, are waiting to be used, and that my library, in its tiny imperfect way, is a successor to the great private libraries of the past. (*TC* 311)

Forster explicitly links the trope of legacy to the trope of the library, and suggests that both conjure up questions of value and responsibility. The library is a dwelling-place of the past, and thus an appropriate target for critique. Despite his courteous acknowledgement of the past and its "accumulated wisdom," Forster felt a typically modernist frustration with the staleness of its conventions. In an entry in his *Commonplace Book*, he likens the past to a stuffy room full of writers who smell: "Immediate Past is like a stuffy room, and the succeeding generation waste their time in trying to tolerate it. All they can do is to go out leaving the door open behind them. The room may be spacious, witty, harmonious, friendly, but it smells, and there is no getting round this. [...] (Writers whom I find smell: H. James, Meredith, Stevenson . . .)" (qtd. in

Aspects 161). Similarly, in *The Longest Journey*, Mrs. Failing finds her nephew, a bookish undergraduate student named Rickie Elliot, “intolerable” and “pedantic”: “He smells of a University library. If he was stupid in the right way he would be a don” (143). Like old books or stuffy libraries, the past needs to be aired out. When Margaret Schlegel wonders what prompted Miss Avery’s unsolicited decision to unpack the Schlegels’ library at Howards End, she reasons, “Perhaps she was airing the things” (209). Rather than trying to “tolerate” or reproduce the work of literary predecessors, the modern novelist must open the door and air out or freshen the past.

Forster thus makes a case in his fiction for the value of shedding conventions along with artifacts. In *The Longest Journey*, too much time in the company of old books makes Rickie Elliot smell like an old book. He reads Shelley and writes fiction: “I’ve got quite a pile of little stories, all harping on this ridiculous idea of getting into touch with Nature” (87). When he meets his half-brother, Stephen Wonham, who is barely literate and reads cheap, “cosmic edition[s]” of biblical stories, Rickie finally gets in touch with his own nature (105). Like Mrs. Wilcox in *Howards End*, Stephen seems strangely omniscient. Despite his unfamiliarity with books and libraries, Stephen, as Rickie’s friend Stewart Ansell observes, “knows more than we do. He knows everything” (297). Though poor and uneducated, Stephen’s innate and unconventional knowledge is starkly contrasted with the intellectual capital coveted by Rickie and Stewart. Stephen reads books for pleasure, not for self-improvement. Likewise, in *Howards End*, Miss Avery’s rebellious act creates a new library at Howards End—a space that makes possible an alternative future for Helen and Margaret after Leonard Bast is crushed by the Schlegels’ relocated books. By defying conventional propriety, Miss Avery opens the door to a promising new era at Howards End. She does, in fact, air things out.

Despite their bourgeois upbringing, the Schlegels recognize the dangers of an all-consuming and antiquated materialism. Unlike Leonard Bast, who worships books unreservedly, Margaret and Helen aspire to separate cultural knowledge and values from the artifacts themselves. Like Forster, they want to forge the right kind of relationship to culture and property. In *Howards End* Forster frames this problem in terms of the antithetical relationship between readers and collectors. Collectors are the sort who take “culture for an end” (203). According to Helen, there are two kinds of people—“supermen” and “the sort that say ‘I’” (185). In a discussion with Leonard about culture, she aligns the former group with collectors such as Pierpont Morgan:

“Pierpont Morgan has never said ‘I’ in his life. [...] No superman ever said ‘I want,’ because ‘I want’ must lead to the question ‘Who am I?’ and so to Pity and to Justice. He only says ‘want.’ ‘Want Europe,’ if he’s Napoleon; ‘want wives,’ if he’s Bluebeard; ‘want Botticelli,’ if he’s Pierpont Morgan. Never the ‘I’; and if you could pierce through him, you’d find panic and emptiness in the middle.” (185)

The collector’s impulse to acquire possessions is incompatible with self-knowledge or self-possession. Blindly or compulsively wanting things is antithetical to knowing oneself. Collecting thus entails a kind of transference: rather than wanting to know the self (or others, for that matter), the collector wants to know things. The collector’s relation to the artifact substitutes for his inability to relate to others or to know himself. For the collector, culture is always an end not a means.

Like many of his fictional characters, Forster was not a book collector. As he admits in “In My Library,” he lacks “the collector’s instinct” (311). He does not have a bookplate, his collection is “unregimented” (311), and most of his books fit in a single room:

What did I bring to my library? Not much deliberately. I have never been a collector, and as for the first edition craze, I place it next door to stamp-collecting—I can say no less. It is non-adult and exposes the book-lover to all sorts of nonsense at the hands of the book-dealer. [...] I am myself a lover of the interiors of books, of the words in them...and much as I enjoy good print and good binding and old volumes they remain subsidiary to the words: words, the wine of life. (310-11)

As a “lover” of the “interiors” rather than the exteriors of books, Forster identifies his particular breed of bibliophilia: he is a reader, not a collector. According to his biographer, even as a young boy Forster was an insatiable reader. Later, at Cambridge, he “was reading in a multifarious way” (Furbank 1:70). As his vast reading list for 1899 suggests, Forster was studying the English novelists “systematically” in preparation for his entry in the College essay contest, which he won (Furbank 1:70). Readers, those who are familiar with the “interiors” of books, are likewise concerned with what Forster calls “the inner life” (*HE* 154). They are the “sort that say ‘I.’” Rather than desiring the kind of self-forgetting that comes from the compulsive acquisition of objects, readers welcome the questions that reading raises. They prize culture as a means to self-knowledge. Culture permits the question “who am I?” Margaret and Helen Schlegel and Leonard Bast in *Howards End*, and Stephen Wonham and Stewart Ansell in *The Longest Journey* exemplify this relationship to culture in Forster’s fiction. They inhabit worlds that are richly “textualized,” and see themselves and others as texts that require decipherment.

Libraries in Forster’s fiction are often the embodiment of the reader’s rich inner life. Like Virginia Woolf, Forster sets scenes in both private and institutional libraries. In “The London Library” (1941), an essay composed during the Blitzkrieg, Forster characterizes the

library as the perfect emblem of civilization or culture. It “recalls us to the importance of seriousness, and to the preciousness and the destructibility of knowledge” (*TC* 315). The library, besieged by falling bombs and the general devaluation of cultural knowledge, must be protected. Forster describes how the London Library, founded in 1841, “celebrates its centenary among the rocks”:

It is unharmed at the moment of writing—not a volume out of action—but the area in which it stands is cloven by the impacts of the imbecile storm. All around it are the signs of the progress of science and the retrogression of men. Buildings are in heaps, the earth is in holes. Safe still among the reefs of rubbish, it seems to be something more than a collection of books. It is a symbol of civilisation. (312)

As a vast storehouse of knowledge, the London Library marks a place of progression rather than “retrogression”: “The desire to know more, the desire to feel more, and, accompanying these but not strangling them, the desire to help others: here, briefly, is the human aim, and the Library exists to further it” (314). These “human aims” are furthered by all libraries, Forster suggests, and are synonymous with the reader’s desire to cultivate an inner life, to secure a space where knowledge can be safeguarded. In *Howards End*, the inner life of words and ideas, of books and music, is valued above the outer life of “telegrams and anger” (261). At the end of the novel, surrounded by their own books and furniture at Howards End, Margaret and Helen find that “[t]he inner life had paid” (236). Similarly, in a scene set in the British Museum Reading Room in *The Longest Journey*, Stewart Ansell tells his friend Widdrington that the “Spirit of Life” is found in books: “If you ask me what the Spirit of Life is, or to what it is attached, I can’t tell you. I only tell you, watch for it. Myself I’ve found it in books. Some people find it out of doors or in each other. Never mind. It’s the same spirit,

and I trust myself to know it anywhere, and to use it rightly" (209).

In contrast to the reader, the book collector is more interested in the exteriors than the interiors of books, and is thus more likely to regard culture as property or acquisition. As Walter Benjamin observes in "Unpacking My Library," "Property and possession belong to the tactical sphere. Collectors are people with a tactical instinct" (63). Cultural acquisition is a form of business to the collector, a way to advertise one's cultural capital. In *The Longest Journey*, Forster describes Rickie's father, Mr. Elliot, as having "not one scrap of genius. He gathered the pictures and the books and the flower-supports mechanically, not in any impulse of love. He passed for a cultured man because he knew how to select, and he passed for an unconventional man because he did not select quite like other people (34). Mr. Elliot, a barrister, acquires culture in order to "pass" as cultured, in order to convey his knack, his "genius," for cultural discrimination or "selection." He regards culture as a means for self-advancement, not as something valuable in itself. Cecil Vyse in *A Room with a View* shares Mr. Elliot's gift for discernment, but he too comes off as a cultural pretender, particularly when compared to his foil, the spirited, free-speaking George Emerson. During a scene in which he announces his love for Vyse's fiancée, Lucy Honeychurch, Emerson recalls first meeting Vyse in the National Gallery, where Vyse "winced" because Emerson's father "mispronounced the names of great painters" (177). According to George Emerson, Vyse is unsuitable as Lucy's husband because he is more interested in cultural refinement, in acquiring and transmitting cultural knowledge, than in real feeling or intimacy:

'You cannot live with Vyse. He's only for an acquaintance. He is for society and cultivated talk. He should know no one intimately, least of all a woman.'

It was new light on Cecil's character.

'Have you ever talked to Vyse without feeling tired?'

‘I can scarcely discuss—’

‘No, but have you ever? He is the sort who are all right so long as they keep to things – books, pictures – but kill when they come to people. [...] Every moment of his life he’s forming you, telling you what’s charming or amusing or ladylike.’ (*Room* 177)

Cecil wants to perfect Lucy so he can love her not as a woman but as an aesthetic object, a collectible. Forster makes this explicit by titling Chapter Nine, “Lucy as a Work of Art.” In this chapter Lucy admits to thinking of Cecil “always as in a room,” an interior space such as a drawing-room, a room “with no view” (122). Cecil may be a cultural authority, a faultless connoisseur, but he is troublingly cloistered and blinded by his devotion to culture. Like a tastefully decorated room used only for formal company, Vyse has no depth or scope, nothing to recommend him beyond his flawless aesthetic judgements.

In *Maurice*, the character Risley also “keeps to things.” Modeled on Bloomsbury writer and personality, Lytton Strachey, whom Forster knew at Cambridge during his student days there, the effeminate Risley is a charismatic “queer fish” (36) who “adore[s] music” (32) and loves to talk: “Risley was dark, tall and affected. He made an exaggerated gesture when introduced, and when he spoke, which was continually, he used strong yet unmanly superlatives” (32). Talk is Risley’s “forte” (33): “It’s the only thing I care about, conversation” (33). Like Cecil Vyse, Risley lives for society and cultivated talk. “Words *are* deeds,” he tells Maurice (33). Exasperated by Risley’s verbal “[g]ambolling” and superior airs, Maurice’s friend Chapman likens him to a character in a novel: “This is just like a book” (34).

Mr. Elliot’s businesslike approach to culture, Cecil Vyse’s preoccupation with “things,” and Risley’s affected aestheticism herald Forster’s more extensive—and more

damning—criticism of the bourgeois middle class in *Howards End*. Forster's main target is the Wilcox family, and particularly its patriarch, Henry Wilcox, the coolly efficient "modern capitalist" (129). The Wilcox tendency to view culture as property or "loot" is stated explicitly in the scene where Margaret Schlegel visits Henry's house on Ducie Street. A great lover of houses, Margaret wants to determine if it is a suitable house to rent. Once inside, she finds the dining-room large but "over-furnished," a space full of "self-colour and "self-denial": "Such a room admitted loot," she thinks (129). The room "suggested men, and Margaret, keen to derive the modern capitalist from the warriors and hungers of the past, saw it as an ancient guest-hall, where the lord sat at meat among his thanes" (129). A keen reader of rooms, Margaret finds that Henry's house "admits" and "suggests" things about him, and about masculinity more generally. In this case, a surfeit of furniture masks a dearth of self-knowledge. Henry Wilcox's houseful of loot belies his spiritual poverty or "self-denial."

Unlike Margaret and Mrs. Wilcox, the male Wilcoxes regard houses as "furniture warehouse[s]" (217). Houses do not help them connect. This different view of property may have something to do with the male-female distinctions Forster traces through the novel. For the pragmatic Henry Wilcox, houses provide shelter and store furniture. For Margaret, Helen, and Mrs. Wilcox, houses store heritage and provide a spiritual accommodation, a source or site of connections. If Ducie Street "suggests men," Wickham Place is "irrevocably feminine" (35): "I suppose that ours is a female house," muses Margaret. "I mean that it is irrevocably feminine, even in father's time" (35).

According to Forster, men, more than women, are guilty of a possessive relationship to culture. Ownership and inheritance were traditionally male domains, as property was passed from the father to the first-born son. As Benjamin suggests, "a collector's attitude toward his possessions stems from an owner's feeling of responsibility toward his property.

Thus it is, in the highest sense, the attitude of an heir" (66). Forster likens his own weakness for books to the desire to own property:

But the ownership of the things does give me peculiar pleasure, which increases as I get older. It is of the same kind, though not so strong, as the desire to possess land. And, like all possessiveness, it does not go down to the roots of our humanity. Those roots are spiritual. The deepest desire in us is the desire to understand, and that is what I meant just now when I said that the really important thing in books is the words in them...not their binding or their print, not their edition value or their bibliomaniac value, or their uncuttability. (TC 311-12)

Ownership does not secure—and often thwarts—the “desire to understand.” As Forster demonstrates in the scene at Ducie Street, a preoccupation with “externals” (HE 154), with furniture, houses, and the exteriors of books, distracts from the enriching possibilities of culture.

Culture in Forster’s fiction is thus an interior phenomenon. And yet, as Christie rightly suggests, it is “an atemporal infinite space” (80). Forster gets around this apparent paradox by textualizing culture, by characterizing it as the space of books and libraries, of rooms and houses. Books open onto the infinite, libraries forecast the future, rooms have views. Reading, not collecting, is synonymous with the “desire to understand.” Just as the “inner life” holds more value than the “outer life” in *Howards End*, cultural knowledge is acquired through reading, not by studying fine bindings. As Forster wryly observes in *Aspects of the Novel*, “Books have to be read (worse luck, for it takes a long time); it is the only way of discovering what they contain” (30-31).

A host of characters in Forster's fiction exhibit a love of books and reading. Many of these are bookish undergraduates like Forster himself during his Cambridge days: Tibby Schlegel in *Howards End*, Maurice Hall and Clive Durham in *Maurice*, Stewart Ansell and Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*, and Cecil Vyse in *A Room with a View*. When Tibby Schlegel is sick with hay fever, books comfort him: "The only thing that made life worth living was the thought of Walter Savage Landor, from whose *Imaginary Conversations* [Margaret] had promised to read at frequent intervals during the day" (9). In *Maurice*, Clive Durham is "not only clever, but had a tranquil and orderly brain. He knew what he wanted to read, where he was weak and how far the officials could help him. He had neither the blind faith in tutors and lectures that was held by Maurice and his set nor the contempt professed by Fetherstonhaugh" (39). Clive's balanced relationship to culture is forfeited, however, when he falls in love with Maurice. During their first encounter in Risley's rooms at Trinity College, Maurice finds Clive kneeling over a "castle of pianola records on the floor" (37). He is searching for Tchaikovsky's "Pathetic Symphony," but he abruptly stops and runs after Maurice. His love of culture is interrupted by his growing interest in Maurice. Later, when Clive apologizes to Maurice for his romantic advances, assuming his feelings are not shared, he alludes to his former relationship to culture: "I had no right to move out of my books and music, which was what I did when I met you" (62). In *Maurice*, as in *The Longest Journey*, homoerotic love or connection is a desirable surrogate for complacent or misdirected aestheticism. When he falls in love with Maurice, Clive lives out what he had formerly only studied in books and music. Culture, Forster implies, may provide a safe place, a "tranquil and orderly" realm apart from the mayhem of sentimental attachment, but it should not be mistaken (or substituted) for firsthand experience.

A belated reader, Maurice's grandfather moves in the opposite direction upon

retirement. Like Henry Wilcox in *Howards End*, Mr. Hall was formerly an “ordinary business man – hard and touchy,” but he “took to ‘reading’” with “surprising results” (*M* 122). Reading generates a “softness” that “transformed his character”: “The opinions of others – once to be contradicted or ignored – appeared worthy of note, and their desires worth humouring” (122). Books soften and broaden his views; they make him open to opinion and feeling—to connections—after a life spent accumulating “hard facts” (*HE* 141) and making transactions. In this case, books expand and enrich (rather than delimit) a character’s moral growth. Mr. Hall comes to culture for the right reasons and at the right time.

Maurice’s grandfather is notable for another reason: he has an “unexpurgated” private library in which Maurice trawls for “smut” (27). Maurice, who as an adolescent is obsessed with “obscenity” (27), is struck by the great contrast between his grandfather’s private library and the “immaculate” collection of books at his school library: “He longed for smut, but heard little and contributed less, and his chief indecencies were solitary. Books: the school library was immaculate, but while at his grandfather’s he came across an unexpurgated Martial, and stumbled about in it with burning ears. Thoughts: he had a dirty little collection. Acts: he desisted from these after the novelty was over, finding that they brought him more fatigue than pleasure” (27). His grandfather’s collection of uncensored books is reassuringly like Maurice’s “dirty” collection of thoughts. It is less decent but more authentic than the school library. Forster implies that private books, like thoughts, are unexpurgated, while books held in public or institutional libraries have been censored or cleaned up, and are thus somehow untrustworthy. As with *Howards End*, Forster privileges the private in *Maurice*; he aligns the private space of the library with the private or unexpurgated space of the mind. Maurice’s reading of “smut,” like his collection of dirty thoughts, is a form of transgression, a way to counter censorship. As Kate Flint suggests,

reading can be a “symbolic action against family or dominant social beliefs” (209). One reads to explore—as well as to stake—moral territory. This passage is also fascinating for its stylistic innovation: Forster’s use of the words “books,” “thoughts,” and “acts” suggests that the words themselves are collections. Like a book or a library, he implies, a word collects or accumulates meaning; it can suggest or evoke more than it appears to. This approach informs Forster’s fiction: the macrocosmic is contained in the microcosmic. Words, like books, contain multitudes.

Forster is not a book collector, then, but a “word collector” (Christie 78). Like Henry James’s “house of fiction,” Forster’s notion of a “house of words” (*TC* 90) is not only a telling metaphor for language and culture, but a trope that brings together two central themes in his fiction: the textual and the architectural. In *Howards End*, language is tied up with the textual—with books and libraries—and with the architectural—with rooms and houses. A library is a cultural sanctuary, a metaphorical “house” of words. A novel, too, is a house of words, and Forster makes this explicit in *Howards End*, a novel about houses and rooms, books and words. According to Christie, Forster privileges the interiors of books because they are “word worlds” that “construct personable lineages of memory and association” (79). In this chapter I suggest that Forster aligns cultural interiors—the insides of books and libraries and houses—with the interiority of selves in *Howards End*. I read the house, and within it, the library, as the embodiment of culture. As Gaston Bachelard claims in *The Poetics of Space*, the house is a universe, a place where everything happens: birth, death, love, reading, talking. Domestic space is private space, but Forster explodes the conventional boundaries of the domestic and the private by linking them (and not public space) to the universal: “It is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity” (*HE* 65). Infinity is “a comprehensive term” (Agheana 187); it encompasses time and space. Houses and libraries in

Howards End are similarly comprehensive. A world of words, the library is a place where things happen in *Howards End*. As an architectural and textual phenomenon—a site that is doubly interior—the library compresses or condenses cultural and spiritual inheritances. Libraries in *Howards End* connect words and things, books and readers, precursors and successors.

A “Series of Mistakes”: *Howards End* and the Uncanny Library

In “Books of the Year” (1911), Arnold Bennett remarks on the popular and critical success of *Howards End*, particularly among the class it seems to criticize:

Now I am in a position to state that no novel for very many years has been so discussed by the élite as Mr. Forster’s “Howard’s End” [sic] [...] The ordinary library reader knows that it has been a very considerable popular success; persons of genuine taste know that it is a very considerable literary achievement; but its triumph is that it has been mightily argued about during the repasts of the élite. [...] A more curious point about it is that it contains a lot of very straight criticism of the élite. (292)

Many critics have read *Howards End* as a statement about class politics and the “fate of England” (qtd. in Royle, *Forster* 89). These include Lionel Trilling, whose *E. M. Forster: A Study* is a well-known account of the class war in *Howards End*, Paul Delany, who analyzes rentier culture, and Forster biographer Mary Lago. As Lago indicates in *E. M. Forster: A Literary Life*, Forster wrote four novels between 1905 and 1910 about middle-class dwellers of English suburban communities. *Howards End*, with its Schlegels and Wilcoxes, was the last and most commercially successful of these novels. According to Lago, Forster depicts a social class “in transition,” caught between environments and centuries (ix). She reads

Howards End as Forster's critique of the middle class, whose "great fault" lay in their being "too often complacent and too seldom uncertain about their place in the new scheme of things. They were absorbed in the minutiae of position and prestige and property-owning. They wished to be thought cultured but seemed not to understand Culture" (ix).

In *Howards End*, Forster presents a portrait of the English middle class that is not entirely sympathetic. He makes this clear in May 1958, when he provides his own assessment of the novel in his *Commonplace Book*:

Howards End my best novel and approaching a good novel. Very elaborate and all pervading plot that is seldom tiresome or forced, range of characters, social sense, wit, wisdom, colour. Have only just discovered why I don't care for it: not a single character in it for whom I care. [...] Perhaps the house in *H.E.*, for which I once did care, took the place of people and now that I no longer care for it their barrenness has become evident. I feel pride in the achievement, but cannot love it, and occasionally the swish of the skirts and the non-sexual embraces irritate. (203-04)

Contrary to most readings of the novel, Forster does not uphold the Schlegels as the model for right behaviour or thinking. Their weakness for houses and furniture renders them altogether too bourgeois. Indeed, Forster's portrait of the Schlegels is a self-portrait of sorts. As he implies in his appraisal of the novel, he too is liable to care more for houses than he should. *Howards End* is thus a self-reflexive and admonitory account of what happens when books, furniture, and houses "[take] the place of people." According to Lago, *Howards End* is a "personal" account of Forster's childhood home, Rooksnest, where he lived from 1883 to 1893: "It came out of the Rooksnest lumber-room" (40). Rooksnest had at some period belonged to a family called Howard, and, after the death of his architect father, Forster was

raised by his mother and aunts, just as Leonard Bast's son is raised by his mother and aunt. It is no accident that Bast's son will inherit *Howards End*. This outcome seems to have a corrective force behind it. In contrast to Forster and the Schlegels, Leonard Bast has no furniture of his own. His son, freed from the burden of cultural inheritance (at least on his father's side), has a better chance of escaping the entrapment of small-minded, middle-class bourgeois taste and refinement. As a product of the melding of classes, Bast's son signifies an ideal, classless future for England. As Jane Lagoudis Pinchin asserts, Forster was more afraid of "patronizing social relations than of openly hostile ones" (86). He was suspicious of the "liberal imagination" espoused by types like the Schlegels. After all, the Schlegels, "for all their generosity, are partners in the murder of Leonard Bast" (86).

In "The Novels of E. M. Forster," Virginia Woolf offers an alternative approach to a class-based reading of *Howards End*. She does so by highlighting Forster's attention to material objects, which she calls "the paraphernalia of reality":

In this combination of realism and mysticism his closest affinity is, perhaps, with Ibsen. Ibsen has the same realistic power. A room is to him a room, a writing table a writing table [...]. At the same time, the paraphernalia of reality have at certain moments to become the veil through which we see infinity. [...] Something of the same problem lies before Mr. Forster—how to connect the actual thing with the meaning of the thing and to carry the reader's mind across the chasm which divides the two without spilling a single drop of its belief. (Qtd. in Wilde 46-7)

Taking Woolf's lead, we can read *Howards End* as an exploration of the relation of objects to the universal or infinite. As Christie suggests, Forster's books "contain universes" (80). This is arguably most evident in *Howards End*, a book about how books and other objects are self-

contained universes that nonetheless serve to connect us to the universal. Like libraries, objects represent an atemporal or infinite realm.

As Jean Baudrillard posits in *The System of Objects*, objects possess seriality; they are “integrated” into a series: “Objects do not merely help us to master the world by virtue of their integration into instrumental series, they also help us, *by virtue of their integration into mental series*, to master time, rendering it discontinuous and classifying it [...] and subjecting it to the same associational constraints as those which govern the arrangement of things in space” (94). Baudrillard’s ideas about objects and their relationship to notions of “integration,” “arrangement,” and association are well-suited to a reading of *Howards End*. Books, furniture, and houses in *Howards End* master time by generating affective associations that transcend time. Furniture, as Baudrillard suggests, personifies human relationships: “The pieces of furniture confront one another, jostle one another, and implicate one another in a unity that is not so much spatial as moral in character” (*System* 15). Even Henry Wilcox, who considers houses to be valuable as property and nothing more, acknowledges that “a house in which one has once lived becomes in a sort of way sacred, I don’t know why. Associations and so on” (242). Forster’s emphasis on connections or associations in *Howards End* is tied to his interest in succession or seriality. He sees humanity itself as a kind of series. All people and all fates are connected, and objects remind us of these connections. In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf similarly conceives of humanity as a series or collection in a scene she sets in the British Museum Reading Room, where Jacob Flanders goes to transcribe passages from Christopher Marlowe: “And now and then was to be heard from the whole collection of human beings a heavy sigh” (120).

In *Howards End*, libraries dramatize and provide a backdrop for this theme of seriality or connectivity. Forster makes this explicit in *Aspects of the Novel* when he

characterizes literature as an ahistorical and collective phenomenon. “We must refuse,” he writes, “to have anything to do with chronology” (30). Instead of classifying literature by chronological periods, Forster suggests that the literary critic should take up T. S. Eliot’s proviso in *The Sacred Wood* and “see literature steadily and see it whole; and this is eminently to see it *not* as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time” (qtd. in *Aspects* 30). Forster attempts to see literature “whole,” to see it beyond or outside of time, by visualizing the English novelists of the last two hundred years “seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum Reading Room – all writing their novels simultaneously” (16). Neither influences nor schools bring the writers together. Instead, the common act of writing does. Authors and their books, Forster argues, are “approximated” by the act of creation (17). That is, an author’s work is approximated or assessed based on its relation to other works, and authors are rendered proximate by their collective presence in libraries. The library is thus doubly significant to Forster: it aptly symbolizes the connective or nodal nature of culture, and it provides the perfect scene or backdrop for reflections on literature itself.

There is something distinctly ahistorical—and thus democratic—about libraries. Jane Austen is shelved cheek by jowl with Paul Auster; Nathaniel Hawthorne rests near Aldous Huxley. As is evident in her own treatise on rooms and readers, *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf sought to democratize the library by liberating it from the fetters of authority and exclusivity. Forster reveals a similar impulse in his representation of the working-class bookworm and autodidact, Leonard Bast, in *Howards End*. As Peter Widdowson suggests, *Howards End* is “ahistorical” (9). Like Woolf and Joyce, Forster objects to the traditionally paternalistic and elitist control of culture in his fiction. Indeed, Elizabeth Bowen once remarked on two central features of Forster’s work: its unusual “mental climate,” and its “anti-authoritarianism” (qtd. in Royle 4). Much of Forster’s anti-authoritarian energies are

directed at things—at books and furniture—in his writing. Rather than a stuffy site of historical facts or chronological imperatives, the library is a site of chance encounters or coincidences, a scene of simultaneity and integration.

Books have a life of their own in *Howards End*. When Margaret Schlegel comes to Howards End and finds the hall “fitted up with the contents of the library from Wickham Place,” she politely informs Miss Avery that there “has been a mistake, and very likely our mistake” (215). Miss Avery’s reply perpetuates the deliberate confusion or conflation of the two Mrs. Wilcoxes in the novel: “Mrs. Wilcox, it has been mistake upon mistake for fifty years. The house is Mrs. Wilcox’s, and she would not desire it to stand empty any longer.” When Margaret attempts a clarification, saying, “Yes, Mrs. Wilcox’s house, the mother of Mr. Charles,” Miss Avery merely replies, “Mistake upon mistake” (215). Later, when Helen Schlegel asks her sister why the books were moved to Howards End and unpacked, Margaret answers: “Series of mistakes” (233). The plot of *Howards End* is itself a series of mistakes. Helen Schlegel and Paul Wilcox engage in an embarrassingly short liaison that they both regret. Shortly thereafter, Helen “inadvertently” leaves a concert with Leonard Bast’s umbrella (28). Henry Wilcox mistakenly advises Leonard to quit his job, which leads to Bast’s eventual unemployment. Leonard’s death-by-books is the ultimate mistake in the series. Before he dies, however, he produces an heir, the origin of a new series.

Books, libraries, and archives forge—and sometimes force—connections between characters in *Howards End*. The ambiguous epigraph to the novel, “Only connect,” announces the theme of seriality or succession. There are a host of underlying connections between characters, objects, and seemingly unrelated events in *Howards End*. Houses, and within them, libraries, uncannily connect or collect things in *Howards End*. In *Night and Day*, another modernist novel keenly concerned with interiors, Woolf asserts that rooms

“accumulate their suggestions” (101). Forster and Woolf are sensitive to the way that libraries accrue not only books and furniture but the memory of a reader’s moods, ideas, postures, and gestures while reading there. A library is thus evocative of the private histories of its readers. It accumulates their spectral “suggestions” or traces. As Widdowson argues, the phrase, “Only connect,” indicates the “structural tendency of the novel: connective, resolving, synthetic (12). The structural and thematic elements of *Howards End* are thus united by Forster’s view of books and libraries as sources of connections and continuity.

The themes of inheritance and continuity in *Howards End* are tied to the love of the past and to the love of things. “[W]here there is enjoyment of the past,” Forster writes, “there may also be reaction—propagation at both ends” (*HE* 220). Objects “propagate” or proliferate connections in *Howards End*. The great love affair of *Howards End* is not between Helen Schlegel and Leonard Bast, or between Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox. Instead, it is the love or “enjoyment” of things—of houses, books, and furniture. Mrs. Wilcox “worshipped the past,” embodied in her beloved Howards End, a house to which she “seemed to belong” (18). Similarly, Helen and Margaret discover that “they could never be parted because their love was rooted in common things” (236). Helen “forgot people” but she does not forget things (246). As Henry says of Helen when Margaret worries that she may not return to Howards End, “She was bound to drive. [...] There will be her books” (226). Books bind characters to each other and to the past in *Howards End*. The Schlegels’ library, composed of their father’s books, survives the series of mistakes. Like the past itself, it had “rumbled forward” and must be “kept” (118).

Like houses, books are beloved or sacred objects in *Howards End* because they are conduits of the past. Even the word “book” carries some of the hallowed residue of the past: “‘Books!’ cried Margaret, moved by the holy word” (209). When the sisters arrive at

Howards End and discover that their books have been unpacked, they find their “salvation” in the presence of their books and furniture: “And all the time their salvation was lying around them—the past sanctifying the present; the present, with wild heart-throb, declaring that there would after all be a future” (236). The past, carried forward and brought to life by objects, sanctifies or affirms the present in *Howards End*.

Forster’s novel is thus haunted by the past, figured as houses, furniture, and books. *Howards End* manifests what Nicholas Royle calls a “logic of mourning” and an “encounter with questions of inheritance” (*Uncanny* 53). Part of the intrigue of the narrative comes from what Royle describes as the “uncanniness of literature” (53), the sense that readers are haunted by books and precursors. Before composing *Howards End*, Forster may have read Ernst Jentsch’s “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” (1906), a text that is considered a forerunner to Sigmund Freud’s better-known essay, “The Uncanny” (1919). Jentsch believed that the uncanny is characterized by doubts about whether an apparently animate being is really alive, or whether a seemingly inanimate object might actually be animate. In *Howards End*, Forster seems particularly attuned to these dynamics of the uncanny, and to this sense of the animation or subjectification of objects. Georges Poulet calls these “subjectified objects” (qtd. in Schwenger 333), and the eponymous house of *Howards End* is the most obvious example of such an object.

As the central source of conflict in the novel, Howards End is an exemplary modernist “*unheimlich* house” or “haunted house” (Freud 395). The word “uncanny” is etymologically tied to notions of home, homeliness, and homelessness. The uncanny thus has something to do with property, and specifically with private property: “The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from the Latin *proprius*, ‘own’), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the

properness of proper names, institutions and events” (Royle, *Uncanny* 1). *Howards End* epitomizes this “crisis of the proper” by exploring the relation of houses to identity, to the family, and to the individual. Proper names are confused in the uncanny doubling of the two Mrs. Wilcoxes, and property rights are thrown into disarray by the first Mrs. Wilcox’s unconventional will. As the central symbol of private property in the novel, Howards End lies at the heart of this disturbance of the proper. The house connects the familiar and the strange, the old and the new, the past and the present; it also conjoins the formerly separate fates of the Wilcox, Schlegel, and Bast families. According to Royle, the uncanny is a “peculiar commingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar”:

It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home. [...] A feeling of uncanniness may come from curious coincidences, a sudden sense that things seem to be fated or ‘meant to happen.’ (*Uncanny* 1)

The revelation of “something unhomely” at the heart of *Howards End* is Mrs. Wilcox’s unexpected decision to leave Howards End, a house close to her heart, to Margaret Schlegel, a young woman she meets shortly before her death. And yet, as the events of the novel unfold, and the characters become more and more connected, this legacy seems somehow right or fated. As Miss Avery tells Margaret after unpacking the Schlegels’ things, “You think that you won’t come back to live here, Mrs. Wilcox, but you will” (215). The fate of Margaret and Helen Schlegel, and that of their books and furniture, is tied from the outset to the fate of Howards End.

In *The Uncanny*, Royle suggests that Freud's essay is "haunted by literature," by an abundance of literary examples and sources (52). *Howards End* is similarly haunted by books. Indeed, Forster employs the word "book" in surprising ways in the novel. After first meeting her, Margaret expresses a desire "to book Mrs. Wilcox as a friend" (63). As is often the case with Forster, this unusual phrase can be read in two ways—literally and metaphorically: Margaret would like to count Mrs. Wilcox among her friends, she'd like to "book" or retain her friendship; in another sense, Margaret thinks of Mrs. Wilcox as a book, an intriguing volume she has yet to read. After several days have passed since their first meeting, Margaret muses about the character of Mrs. Wilcox and whether or not she will make a satisfactory friend, or a good "read":

Was Mrs. Wilcox one of the unsatisfactory people—there are many of them—who dangle intimacy and then withdraw it? They evoke our interests and affections, and keep the life of the spirit dawdling around them. Then they withdraw. When physical passion is involved, there is a name for such behaviour—flirting—and if carried far enough, it is punishable by law. But no law—not public opinion, even—punishes those who coquette with friendship, though the dull ache that they inflict, the sense of misdirected effort and exhaustion, may be as intolerable. Was she one of these? (63)

Margaret's musing is itself a form of reading, or interpreting, Mrs. Wilcox. Like a gluttonous reader, she is all impatience. She wants to read to the end of her friendship with Mrs. Wilcox: "she wanted everything to be settled up immediately" (63). Margaret worries that her "efforts" will be "misdirected" in the same way that a poorly written book seems a waste of one's time if read to the end. Moreover, Forster's phrase implies a sense of the uncanny or fated nature of their connection: because she is successful in "booking" or securing Mrs.

Wilcox's friendship, the rest of the novel unfolds accordingly. Read in this way, *Howards End* is an account of what happens when Margaret reads Mrs. Wilcox rightly. The phrase ingeniously implies that the ending of the book has already been written or "booked," that things were somehow "settled up" from the beginning.

Like Isabel Archer and Lily Bart, Margaret seems aware that she is a character in a book. She frequently, and ironically, refers to the difference between life and books. After her marriage to Henry Wilcox, for example, she finds that "Love was so unlike the article served up in books" (140). While a marriage proposal on "the stage" or "in books" is "a full-blown affair; a kind of bouquet" that "loses its literal meaning" (141), she finds that "in life a proposal really is a proposal—" (141). Moreover, just as Isabel Archer feels compelled to make something of her life, to live up to her status as the heroine of James's novel, Helen tells Margaret at the end of the novel that her life has been "heroic" (268). Like Isabel, Margaret is not like other people, partly because she knows or has read herself so well. After her marriage to Henry, she finds she no longer has any "illusions" about herself or others: "She knew her own heart with a thoroughness that commonplace people believe impossible" (204).

In "Uncanny Reading," Peter Schwenger suggests that "[m]ost of the time, we forget the strangeness of reading" (340). Forster frequently draws our attention to reading and to the strangeness it entails in *Howards End*. He does so at the outset when he presents the reader with his epigraph ("Only connect"), a motto that, according to John Edward Hardy, evokes a "provocative incompleteness" (114):

This motto...clearly indicates the problematical character of the work.

Connect what, we are to ask, with what? And how? The novel pictures a civilization in which everything is disconnected—past from present, country

from city, culture from economic reality, morality from manners, institutions from human need, purpose from technique, reason from impulse, the unseen from the seen, masculine from feminine, man from nature, man from man.

How, if at all, are the rifts to be healed? (114)

Paradoxically, Forster's endorsement of connection in the novel is meant to combat its overwhelming sense of disconnection. To read *Howards End* rightly, then, is not to refer everything to a conflict of class or of the sexes; instead, as Hardy suggests, a productive reading of *Howards End* calls for something more "comprehensive" (114). Following Hardy's logic, I would argue that Forster builds a solution to the problem of disconnection into his novel in the form—and subject—of reading. Reading is, by its very nature, connective. Words are read in sequence to form sentences, sentences to form paragraphs, and so on. The reader is expected to "connect" things—words with ideas, objects with the meaning of things—and to be open or receptive to connections. Forster advocates this connectivity in his epigraph. He emphasizes books, libraries, and reading as the basis of the uncanny or the strangely familiar in *Howards End*. In this sense, reading is a form of haunting. As Royle puts it, reading "entails something unreadable, in reserve, something that resists being understood *now*" (*Uncanny* 57). The infinite or unbounded nature of reading haunts readers: there will always be more to read. The unread or unknown is inexhaustible.

Reading is a strange business in *Howards End*. Forster's call for connectivity and comprehensiveness is answered by the reading of books and individuals (and the relationship between books and individuals) in the novel. As Widdowson posits, "The search for completion and harmony demands contingency" (125). Reading is tied up with contingency in *Howards End*; it is synonymous with the search for completion or connection. As the source of textual and interpersonal connections, books and libraries

materialize the uncanny in *Howards End*. The library in *Howards End* is an uncanny space, the site of the strangely familiar, the fated or predetermined. Leonard Bast's uncanny death is causally linked in the novel to the uncanny or "mistaken" relocation of the Schlegel's books, and both of these events bring about the proper reinstatement of Margaret's inheritance of Howards End.

According to Freud, the uncanny is about "everything [...] that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light" (376). *Howards End* has its share of secrets and their sudden revelation: Helen keeps her pregnancy a secret until Margaret glimpses her altered shape at Howards End. The account of Henry Wilcox's affair with Jacky Bast is kept from the first Mrs. Wilcox but revealed to Margaret. Knowledge of Mrs. Wilcox's gift of Howards End to Margaret is withheld from her until the very end of the novel when it is mistakenly divulged by Dolly Wilcox: "It does seem curious that Mrs. Wilcox should have left Margaret Howards End, and yet she get it, after all" (270). When Henry, strangely echoing Leonard Bast's last words ("Mrs. Wilcox, I have done wrong"), asks Margaret, "I didn't do wrong, did I?" she replies, "You didn't, darling. Nothing has been done wrong" (271). Margaret's ironic rejoinder is meant to forgive or right the series of mistakes or "wrongs" that have been committed. She speaks not only for herself but for the first Mrs. Wilcox, as well. Forster implies, then, that Margaret's inheritance of *Howards End* was fated. When the Wilcoxes tried to prevent that fate, fate intervenes again to set things right, to connect the rightful inheritor of Howards End with the house. As Margaret says of Miss Avery's conviction that the Schlegels will return to Howards End, "It is disquieting to fulfil a prophecy, however superficially" (239).

Like Margaret, Forster extols the principles of arrangement or organization in

Howards End. In a letter Margaret writes to Helen, she states that what matters is “the way things are arranged” (83). This emphasis on the arrangement of things—the organization of books, furniture, interiors, experiences, and events—lies at the heart of Forster’s narrative. Forster implies that things are doubly “arranged” in *Howards End*: like interiors, they are organized, assembled, and coordinated; they are also “booked” or fated. Miss Avery intervenes to arrange the Schlegels’ books and furniture in Howards End. Mrs. Wilcox’s mind is characterized as the organizing principle of the novel: “How incomprehensible that Leonard Bast should have won her this night of peace! Was he also part of Mrs. Wilcox’s mind?” (249). Nevertheless, the classificatory impulse is suspect in *Howards End*, as it too needs to be classified or examined. In a letter Margaret writes to Helen after the latter flees to Germany, she argues: “I don’t say there is no standard, for that would destroy morality; only that there can be no standard until our impulses are classified and better understood” (204). Like Forster and his house of words, Margaret regards the writing of letters as a productive means to classify or organize experiences and impressions.

Reading *Howards End* as a “series of mistakes” is productive only to a point. Forster reminds his reader, through the mistakes, accidents, and coincidences of the narrative, that seriality or “sequence” is not how life is actually experienced: “Looking back on the past six months, Margaret realized the chaotic nature of our daily life, and its difference from the orderly sequence that has been fabricated by historians” (85). The experience of modern life is not orderly or systematic. The sense of life as sequential or chronological is the false representation of history books. History, Forster proposes, lies or fabricates. It wants to draw connections between things, and thus constructs narratives after the fact. Conversely, personal history or private life is chaotic, unbounded: “It is private life that holds out the

mirror to infinity" (*HE* 65). Like Margaret Schlegel, Forster wants the reader to see life whole. He wants his novel to convey the totality of life. Life is encyclopaedic, vaster, more diverse, more chaotic than any library or museum or series of books. After his affair with Helen, Leonard realizes that "the whole of life is mixed" (252).

Reading is thus a metaphor for perception in *Howards End*. How one "reads" things signifies how one lives, whether rightly or wrongly. The correction of one of the central mistakes in the novel has something to do with reading and with the uncanny, a word that is used only once, at the end of the text. This mistake is Henry Wilcox's mistaken reading of his wife's will, and his decision to disregard Mrs. Wilcox's wish to leave Howards End to Margaret. After Bast's death and Charlie Wilcox's indictment, Mr. Wilcox announces formally to his family that he will "leave Howards End to my wife absolutely" (270). Margaret, who is rendered speechless by the pronouncement, also finds it somehow familiar or expected, since "she knew quite well what was going to be said" (269): "There was something uncanny in her triumph. She, who had never expected to conquer anyone, had charged straight through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives" (270). In contrast to her primary impulse to "connect," Margaret, with the authorization of Mrs. Wilcox, breaks into the Wilcox family and breaks up its material continuity. Howards End will pass out of the Wilcox family and will be inherited by her nephew, the son of Helen Schlegel and Leonard Bast. This principle of interruption or discontinuity is central to the novel and serves as a response to the relentless forward movement or progress that is embodied by the Wilcox clan. With their automobiles and business know-how, the Wilcoxes represent what David Medalie calls the "irresistible movement" of modernity, something Forster wants to intercept or interrupt:

The entire plot of *Howards End* may be seen in terms of this notion of 'interruption,' for it shows the way the world is going and then offers forms of escape or tenuous sanctuaries which stand in contradistinction to that seemingly irresistible movement. Because modernity is seen as disrupting what ought to be preserved, the novel, in response, seeks to 'interrupt' the course of modernity by refusing to sanction it, signalling it as a crisis (with potentially tragic ramifications) and, finally, veering away from it at the level of plot. (Medalie 7)

The library and drawing-room, those cultural interiors associated with the Schlegels and their bourgeois inheritances, are examples of "tenuous sanctuaries" or cultural holdouts.

Nevertheless, Forster does something remarkably modern by selecting the library as the site of the climactic action of the novel. In the library, the most momentous interruption of all—death—halts *Howards End*.

Forster thus explores the dialectical relationship between connection and disconnection, continuity and discontinuity, progression and retrogression, mess and order in *Howards End*. To discourage his father's plan to have Helen come to Howards End to pick up her books, Charles Wilcox states: "We don't want any more mess" (225). Mess happens at the expense of order in *Howards End*. But mess, like the series of mistakes that shapes Forster's plot, is a kind of "ordered insanity" (261). In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Forster's narrator comments on the characters' sense of confusion and loss after the death of Leonard Bast. These comments are evidently about the nature of modernity itself, but they also seem to refer to the novel and the strange experience of reading it: "Events succeeded in a logical, yet senseless, train. People lost their humanity, and took values as arbitrary as those in a pack of playing-cards" (260). The arbitrary or accidental is joined to the arranged or

ordered in *Howards End*. The impulse to serialize, to order or classify experience, encounters the inherent messiness or disorder of the plot, its “jangle of causes and effects” (HE 261).

Given the arbitrary and composite nature of its narrative structure, *Howards End* reads like a collection of letters. In his *Commonplace Book*, Forster aligns novel-writing with letter-writing, suggesting that the novel is a kind of letter: “Not a bad plan to think a novel’s going to be a letter. Think of novelists all writing letters at once in a sort of [British Museum] Reading Room and getting books at the same time on various subjects” (qtd. in *Aspects* 162). Forster conceives of the novel as epistolary in the sense that it is addressed to an audience and informed by immediate surroundings. In this regard, *Howards End*, a novel full of references to books, libraries, and archives, is Forster’s letter from the British Museum. From the opening line of the novel, Forster draws attention to the centrality and significance of letters. *Howards End* begins with a series of letters from Helen to Margaret: “One may as well begin with Helen’s letters to her sister” (3). Save for this line, Chapter One is composed entirely of letters. This epistolary form highlights the ways that private life and personal intercourse are entwined with private archives. Letters and telegrams form a crucial narrative structure, underscoring and furnishing connections between characters. Helen’s first letter contains a prophetic description of Howards End and the narrative action it will soon accommodate or “pack in”: “It isn’t going to be what we expected. It is old and little, and altogether delightful—red brick. We can scarcely pack in as it is, and the dear knows what will happen when Paul (younger son) arrives tomorrow” (3). Letters are prophetic or visionary in *Howards End*. Helen’s letter predicts the way that Margaret later perceives Mrs. Wilcox during her first visit to Howards End: “It was Mrs. Wilcox. She approached just as Helen’s letter

had described her, trailing noiselessly over the lawn, and there was actually a wisp of hay in her hands. She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it" (18). Letters in *Howards End* have an uncanny ability to forecast the future.

Not surprisingly, Helen experiences a Jamesian anxiety about private archives and the perilous residue they leave behind. Letters reveal too much of human sentiment, and Helen, who asks Margaret to burn her letters after she reads them, is acutely conscious of this: "Much love. Modified love to Tibby. Love to Aunt Juley; how good of her to come and keep you company, but what a bore. Burn this. Will write again Thursday. Helen" (4). Later, Helen writes: "Meg, shall we ever learn to talk less? I never felt so ashamed of myself in my life. [...] Thank you for your letter. Burn this. Your affectionate Helen" (5). Letters must be burnt because they are liabilities. Letters too closely link personal intercourse and fate. Moreover, the reading of letters, like the reading of individuals, provides opportunities for "mistakes" or "misunderstandings," such as when Mrs. Munt misinterprets Helen's letter about her recent engagement, and confuses Charles Wilcox for Paul:

"I trust there has been no misunderstanding," quavered Mrs. Munt. "Her letter certainly read that way."

"What way?"

"That you and she—" She paused, then drooped her eyelids.

"I think I catch your meaning," he said stickily. "What an extraordinary mistake." (16)

The revelatory contents of letters, the way that they “read,” have the capacity to transform personal relations, to connect and disconnect people and things, and to result in “extraordinary mistakes” (16).

In this sense, the expression “dead letter” is a misnomer, for letters are never dead. They remain vulnerable to misinterpretation long after the death of their author, as with the case of Mrs. Wilcox’s will, which is sent in the form of a short and altogether unexpected letter. When Mr. Wilcox reads his dead wife’s letter—“To my husband: I should like Miss Schlegel (Margaret) to have *Howards End*” (77)—he is stunned: “He stood in the porch, transformed, letters in his hand” (77). In discussion with his son Charles and Charles’s wife Dolly, Mr. Wilcox decides that Mrs. Wilcox’s note, “scribbled in pencil, sent through the matron, was unbusinesslike as well as cruel, and decreased at once the value of the woman who had written it” (79). Mrs. Wilcox’s letter is proof that she has been “treacherous to the family, to the laws of property, to her own written word. How did she expect *Howards End* to be conveyed to Miss Schlegel? Was her husband, to whom it legally belonged, to make it over to her as a free gift? [...] Treacherous! Treacherous and absurd!” (79). For Henry Wilcox, the idiosyncratic or “unbusinesslike” nature of Mrs. Wilcox’s letter is part of its treachery. ““We know that it is not legally binding, Dolly,” said Mr. Wilcox, speaking from out of his fortress. ‘We are aware of that. Legally, I should be justified in tearing it up and throwing it into the fire’” (77). Mr. Wilcox’s desire to destroy the letter is due to his misreading or misunderstanding of its contents. As a businessman, Henry Wilcox is acutely conscious of property values or the “laws of property,” to the extent that he unconsciously applies the same logic—and rhetoric—to his wife’s motives and actions: her letter “decreased at

once the value of the woman who had written it.” Henry Wilcox cannot fathom how his wife could leave Howards End to Miss Schlegel as a “free gift.” He is incapable of understanding her desire to leave a spiritual inheritance as it not only betrays the laws of “the family,” but also makes terrible business sense. The letter embodies what he perceives as his late wife’s treachery, and he thus feels justified in burning it.

The House as Universe, the House as Property

Howards End is the site of the uncanny in Forster’s novel, the scene of the strangely familiar. When Margaret enters the hall at Howards End and sees it fitted up with her own furniture, she finds herself in an unfamiliar setting yet surrounded by familiar things:

Margaret uttered a cry of despair. For an appalling thing had happened.

The hall was fitted up with the contents of the library from Wickham Place. The carpet had been laid, the big work-table drawn up near the window; the bookcases filled the wall opposite the fireplace, and her father’s sword—this is what bewildered her particularly—had been drawn from its scabbard and hung naked amongst the sober volumes. (214)

Despite her discomfort, Margaret cannot help but observe how well her things look in this new context: “The furniture fitted extraordinarily well” (216). Margaret’s love of houses and her curious attraction to Howards End soon prevail over her sense of unease. Surrounded by her own possessions, things she has had since childhood, she takes spiritual ownership of the house. She is no longer guest but owner. As Miss Avery tells her, “You are living here now” (215). Furniture fitted into a new space immediately

creates a kind of homeliness, a sense of belonging.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard characterizes the house as “our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world” (4). The house is an “object” for Bachelard, but it also “our corner of the world” (3-4), a space that reflects the “topography of our intimate being” (xxxii), that shelters our memories and dreams:

if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. [...] I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. [...] In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. (6-7)

The house makes possible what Bachelard calls “psychological integration” (xxxii).

Houses collect the disparate and dispersed elements of the self; they connect self and world, the present and the past. “Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are ‘housed.’ Our soul is an abode. And by remembering ‘houses’ and ‘rooms,’ we learn to ‘abide’ within ourselves” (Bachelard xxxiii).

This poetics of the house is particularly relevant to *Howards End*, which, as Michael J. Hoffman and Ann Ter Haar suggest, “is full of houses” (51). The eponymous *Howards End* is figured as the centre of intrigue, a space that serves a spiritual and integrative function for the characters and for the plot itself. The inheritance of the house incites conflict in the novel. In this regard, *Howards End* attracts (rather than thrusts aside) contingencies, accidents, and family disputes. It connects these elements, just as it

brings members of the Wilcox, Schlegel, and Bast families together in the climactic scene of the novel. Like the pigs' teeth mysteriously embedded in the wych-elm outside its doors, *Howards End* is entrenched or rooted in the lives of these characters.

As intimate spaces, houses are "inscribed in us" (Bachelard 14). We also make our mark on the houses that we inhabit. *Howards End* is a kind of palimpsest, a site where familial "affection" (230) accumulates and is transmitted. Margaret absent-mindedly traces the word "affection" on the exterior wall of *Howards End*, marking the triangular connection between Mrs. Wilcox, herself, and the house. "And affection," writes Forster, "when reciprocated, gives rights" (230). For Margaret, *Howards End* represents the localization and continuation of Mrs. Wilcox's spirit. Forster himself makes this clear in a 1952 interview when he responds to a question about the significance of Mrs. Wilcox's influence on the other characters after her death: "I was interested in the imaginative effect of someone alive, but in a different way from other characters—living in other lives" (qtd. in Armstrong 292). In *Archive Fever* Jacques Derrida suggests that the notion of "haunting" is synonymous with place, with a "habitation" or "haunted house" (86). Mrs. Wilcox lives on in the house and in her successor and namesake, the second Mrs. Wilcox. Just as Virginia Woolf conceived of the British Museum as one great mind, Margaret associates *Howards End* with Mrs. Wilcox's mind: "I feel that you and I and Henry are only fragments of that woman's mind," she says to Helen. "She knows everything. She is everything. She is the house... [...] I cannot believe that knowledge such as hers will perish with knowledge such as mine. She knew about realities" (248). Like Stephen Wonham in *The Longest Journey*, Mrs. Wilcox "knows everything," and her knowledge—an inclusive, comprehensive,

even universal knowledge, the kind attributed to libraries—is embodied by or carried forward in the house.

Houses accommodate our words, ideas, and relations; they make us connect. The houses in *Howards End* serve to instruct or enlighten their owners about the past. As Margaret Schlegel says of Wickham Place, the Schlegels' first home, "It had helped to balance their lives, and almost to counsel them" (119). Houses "counsel" continuity and connectivity in *Howards End*. Like lumber-rooms containing private or domestic history, houses testify to the presence or "solidity of our past" (121). The books and furniture that the Schlegels have inherited embody familial "sentiment": "Round every knob and cushion in the house sentiment gathered, a sentiment that was at times personal, but more often a faint piety to the dead, a prolongation of rites that might have ended at the grave" (119). Houses ensure the perpetuation of this "piety," this acknowledgement of the dead. As Bachelard puts it, houses "are in us as much as we are in them" (xxxiii).

Howards End perfectly embodies, then, what Bachelard calls "eulogized space" (xxxi). For both Mrs. Wilcoxes, Howards End is a beloved space, a place charged with sentiment, with "all the partiality of the imagination": "Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect" (Bachelard xxxii). Howards End exercises exactly this kind of attraction over Margaret. Unlike the Wilcox family, Margaret cannot remain indifferent to Howards End. As she admits to Henry Wilcox, houses have an uncanny sway over her: "It's the houses that are mesmerizing me, I've no control over the saucy

things. Houses are alive. No?" (123).

Houses have human attributes in *Howards End*. They "have their own ways of dying, falling as variously as the generations of men" (203). For the Schlegels, Wickham Place was "a house which had always been human" (203). Likewise, Howards End embodies the spirit of Mrs. Wilcox, which is a connecting or collecting spirit. Her family is outraged when they learn that she has left the house to Margaret. "To them Howards End was a house: they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir" (79). Mrs. Wilcox's gift of Howards End to Margaret Schlegel is a final act of will, a spiritual legacy to a "spiritual heir," to one who will preserve or protect the sentimental knowledge it houses. Hoffman and Ter Haar argue that without this new heir, the empty, uninhabited Howards End "remains the monument if not the mausoleum of Ruth Wilcox" (57). But because Forster "insists upon regeneration," upon the continued connection or "interaction" of the inhabitants and furnishings of Howards End, the house lives on (58). As an uncanny or omniscient intermediary, Howards End exemplifies the principle of psychological or cosmic integration at the heart of the novel. Like Mrs. Wilcox's mind, Howards End connects everything. In the final scenes of the novel, the house collects all the fragments or "pieces" (268) of the narrative, as well as its "broken" characters (264). As Margaret puts it, "this place has wonderful powers" (237). Mysteriously furnished with the Schlegels' books and furniture, and the site of the climactic library scene, the house connects the past to the future, one Mrs. Wilcox to the other, one dead father (Mr. Schlegel) with another (Leonard Bast).

When Helen and Margaret "camp out" overnight at Howards End (238), against the wishes of its owner, Henry Wilcox, they speak of a different kind of property

ownership, one founded on knowledge and enjoyment. In trying to convince Margaret that they should stay, Helen says, "Ducie Street is his house. This is ours. Our furniture, our sort of people coming to the door. [...] I know of things they can't know of, and so do you. We *know* there's poetry. We *know* that there's death. They can only take them on hearsay. We know this is our house, because it feels ours. Oh, they may take the title-deeds and the doorkeys, but for this one night we are at home" (238). The Schlegels make a symbolic or spiritual claim for property ownership of Howards End based on their connection to the house. Because they identify with Howards End, because they see it as an extension of themselves ("it feels ours"), Forster suggests that this bid for ownership is legitimate—more legitimate, perhaps, than ownership based on "title-deeds and doorkeys." The Schlegels' sense of ownership is at odds, however, with more traditional or conventional notions of property and ownership, and the tension between the two is central to *Howards End* and other writings by Forster.

In a 1926 essay entitled "My Wood," for example, Forster considers the impulse to possess property. After the commercial success of *A Passage to India*, he purchased a small wood, "the first property that I have owned" (33). As in *Howards End*, Forster is not concerned in his essay with economics so much as he is interested in "psychology," in the effect of ownership on the owner: "What is the effect of property upon the character? [...] If you own things, what's their effect on you? What is the effect on me of my wood?" (33). Forster offers three answers to these questions: first, property, Forster admits, "makes me feel heavy" (34). It produces "men of weight"—people who are burdened or constrained by furniture and its demands. Forster finds that "if you have a lot of things you cannot move about a lot, that furniture requires dusting, dusters require

servants, servants require insurance stamps, and the whole tangle of them makes you think twice before you accept an invitation to dinner or go for a bathe in the Jordan" (34). Secondly, Forster's wood "makes me feel it ought to be larger" (34). Owning property raises questions of limits or boundaries, of the extent and obligations of ownership. Does Forster own the bird he sees in his wood? Why not buy up Mrs. Henessy's adjoining land to "round off" his property? What, he asks, is the "limit of possession" (35), implying, of course, that possession always strives towards the unlimited or infinite. Thirdly, property "makes its owner feel that he ought to do something to it" (35). Like the writer's impulse to write, property gives its owner a sense that "he has a personality to express" (35). Property promotes dissatisfaction. It produces an "inability to enjoy what I have got" (35). Echoing *Howards End*, with its emphasis on "propagation" and "enjoyment" (220), Forster writes:

Creation, property, enjoyment form a sinister trinity in the human mind. Creation and enjoyment are both very [...] good, yet they are often unattainable without a material basis, and at such moments property pushes itself in as a substitute, saying, 'Accept me instead – I'm good enough for all three.' It is not enough. It is, as Shakespeare said of lust, 'The expense of spirit in a waste of shame' [...]. Yet we don't know how to shun it. It is forced on us by our economic system as the alternative to starvation. It is also forced on us by an internal defect in the soul, by the feeling that in property may lie the germs of self-development and of exquisite or heroic deeds. Our life on earth is, and ought to be, material and carnal. But we have not yet learned to manage our materialism and

carnality properly; they are still entangled with the desire for ownership, where (in the words of Dante) 'Possession is one with loss.' (35-6)

Forster is of two minds about property. Possession of property is synonymous with loss because the desire for it is never satisfied. Property entangles owners in material concerns and thus distracts them from spiritual or moral considerations. The desire to own property, to revel or lose oneself in things, often entails the deprivation of the spirit. The ownership of property is thus not an appropriate substitute for self-development or self-possession. Yet, as the alternative to "starvation" or privation, property is a desirable commodity. Moreover, ownership is tied to "enjoyment." In legal terms, to "enjoy" property is to possess, occupy, or use it, without legal title. The property remains in a sort of trust, and cannot be sold or altered. To enjoy property, then, means to obtain the pleasures or benefits of ownership without its entanglements or obligations. Before Margaret knows that *Howards End* is legally hers, she and Helen "enjoy" it. They find it feels like "home" because it holds their furniture and brings their "sort" of people to the door. Unlike Wickham Place, where the Schlegels have lived since childhood, *Howards End* is a provisional home; it offers all the advantages of home without the liabilities. The Schlegels thus enjoy their one night at *Howards End* in this dual sense of the word.

Forster's ambivalence about property is also expressed through Margaret Schlegel's experience of moving from Wickham Place. Like Forster, Margaret feels the burden of ownership most acutely when she is reminded of the oppressive weight of furniture: moving is difficult when one has a lot of things. Mobility and portability are modern values in London's "architecture of hurry" (86), but until she is forced to move, Margaret is largely unconscious of the rapid rate of change taking place in the city: "The

Londoner seldom understands his city until it sweeps him from his moorings, and Margaret's eyes were not opened until the lease of Wickham Place expired" (86). Margaret's obliviousness to the rapid transformations of the city is the result of her privileged bourgeois lifestyle. She and her siblings receive an income from their family's estate and do not have to work. They are literally insulated by culture, furniture, and houses.

Like the Forsyte family in John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* (1906), the Schlegels are part of England's property classes. They collect houses; they accumulate furniture. As Galsworthy puts it, "Without a habitat a Forsyte is inconceivable—he would be like a novel without a plot, which is well-known to be an anomaly" (84). Margaret feels the same way when forced to move from her childhood home: "Thank goodness she, too, had some money, and could purchase a new home" (*HE* 87). According to Helen, this connection to "tangible things—money, husbands, house-hunting" is the source of the Schlegel's "bothers" or problems (154). Margaret, however, sees things differently. Unlike the Wilcoxes, the Schlegels cannot "break loose from culture" (119). Their fate lies in culture. Despite the distractions of furniture, servants, and social calls, Margaret believes that she and Helen have furnished a rich inner life for themselves, a life that "was so safe that they could bargain over externals" (154). Margaret is convinced that the negotiating or bargaining over "externals" that comes with property ownership does not hamper or encumber her interior life.

Nevertheless, this conviction does not prevent her from complaining bitterly about the burden of ownership. While packing her library and household goods in preparation to move out of Wickham Place, she decries the "modern ownership of

movables" (119). With its endless accretion of possessions, middle-class British society, she suggests, has become a "civilization of luggage" (119). The middle classes are a "nomadic horde" whose "imaginative poverty" is the result of an over-provision of furniture (119). The middle class owns too much. This surplus of property—of books, pictures, furniture, and ornaments—forces Margaret to consider her ambivalent feelings about ownership and inheritance:

The Age of Property holds bitter moments even for a proprietor. When a move is imminent, furniture becomes ridiculous, and Margaret now lay awake at nights wondering where, where on earth they and all their belongings would be deposited in September next. Chairs, tables, pictures, books, that had rumbled down to them through the generations, must rumble forward again like a slide of rubbish to which she longed to give the final push and send toppling into the sea. But there were all their father's books—they never read them, but they were their father's, and must be kept. (*HE* 118)

The ownership of houses is often pitched against rented spaces in Forster's fiction. In *A Room with a View*, the Emersons let a house in England and fill it, provisionally, with their books. Nonetheless, as Forster implies in "My Wood," renting houses does not furnish the same pride as home ownership. Inundated by owned goods in a rented house, Margaret embodies this twin relationship to property and its permanence and impermanence. The lumber or "rubbish" she disparages has been kept in the family's possession and must, she concedes, remain in its keeping. Despite her annoyance, however, Margaret makes a distinction between the nondescript list of furniture she

cites—the chairs, tables, pictures, and books which seemingly belong to the family at large—and the provenance of one book collection in particular, the Schlegels’ “father’s books.” Though these books are never read, they are the father’s and thus stand as cultural inheritance. Their value lies in their provenance.

As Margaret discovers when faced with moving her father’s books, property creates obligations. The things others have accumulated become a liability. The problem with property, Forster suggests, is that it binds us to it and limits our freedom. A “man of property” becomes what he possesses: his property becomes one of his defining qualities, one of *his* properties. Like Galsworthy, Forster implies that British modern life is an “Age of Property,” an age encumbered with the luggage of the past: a surfeit of furniture and collectibles. Whole houses are overrun with old things. Modern life is itself a kind of lumber-room. In a letter he wrote in 1925, Forster laments this tendency to accumulate things: “Oh, possessions, possessions! We are bound to have them but why will we keep trying to include human beings among them? Ownership is after fear the wickedest thing in the universe; perhaps it’s all the same thing, for we are generally afraid we may lose something. I wish I could have nothing and yet not be an ascetic” (qtd. in Stape 67). For Forster, possessions are a burden and ownership a middle-class compulsion that is inherited or passed on.

Moreover, Forster implies that the danger of a love of collecting and a love of objects is to extend that desire to human beings. Henry James shares this concern in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Gilbert Osmond regards Isabel Archer as the supreme collectible, the perfect indicator of his exquisite taste. Similarly, when Ralph Touchett notes his mother’s possessiveness of Isabel (“She’s my niece; she’s not his”), he replies: “Good Lord, dear

mother; what a sense of property!" (46). Joyce uses this same phrase ("sense of property") in the library scene in *Ulysses* (262). Like James and Joyce, Forster is sensitively attuned to both the obligations and the rights of property. In *Howards End*, Forster takes up this notion of a "sense" of property in two ways: he explores the meaning or significance of property, and he investigates what it means to have an acute feeling for or awareness of property.

Etymologically, the word "property" suggests ownership, the holding of something as one's own ("proprius"), as well as the exclusive right to the possession or use of a thing. *Howards End* considers what Henry Wilcox calls "the rights of property" (258). The day before Margaret and Helen camp out at Howards End, Henry Wilcox stresses to his son the importance of ownership of the house (rather than affection for it), and the significance of inheritance: "The house is mine—and, Charles, it will be yours—and when I say that no one is to live there, I mean that no one is to live there. I won't have it. [...] To my mind, this question is connected with something far greater, the rights of property itself" (258). As Widdowson suggests, the Wilcoxes are "men of property. As finance capitalists they make money and they make money work. Both Henry and Charles (father and elder son) are men of action and decision in the City. They know what they have to do and they do it" (Widdowson 67). The male Wilcoxes do not understand anything but London's "language of hurry" (86) and its rhetoric of "rights," nor do they comprehend claims for ownership that are founded on a shared or inherited affection. Unlike the Schlegels, they do not feel beholden to cultural inheritance or to the past. They live in, and for, the present. However, it is the Schlegels, with their romantic notions of property and their oppressive piles of furniture, whose bid for ownership of

Howards End ultimately wins out.

Nonetheless, Forster's sympathies clearly lie with the non-propertied in *Howards End*. Having too much furniture is an exclusively middle-class problem. When Tibby Schlegel visits the Basts to press them to take Helen's gift of 5,000 pounds, a "scurf of books and china ornaments awaited him. The Basts had just been evicted for not paying their rent, and had wandered no one knew whither" (202-203). Leonard and Jackie are casualties of London's "architecture of hurry," the rapid rate of architectural changes taking place in the city, where old houses are being demolished to "accommodate" new flats (86, 38). Bast rents his furniture and his lodgings, and is thus deprived of the joys and burdens of property ownership: "of all the objects that encumbered [the flat], none were his own except the photograph frame, the Cupids, and the books" (39). Like his apartment, Bast's life is "makeshift" or provisional: "But it struck that shallow makeshift note that is so often heard in the modern dwelling-place. It had been too easily gained, and could be relinquished too easily" (39). Like the Schlegels, the Basts are forced to move from their home. However, the two families have vastly different concerns: instead of worrying over how to find the right house or how to move their surplus of furniture, the Basts "wander" into the city, leaving behind only rubbish. Unhoused by progress, they embody the relentlessly mobile or transitory nature of modernity.

Leonard Bast

Thirty years after composing *Howards End*, Forster offered an alternative view of culture and its relationship to social democracy in "Does Culture Matter?": "Culture, thank goodness, is no longer a social asset, it can no longer be employed either as a

barrier against the mob or as a ladder into the aristocracy" (TC 113). While the allusiveness and impenetrability of many modernist texts did act as a "barrier" against the uneducated masses, Forster clearly supported a more democratic approach to culture. He taught adult-education at the Working Men's College for almost twenty years, and formed "close friendships with well-read workingmen before and after he wrote *Howards End*" (Rose 16). This experience influenced his views in *Howards End*, and particularly his concern about the abuses of culture. According to P. N. Furbank, Forster believed that culture put to the wrong end is thereby cut off from what gives it its value, namely the "furthering of humanness generally" (173). *Howards End* thus poses a quandary: "how is culture to confer distinction, and, simultaneously, to function as an agent of democratization?" (Medalie 45). Culture, Forster implies, should be used neither as an end or escape, nor as a means to legitimate one's superiority through property ownership. Ideally, culture connects or democratizes rather than disconnects or disenfranchises.

In *Howards End*, however, culture is still largely a "social asset" rather than a democratizing agent. Education keeps certain people inside libraries and drawing-rooms and others outside of them. At the beginning of the novel, Forster hints at this partition when Aunt Juley calls to Margaret in Wickham Place: "Dear Margaret, do come into the library and shut the door. Your good maids are dusting the banisters" (9). The middle classes take shelter in private libraries while the working classes dust the banisters. Books and furniture must be safeguarded, appearances kept up. Like Henry James's send-up of Isabel Archer's aunt, Mrs. Varian, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, whose "reverence for books" suggests a lack of familiarity with their interiors (52), Forster pokes fun at the Schlegels' ultra-serious regard for culture. Like Mrs. Varian, the Schlegels' Aunt Juley

has a tendency to make empty assertions about the importance of “Literature and Art”: “What do you think of the Wilcoxes?” she asks Margaret. “Are they our sort? Are they likely people? Could they appreciate Helen, who is to my mind a very special sort of person? Do they care about Literature and Art? That is most important when you come to think of it. Literature and Art. Most important” (7).

The satire Forster directs at the cloistered and complacent middle class is exemplified in *Howards End* by Leonard Bast’s frantic attempts to emulate its leisured reading and concert-going. In fact, when he announces to his wife that he intends to improve himself through culture, his words perfectly echo those of Juley Munt:

“I’ll tell you another thing too. I care a good deal about improving myself by means of Literature and Art, and so getting a wider outlook. For instance, when you came in I was reading Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice*. I don’t say this to boast, but just to show you the kind of man I am. I can tell you, I enjoyed that classical concert this afternoon.” (43)

Unlike the middle-class Paul Wilcox, Leonard is Helen’s “sort”—the kind who cares about literature and art. His working-class status, however, makes him decidedly not of her social class. Forster agonizes over this dilemma in *Howards End*, going so far as to plot what most critics regard as an implausible and unconvincing love affair between Helen and Leonard. Nevertheless, Forster’s insistence on conflating culture with class, books and reading with social standing, may be the result of his own middle-class prejudices. The well-read workingman is a threat to the social distinctions that culture upholds. If too much distinction is conferred on him, how are the middle classes to maintain their advantage? The mass-production of books, the rise of subscription

libraries, as well as the public library movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries made more books available to a greater number and variety of readers. Similarly, reading takes on a social and cultural significance in *Howards End*. Leonard Bast is not awful because he is working class; he is awful because he dreams of joining the leisured reading classes, which requires breaching the exclusive domain of their private libraries.

According to Helen, because he is poor and uneducated, Leonard Bast's heart is "full of little things" (189). He is bound to books—to Ruskin and Stevenson—and to small distractions like lost umbrellas. He has a sense of "great things" (such as the idea of Death) but cannot "receive" them (189). Unlike Helen, who receives a comfortable income without having to work, Leonard cannot afford to spend much time on intellectual pursuits, despite his desire to do so: "I get no time for reading," he tells her (185). Torn between his commitment to self-improvement through reading and his anxieties about gainful employment and financial stability, Leonard must face, in real terms, the abstractions Helen luxuriously contemplates: "Death, Life, and Materialism were fine words, but would Mr. Wilcox take him on as a clerk?" (188).

When Bast, a clerk with the Porphyryon Fire Insurance Company, calls at Wickham Place, the Schlegels find a "young man, colourless, toneless" but with "[h]ints of robustness" (91). Margaret feels that she "knew this type very well—the vague aspirations, the mental dishonesty, the familiarity with the outsides of books" (92). In reading or appraising Leonard, Margaret faults him for his superficial knowledge of books. However, the hypocrisy of her own reading is clear: she judges the book by its cover. Margaret's attention to the inside-outside composition of books and people recalls

Forster's distinction between readers and collectors, as well as his segregation of the classes within the house: the middle classes are legitimized readers or cultural insiders; they inhabit furnished interiors and are likewise furnished with cultural knowledge. They enjoy free access to cultural goods because they can afford them.¹³ Leonard's alleged interest in the external qualities of books—in their cultural cachet or capital—disqualifies him from insider status, as does his working-class standing. He is thus doubly excluded: he is barred from joining the middle classes in their book-rich private libraries, and his unschooled attempts to acquire culture are regarded as inauthentic.

Uneducated clerks like Leonard, Margaret implies, cannot possibly be taken seriously as readers. As she says to Henry Wilcox, "His brain is filled with the husks of books, cultures—horrible; we want him to wash out his brain and go to the real thing" (115). As Jonathan Rose points out in "Intellectuals Among the Masses; or, What Was Leonard Bast Really Like?" the term "brainwashing" did not originate in the Korean War (5). The Schlegels want to "wash out" or eliminate Leonard's rudimentary understanding of books. They want to rehabilitate or renovate his relationship to culture and to life, the "real thing." According to Helen, the solution lies not in freer access to books and libraries, but rather in careful guidance or supervision of Bast's reading: "He likes books, and what one may roughly call adventure, and if he had a chance—But he is so poor. [...] How should he be helped? Should he and those like him be given free libraries? I said 'No!' He doesn't want more books to read, but to read books rightly" (105-6). The Schlegels have strong ideas about the use of books and the right (or wrong) way to read

¹³ Another irony of Margaret's assessment of Leonard is that he cannot possibly afford to be a collector, someone truly familiar with the "outsides of books." Because he is poor, he must take the same approach to culture as he does to his furniture and lodgings—he rents or borrows it.

them. To an uneducated but greedy reader like Bast, free access to a library filled with a surplus of books would be dangerous. Margaret and Helen want to teach Bast to read books and to live his life “rightly.” Forster implies that reading books in the right way is a precondition to living in the right way.

Leonard’s class position is thus at odds with his hunger for cultural edification. A social climber, he reads Ruskin “with reverence” (40), and hopes for a “sudden conversion” through culture: “if he kept on with Ruskin, and the Queen’s Hall Concerts, and some pictures by Watts, he would one day push his head out of the grey waters and see the universe” (40). Leonard had hoped “to come to Culture suddenly, much as the Revivalist hopes to come to Jesus” (40). He thought it would be a sudden, transforming force, something one acquires, like a collectible, for the purposes of easy social discourse: “Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well formed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started! But it would take one years. With an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women who had been reading steadily from childhood?” (32). Because Bast emulates bourgeois readers like the Schlegels, who have inherited or “acquired” their father’s books, Forster extends his satire to them as well. Culture, he implies, is a middle-class birthright, the default acquisition of cultural capital. The Schlegels are “well formed” because they have been reading since childhood; they read because their father was a reader and because they have time for reading. Conversely, Bast, with his meagre lunchtime and “shattered” or interrupted evening reading, cannot possibly “catch up” with the Schlegels’ lifelong connection to culture. Though his methods are dubious, Bast’s longing to acquire culture is sincere: he seeks

self-improvement and dreams of a more “leisured” life in which to indulge in the pleasures of books, music, and painting.

Steady or uninterrupted reading is thus a luxury of the leisured classes. At the end of Chapter Six, when Jacky Bast repeatedly interrupts her husband’s reading of Ruskin to call him to bed, Forster underscores not only the difference between the classes (Margaret and Helen frequently read in peace) but also Leonard’s frustration with a partner who is illiterate and does not understand his passion for books. When Jacky comes home from work and finds Leonard reading, she asks, “‘Is that a book you’re reading?’ and he said: ‘That’s a book,’ and drew it from her reluctant grasp” (42). Books and reading serve to disconnect or distance Leonard and Jacky rather than connect them, as this bedtime exchange suggests:

“Len?”

“You in bed?” he asked, his forehead twitching.

“M’m.”

“All right.”

Presently she called him again.

“I must clean my boots ready for the morning,” he answered.

Presently she called him again.

“I rather want to get this chapter done.”

“What?”

He closed his ears against her.

“What’s that?”

“All right, Jacky, nothing; I’m reading a book.”

“What?” (44)

If reading is a form of connecting, interrupted reading signifies disconnection. Though they are of the same class, Jacky and Leonard could not be more different. Her husband’s reading alienates Jacky, who is neither a reader nor “a great talker” (*HE* 42). If Leonard is a reader, the uncomprehending Jacky is the passive book-object. In one of the songs she sings, she compares herself to a book that has been “shelved”: “*On the shelf, / On the shelf, / Boys, boys, I’m on the shelf*” (42). Considered past her prime, Jacky is no longer valued for her beauty, for the attractions of “her smile or her figure” (42).

Part of Leonard’s unhappiness, then, is his sense of obligation to Jacky, a spouse who neither appreciates nor understands his bookish aspirations, and whose sexually compromised past prevents her from advancing herself. When she calls him once more, Leonard, who is still trying to read, is struck by the contrast between the “folly” and “misery” of his reality and the “beauty” of the literary observations he finds in Ruskin: “It occurred to him...that the power of Nature could not be shortened by the folly nor her beauty altogether saddened by the misery, of such as Leonard” (44). Leonard, who refers to himself in the third-person, like a character in a book, wants to escape his miserable life. He is forced to acknowledge, however, that the romance of Ruskin’s Venice is at odds with the reality of modern-day London. Despite being “full of high purpose, full of beauty, full even of sympathy and the love of men” (40), Ruskin’s prose still eludes “all that was actual and insistent in Leonard’s life. For it was the voice of one who had never been dirty or hungry, and had not guessed successfully what dirt and hunger are” (40). Once again, Leonard draws attention to the troubling disparity between his life and the romantic abstractions of books. Dirt and hunger are not simply words or concepts but real

things. Books cannot provide enough of an escape; they cannot make Leonard forget that his own world is nothing like Ruskin's idyllic book-world.

Leonard Bast compares his life to what he reads about in books, but he also compares himself to the Schlegels. As a social climber, he aspires to enjoy the "politico-economical-aesthetic atmosphere" that reigns at their home (45), a comfortable milieu apart from London's haste. The Schlegel household represents a "life of cultured but not ignoble ease" (85), a life that Bast fiercely envies and covets. The Schlegels, he muses, had "come to [culture]; they had done the trick; their hands were upon the ropes, once and for all. And meanwhile, his flat was dark, as well as stuffy" (40). Like James and Wharton, Forster often employs architectural tropes to convey the differences between characters and their social status. When he first visits them at Wickham Place, Leonard watches the Schlegels climb an interior staircase to an inner room, a private space that embodies the culture and leisure he is unable to attain:

They had all passed up that narrow, rich staircase at Wickham Place, to some ample room, whither he could never follow them, not if he read for ten hours a day. Oh, it was no good; this continual aspiration. Some are born cultured; the rest had better go in for whatever comes easy. To see life steadily and to see it whole was not for the likes of him. (44)

Bast's "continual aspiration" to acquire culture, his longing to live like the Schlegels, only serves to remind him of the great distance between them. Without the time and resources for reading, how can he afford to see life "steadily" or "whole"? Leisure, Forster implies, is a necessary precondition for making connections.

As a bookish social climber, Leonard Bast recalls Hyacinth Robinson in *The*

Princess Casamassima. The uneducated, working-class Bast serves as a foil for the well-read, middle-class Schlegels. As Jonathan Rose asserts, Bast is “anxious and envious among the rentier intelligentsia, and his attempts to acquire culture are hopeless. [...] He plays the piano ‘badly and vulgarly,’ and, what is worse, he plays Grieg, a bad and vulgar composer” (5). The middle classes find the vulgar or unrefined cultural tastes of the working classes reassuring; they define their own cultural proclivities against those of types like Jacky and Leonard Bast. If the working classes prefer Grieg, Grieg must be a vulgar composer. According to Bourdieu, perhaps the “sole function” of the working class in what he calls “the system of aesthetic positions” is to serve as “a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations” (57). This cultural snobbery, which is based on negative or reverse aesthetic positions, is inextricably connected to the English class system. Class and culture are historically conjoined, and Forster explores the nature of this conjunction in the encounters between the lower-class Basts and the upper-class Schlegel and Wilcox families.

In particular, Forster examines what Bourdieu calls “the symbolic class struggle with the certified holders of cultural competence” (330). The cultured middle classes set the standard of cultural competence to which the lower classes aspire. Thus, Leonard Bast’s struggle to “raise himself” through the acquisition of cultural capital is connected with snobbery in *Howards End*. As Sean Latham suggests, the word “snob” was used in the nineteenth century by Cambridge students to refer derisively to lower-class citizens of the town who were not associated with the university. The word’s meaning later expanded to include anyone “who has little or no breeding or good taste” (qtd. in Latham

12). Thus, until the early twentieth century, the word signified the exact opposite of its contemporary meaning: “one who despises those who are considered inferiors in rank, attainment or class” (qtd. in Latham 13). As Latham puts it, snobbery initially described not the arrogance of an individual possessing good taste and social refinement, but “those class climbers who vulgarly imitated the tastes and habits of the upper classes” (13). In this sense, Leonard Bast is a snob. He fulfils the two crucial elements of snobbery: “first, an essentially empty public display of taste, and second, an imitation of a perceived superior” (Latham 17). The label “snob” cannot be applied to the Schlegels or the Wilcoxes, who have no “perceived superiors.” They are examples of what Latham terms “the big people” (17). The self-taught, social-climbing Leonard Bast, on the other hand, reads Ruskin to “catch up” with the middle classes, to get the bigger outlook afforded them by their father’s books and university educations.

From the Schlegels’ point of view, Leonard’s reading and concert-going are thus a form of “social mimicry”: “This is class climbing of the most obvious sort, in which the presumably authentic desires and sensibilities of an individual are supplanted by an inept act of social mimicry” (Latham 20). What Latham describes as the social mimicry of the snob, Bourdieu defines as the “grotesque homage” of the autodidact or self-taught man, an individual who has been excluded from the “superstructures of wealth and art” (*HE* 36), those “bastions of social capital” (Latham 39): “The old-style autodidact was fundamentally defined by a reverence for culture which was induced by abrupt and early exclusion, and which led to an exalted, misplaced piety, inevitably perceived by the possessors of legitimate culture as a sort of grotesque homage” (Bourdieu 84). Leonard’s cultural “piety,” especially his reverence for books, is “misplaced” or “grotesque”

because it is excessive. When it comes to culture, Leonard loses all sense of “proportion,” a term Forster uses eight times in the novel. Indeed, “to live with proportion” (*HE* 58) is one of the middle-class mottos of *Howards End*. It is, of course, easier to live with proportion if one has been educated and has ready access to books and paintings. With culture, as Bourdieu asserts, “the important thing is to know without ever having learnt” (330).

As an autodidact, Leonard Bast exemplifies the social and cultural “outsider” (Bourdieu 84). These individuals “use a deeply orthodox self-teaching as a way of continuing a brutally foreshortened trajectory by their own initiative” (Bourdieu 84). In other words, Leonard unwittingly reinforces his cultural exclusion by trying to overcome it. With his regimented and self-directed program of reading, and his compulsive drive to acquire knowledge, he makes himself ridiculous. He is not, however, alone. In *An Introduction to Book History*, David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery attest to a “strong tradition of autodidacticism among the working class” in Britain and Germany in the early twentieth century (115). In a diary entry on Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf ironically confirms the middle classes’ disdain for the autodidact when she compares Joyce to “a self-taught working man, and we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking, and ultimately nauseating” (*Moment’s* 148). The connection is clear: for the fiercely competitive Woolf, Joyce’s “insistent” literary allusiveness in *Ulysses* recalled the distasteful striving of the self-taught class climber. Of course, not having gone to university, Woolf was also an autodidact. In this regard, her comments perhaps pertain more to her class or pedigree (she is, after all, related to Leslie Stephen and Thackeray), than her education.

Leonard Bast is the definition of the self-taught or self-made man in *Howards End*. Unlike the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes, he is not a man of property, a possessor of inherited wealth and culture. He has, accordingly, “the insecurity which haunts self-made men” (Bourdieu 330), rather than “the certainty of having which is grounded in the certainty of having always had” (Bourdieu 329). Leonard’s familiarity with books replaces the family from which he is estranged; his relation to culture thus stands in for the family inheritances or connections he does not enjoy. As Bourdieu suggests, the self-taught man takes culture for knowledge, placing an over-reliance or too-great faith in it:

Identifying culture with knowledge, they think that the cultivated man is one who possesses an immense fund of knowledge and refuse to believe him when he professes [...] that, brought down to its simplest and most sublime expression, it amounts to a *relation* to culture [...]. Making culture a matter of life and death, truth and falsehood, they cannot suspect the irresponsible self-assurance, the insolent off-handedness and even the hidden dishonesty presupposed by the merest page of an inspired essay on philosophy, art or literature. Self-made men, they cannot have the familiar relation to culture which authorizes the liberties and audacities of those who are linked to it by birth, that is, by nature and essence. (330-31)

In this sense, Leonard’s disproportionate love of books, his gravitas towards all culture, betrays his illegitimacy. Forced into an unorthodox or “heretical” acquisition of cultural knowledge (Bourdieu 328), he takes culture too seriously. Culture becomes a matter of life and death to him, as his death-by-books implies. Yet, with his concern for “little things” like lost umbrellas, Leonard represents the “petit bourgeois” (Bourdieu 330).

Given the hastiness of his acquired knowledge and the seriousness with which he offers it, this type embodies “the antithesis of the legitimate relation to culture” (Bourdieu 330). The petit bourgeois do not know “how to play the game of culture as a game. They take culture too seriously to go in for bluff or imposture or even for the distance and casualness which show true familiarity” (Bourdieu 330). As an autodidact who follows his own programme of reading and takes his reading seriously, Leonard Bast is “ignorant of the right to be ignorant that is conferred by certificates of knowledge” (Bourdieu 329). This becomes clear in his bookish conversations with the cultivated Schlegels. Like the “petite bourgeoisie” or “old-style autodidacts” (Bourdieu 84), Leonard wants to offer proof of his culture “even when it is not asked for” (Bourdieu 84). As a result, he betrays his exclusion from the leisured reading class by too eagerly wanting to prove his membership.

On his second visit to the Schlegel household, Leonard finds himself “itching to talk about books and make the most of his romantic hour” (*HE* 111). Like reading, talking about books provides an escape for the poor clerk: “And the precious minutes slipped away, and Jacky and squalor came nearer. At last he could bear it no longer, and broke in, reciting the names of books feverishly. There was a moment of piercing joy when Margaret said: ‘So *you* like Carlyle,’ and then the door opened” (112). This moment of bookish *sympatico* is interrupted by the arrival of Henry and Evie Wilcox, neither of whom share Leonard’s or the Schlegels’ affinity for books. Library intrusions and the interruption of reading or talking of books are already disorienting; when the intruders are non-readers, the intrusion is even more symbolic: readers feel the interruption more acutely because their passion for books is not shared.

Leonard Bast's desire to talk about books with the Schlegels, to be able to discourse easily on any subject, anticipates the freewheeling "booktalk" of Stephen Dedalus and friends in the library scene of *Ulysses*. Like Leonard, Stephen is a snob: "Several characters from *Ulysses* might [...] be labeled snobs, including a dispirited Stephen Dedalus, the highly educated Haines, and the various poets of the Celtic revival who gather together in the Irish National Library episode" (Latham 123). Stephen's penchant for literary name-dropping is shared by Leonard, who compulsively accumulates literary references as he talks. At the Schlegels, when he tries to explain the motivation for his long, overnight walk to the countryside outside of London, he turns to books for help: "Yes, but I want—I wanted—have you ever read *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*? [...] It's a beautiful book. I wanted to get back to the Earth, don't you see, like Richard does in the end. Or have you ever read Stevenson's *Prince Otto*? [...] That's another beautiful book. You get back to the Earth in that" (93). Unsure of how to express his ideas, Bast frames his experience in literary terms. Books are "beautiful" because they help him express his desire to "get back to the Earth," a romantic notion that he likely lifted from a book.

The narrator, who shares Margaret's point of view concerning Leonard's alarming weakness for books, describes culture as a kind of veil or shroud that falls oppressively on Leonard: "But culture closed in on him again. He asked if they had ever read E. V. Lucas's *Open Road*" (93-4). Frustrated by Leonard's over-reliance on books and second-hand or mediated experience, Helen responds by asking for a more personal account of the walk: "No doubt it's another beautiful book, but I'd rather hear about your road" (94). Unable to speak directly of his own experience, Leonard returns again, even more

feverishly, to books and booktalk. Culture is a surrogate for personality. Title-dropping relieves Leonard of the burden of forming his own ideas. "Culture," as Austin Warren suggests, "is a list of books" (52). Listing books is not, however, synonymous with reading or connecting. Despite his abundant allusions to the classics, Leonard's cultural knowledge is not authentic: "His brain might be full of names, he might have even heard of Monet and Debussy; the trouble was that he could not string them together into a sentence, he could not make them 'tell'" (*HE* 32).

Leonard's over-eager booktalk advertises his imposture. He does not legitimately belong to the middle class because his cultural knowledge was not acquired in a legitimate way. As Bourdieu suggests, the autodidact's knowledge is like a "collection of unstrung pearls" (328). Like his idiosyncratic system of classification, his knowledge is arbitrary, capricious, and dangerously "unchecked" by institutional obstacles (328): "The apparent heterogeneity of [the autodidact's] preferences, his confusion of genres and ranks, operetta and opera, popularization and science, the unpredictability of his ignorance and knowledge, with no other connections than the sequence of biographical accidents, all stem from the particularities of a heretical mode of acquisition" (Bourdieu 328). If culture is a list of books, then the consumption of a book's "externals," its circumstantial information, replaces consumption of the text itself (Bourdieu 330). Having never been to school, Leonard Bast reads wrongly. Moreover, he replaces reading with booktalk. In this sense, Leonard shows how cultural knowledge can be superficial. His "stockpiling avidity" (Bourdieu 330) is cultural collecting "carried to the extreme, i.e., to absurdity" (Bourdieu 330). Rather than contemplation, Leonard favours consumption. He is not a book collector but a book-title collector. Like Percy Gryce or

Simon Rosedale in *The House of Mirth*, Leonard prefers accumulation to collecting proper. Like Bourdieu's petit bourgeois, he always knows either "too much or too little" and is thus "condemned endlessly to amass disparate, often devalued information which is to legitimate knowledge as his stamp collection is to an art collection, a miniature collection" (Bourdieu 329).

With his compulsive title-dropping, Bast thus emulates a "real" collection and "real" or legitimate cultural knowledge. His conversation collects, like a mad or compulsive series, a glut of allusions to writers such as Henry Thoreau, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Borrow Stonehenge, and Richard Jefferies:

[Margaret] could not stop him. Borrow was imminent after Jefferies—
Borrow, Thoreau, and sorrow. R. L. S. brought up the rear, and the
outburst ended in a swamp of books. No disrespect to these great names.
The fault is ours, not theirs. They mean us to use them for sign-posts, and
are not to blame if, in our weakness, we mistake the sign-post for the
destination. (96)

Mentally and discursively bogged down by books, Bast ends his account in a "swamp of books," an incomprehensible no-man's land of intertextual connections which only he perceives. In the grips of this literary swoon, one reference leads to another until his talk loses sense. Bast's "fault," Forster implies, is a distinctively modernist fault. Like the modern writer, he "borrows" too liberally from the books he reads. He appropriates their contents to articulate his own ideas and to further his own narrative. He mistakes culture for an end. Moreover, Bast uses books as shortcuts to culture; his knowledge of the outsides of books substitutes for clear thinking.

Ultimately, however, the Schlegels find a way to break through Bast's wall of books, the literary bastion he has built up in place of genuine cultural understanding. When they ask him about the dawn and whether it was wonderful to see, he replies, with "unforgettable sincerity," that no, it was not. At this "[d]own toppled all that had seemed ignoble or literary in his talk, down toppled tiresome R. L. S. and the 'love of the earth' and his silk top-hat. In the presence of these women Leonard had arrived" (95). Bast's sincerity signals his ability to speak in his own language rather than rely on literary stock-phrases or clichés ("love of the earth"). To the Schlegels, he is most noble when he forgets his "ignoble" or insincere booktalk. Helen and Margaret perceive Bast's capacity to appreciate life outside of books and yet to connect his own experiences to the spirit of romantic adventure in which they were written: "Within his cramped little mind dwelt something that was greater than Jefferies's books—the spirit that led Jefferies to write them; and his dawn, though revealing nothing but monotones, was part of the eternal sunrise which shows George Borrow Stonehenge" (*HE* 96). Ironically (and hypocritically), the Schlegels ultimately connect Bast to their romantic view of literary history. They read his walk as "part of" and evocative of the "eternal sunrise" in literature.

If Leonard Bast's Achilles' heel is his penchant for books and booktalk, the Wilcoxes are guilty of a predilection for "business talk" (141), and the Schlegels suffer from their fetishization of houses and furniture. In their encounters with Wilcoxes and Basts, the Schlegels renovate their own relations to objects. When Helen first meets the Wilcoxes, she finds that "[o]ne by one the Schlegel fetishes had been overthrown, and, though professing to defend them, she had rejoiced" (19). Just as Bast's talk borrows

from books, Margaret tends to frame all experience in architectural terms. Margaret, commenting on Leonard Bast's walk, observes: "You tried to get away from the fogs that are stifling us all—away past books and houses to the truth. You were looking for a real home" (113). Here Margaret aligns Bast's weakness for books with her own penchant for houses. Books and houses stifle and distract. For the Schlegels, a "real home" is the site of "truth" or sincerity, of connections. One should try to get beyond the seductive draw of "solid objects" (Mao 25) and attain a spiritual connection to all things. Ideally, a home is largely a spiritual entity, an idea—a place unconstrained by books, furniture, and other trappings of property ownership and inheritance. Like the mind, a real home is a place that cannot be owned. For the Schlegels, who have the luxury of leisured reading time, books are equated with insincerity; they distract from life. Unlike Bast, they can afford to take a hypocritical or ambivalent relationship to books and culture because they are, thanks to their middle-class status, cultural insiders.

This scene of sincere "interchange" or booktalk represents a transformation of Leonard's view of books and of the Schlegels's view of the bookish clerk (*HE* 99). Before this epiphanic conversation with the Schlegels, Leonard believed that the "unknown" was found in "books, literature, clever conversation, culture. One raised oneself by study, and got upsides with the world" (99). Afterwards, he feels quite differently: "I shall always look back on this talk with you as one of the finest things in my life. Really. I mean this. We can never repeat. It has done me real good, and there we had better leave it" (96). Books, Bast feels, will "never be the same to me again" (188). Bast's booktalk with the Schlegels shows him that the "barriers of wealth" (99) could come down; they had agreed that "there was something beyond life's daily grey" (99). If

reading produces and reinforces class distinctions, it can also help to transcend them. As Helen tells Leonard when he leaves Wickham Place, “never forget you’re better than Jefferies” (97). In spite of their initial disapproval of Bast’s obsession with books, Margaret defends him to Henry Wilcox: “I said before—he isn’t a type. He cares about adventures rightly. He’s certain that our smug existence isn’t all. He’s vulgar and hysterical and bookish, but I don’t think that sums him up. There’s manhood in him as well. Yes, that’s what I’m trying to say. He’s a real man” (117). Though Bast may read books wrongly, the Schlegels recognize and commend his sense of the importance of romance or “adventure,” of explorations outside of (though parallel to) the realm of books. Indeed, in spite of (or in Helen’s case, perhaps because of) Leonard’s hunger for booktalk, the Schlegels find themselves drawn to him: “Poor dear Mr. Bast!” says Helen. “[H]e wanted to talk literature, and we would talk business. Such a muddle of a man, and yet so worth pulling through. I like him extraordinarily” (117).

Another kind of cultural bastion, a place defined by the presence of their father’s books, paintings, and other family heirlooms, the Schlegels’s Wickham Place represents the embodiment of culture and a cultured lifestyle. Despite this, Margaret and Helen privilege life outside of drawing-rooms and libraries. To Bast, the Schlegels, in their comfortable, book-filled home “were Romance, and so was the room to which he had finally penetrated, with the queer sketches of people bathing upon its walls, and so were the very tea-cups, with their delicate borders of wild strawberries” (109). Like characters in the books he reads, the Schlegels embody the Romantic spirit of books: “But they to him were denizens of Romance, who must keep to the corner he had assigned them, pictures that must not walk out of their frames” (97). Bast is determined not to let

Romance “interfere with his life” (109). The Schlegels, who embody the Romantic spirit of the books he reads, do ultimately interrupt his life. They pass on Henry Wilcox’s advice that he should quit his post at the Porphyryon and take another, ultimately less stable job. Helen tries to help Jacky and Leonard by giving them money. The most obvious interference of the Schlegels in Bast’s life is Helen’s short-lived tryst with Leonard, which produces a child.

Despite her insistence on reading books and individuals in the right way, Margaret reads Leonard wrongly. She overlooks his genuine love of reading, as well as the inherent limitations of his poverty and lowborn social status. Several critics share Margaret’s blindness to the sincerity of Leonard’s cultural curiosity, content to take Forster’s description of Bast’s “half-baked mind” (*HE* 40) at face value. Jonathan Rose argues that *Howards End* “conveys none of that naive but genuine intellectual ferment” (13). Rose blames Forster, suggesting that it seems “inconceivable” to him “that a clerk could actually be thrilled by literature” (6). Yet Bast *is* thrilled by literature, and his discovery of it does produce what Rose calls “an awesome intellectual epiphany” (6). When he finds himself in a library at the end of the novel, Bast finally succumbs to the immense burden of cultural inheritance. Even though that heritage is not his, he experiences its awe-inspiring and life-altering effect firsthand.

“Things happen”: Leonard’s End

“Here was the father; leave it at that” (*HE* 261).

In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster suggests that death is “congenial” to the novelist because it “ends a book conveniently” (63). Similarly, in “Pessimism in Literature,” a

lecture Forster gave in 1906, he makes a distinction between life and literature by suggesting that “the *end* is of supreme importance in a book” but not in life (qtd. in Pinchin 88). In his lecture, Forster ponders the endings of modern novels, suggesting that optimists end them with the “old answer”—marriage—while the pessimist, “who is more modern in feeling, ends a book by some scene of separation” (qtd. in Pinchin 88). Given Forster’s proclivity for killing off characters at the end of his novels, it is not surprising that death is “the inevitable word” (263) in *Howards End*, as it is in *The House of Mirth*. Despite the inevitability of death in the published version of the novel, the manuscript version of *Howards End* reveals Forster’s original uncertainty about how to end the novel. In his working notes for the manuscript, Forster contemplates several possible endings:

Then I think that Charles [...] is sent by his father to horse whip Leonard, and is killed by him, and L flings himself out of the window.

Or it may be that Helen & Leonard die.

Or perhaps Leonard lives. (Forster, *Manuscript* 355)

Ultimately, neither Charles Wilcox nor Helen Schlegel die, but Leonard does not live. His death is the price that must be paid for the connections that are made in the novel between characters and classes, as well as books and readers. Frustrated by her husband’s infuriating hypocrisy, and his refusal to apply the same moral standard to his own actions as to those of others, Margaret makes this relationship between death and connecting clear:

“You shall see the connection if it kills you, Henry! You have had a mistress—I forgave you. My sister has a lover—you drive her from the

house. Do you see the connection? Stupid, hypocritical, cruel—oh, contemptible!—a man who insults his wife when she’s alive and cants with her memory when she’s dead. A man who ruins a woman for his pleasure, and casts her off to ruin other men. And gives bad financial advice, and then says he is not responsible. These, man, are you. You can’t recognize them, because you cannot connect.” (243-44)

As Oliver Stallybrass notes, the nature of Margaret’s speech on the need to connect was even more explicit in the manuscript version: “Connect! You shall connect if I kill you” (Forster, *Manuscript* xiii). Margaret seems to speak in Forster’s own, authorial voice here. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Forster connects these characters and their fates in the library scene at Howards End. Leonard’s death and Charles’s indictment are the killing price—the penalty not only for the connections that are made, but also for certain characters’ failure to connect.

Forster brilliantly joins the disparate threads of the plot in this final scene, suggesting that the library is the natural site of connection. According to Royle, “[c]oincidences become significant only when close together in time” (*Uncanny* 204). Given the close proximity of books from all periods in a library, and the way that coincidences, like books, pile up in this scene, Forster figures the library as the uncanny source of coincidence in the novel. Books have a life of their own. The climax, which takes place in the front hall of Howards End, is marked by a series of coincidences that come together to end Leonard Bast’s life: Miss Avery unpacks the Schlegel’s library; Helen arrives at Howards End to pick up her books; Charles Wilcox, Helen and Margaret Schlegel, and Leonard Bast all congregate at Howards End.

Leonard Bast dies in the library, buried alive by books: “Women were screaming. A stick, very bright, descended. It hurt him, not where it descended, but in the heart. Books fell over him in a shower. Nothing had sense” (*HE* 258). Bast dies in a “shower” or avalanche of books. His death is senseless yet revelatory. Like the uncanny, “it comes out of the blue” (Royle, *Uncanny* 320), and yet, as Gordon C. F. Bearn says of the uncanny, it seems somehow preordained or “prepared” by the events preceding it: “If the world comes to seem uncanny, this will not happen gradually [...]; it will come all of a sudden. It will be prepared of course, like an avalanche, but when it comes, it comes all at once. The uncanniness comes as a revelation” (qtd. in Royle 320).

Given his curious affinity for books despite the cultural burden they bear, it is appropriate that Bast should be buried under a mass of books. As Michael Edwards suggests, “Books, after all, have been Leonard’s life-blood. They have inspired him, and they have shown him his frustration. Indirectly, books have been the cause of his associating with the Schlegels and have thus led by devious paths to his death [...]. [Bast] is thus fittingly buried under the books he read but did not fully understand” (113). The ambiguity of Bast’s death is striking: it is unclear whether he dies from literal or figurative causes—is the “hurt” in his heart a heart attack or grief? Do books crush him or is it the “cumulative weight of the Schlegel library, steeped in the tradition of German romanticism” (Christie 80)? Despite the sense that it is somehow fated, Bast’s death is accidental, the result of “natural causes” or the “logical, yet senseless, train” of narrative events (260): “Here Leonard lay dead in the garden, from natural causes; yet life was a deep, deep river, death a blue sky, life was a house, death a wisp of hay, a flower, a tower, life and death were anything and everything, except this ordered insanity [...].

Here was the father; leave it at that" (261). According to Royle, who comments on an essay by Freud, "being buried alive *per se* is not necessarily uncanny; what is really uncanny is when it happens *by mistake*. [...] [W]hat tops the lot when it comes to measuring maximum uncanniness is being committed to the earth not because you are dead but because you *appear to be* dead. It is a matter of ostensibly or being seemingly dead [*scheintot*], as if in suspended animation" (*Uncanny* 143). The ghostly presence or "suspended animation" of figures such as Mrs. Wilcox and Leonard Bast blur the boundaries between life and death, beginnings and ends. These characters appear to be dead but uncannily live on in houses and archives, books and offspring. In this regard, Bast is like a book: he does not die so much as *end*. Coming to the end of a book is not like dying; the reader can always begin again.

The end of Leonard Bast is thus inscribed in the history of *Howards End* and *Howards End*—the house and the book. In fact, Bast's death is connected to an earlier tragedy involving another pair of young lovers: Tom Howard proposed to Miss Avery. When she refused, he "went out and was killed" (161). As the last male Howard, Tom Howard represents the "end" of the Howard line. Had Miss Avery accepted his proposal, the line might have continued. Just as the Howard line dies off, so too does Bast's death signify the end of *Howards End* under the ownership of the Howards and Wilcoxes. Ironically, Dolly Wilcox makes this connection at the end of the novel, after hearing the story about Tom Howard: "I say! *Howards End*—Howard's Ended!" (161). As the father of a new line, however, Bast instigates a beginning. Forster traces the genealogical history of the house from its patriarchal origins to its uncanny, matriarchal regeneration. Miss Avery, Mrs. Wilcox, and the Schlegel sisters refuse to see *Howards End* as "ended."

Like Joyce and Woolf, Forster wants to renovate the idea of cultural inheritance: houses, despite being lumber rooms of antiquarian furniture, are culturally alive—sites of cultural, affective, and spiritual transfer or connection.

The Romantic legacy of books and reading, and the haunting of libraries and houses by precursors, is thus linked in *Howards End* to Leonard Bast's fate. "One can but see," he tells the Schlegels, "as Ibsen says, 'things happen.'" (111). Things happen in books and things happen outside of books, and sometimes, as in *Howards End*, things happen in books with books. As a modern reader, Leonard Bast is uncannily connected to things. Despite their metaphysical—and metaphorical—contents, books are solid objects. Like the "toppling down" of Robert Louis Stevenson and the "closing in" of culture, Leonard's readerly allusion to Ibsen foreshadows, or "books," his death: reading, Forster implies, makes things happen.

Conclusion

The Melancholy Library

The date is 1 January 1941. Bombs are dropping on London, and Virginia Woolf sits by the fire at her house in Rodmell, reading a book that she salvaged from the ruins of 37 Mecklenburgh Square. In three months she will drown herself in the Ouse River. But for now she is busy planning her latest literary project—a history of English literature that she will never finish. “Did I tell you I’m reading the whole of English literature through?” she writes to her friend Ethel Smyth. “Thank God, as you would say, one’s fathers left one a taste for reading! Instead of thinking, by May we shall be—whatever it may be: I think, only 3 months to read Ben Jonson, Milton, Donne, & all the rest!” (*Letters* VI: 3685). Until the end of her life, Woolf’s taste for reading consumed and comforted her. She turned to books and the literary past they preserve as a sanctuary from the terrifying realities of the war and the uncertainty of the future. “Yes, I was thinking: we live without a future. That’s what’s queer: with our noses pressed to a closed door” (*Writer’s* 434-5).

Woolf’s last days as a reader were spent in the company of the classics. Her desire to read through the history of English literature attests to her voracious appetite for books, and her intention to record that history evinces an urge to document, exhaustively, what reading meant to her as a writer. In her final diary entry, Woolf wrote: “I mark Henry James’ sentence: observe perpetually. Observe the oncome of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despondency. By that means it becomes serviceable. Or so I hope. I insist upon spending this time to the best advantage. I will go down with my colours flying” (*Writer’s* 436). For Woolf, as for Don Quixote, literature was an “unfinishable

adventure” (Cervantes 22). The daunting accumulation of classics, as well as the proliferation and destruction of books and libraries in the modern period, attests to the impossibility of reading through the library. Nonetheless, to read is to salvage the past. This scene of Woolf’s reading illustrates what Henry James, Edith Wharton, and E. M. Forster express in their fiction, namely that books matter. Reading is an act of recuperation, affiliation, and affirmation. In this regard, modernism “is as much a strategy of *reading* as it is a style of *writing*” (Dettmar 13). “Perhaps,” writes Kevin Dettmar, “we are just beginning to appreciate what was apparent to the Modernists all along—that the edifice of Modernism was always vulnerable, and that the best Modernist writing always betrayed the artifice of its construction in ways we have begun to call postmodern—that the monuments of High Modernism already contained within them the seeds of their own (de)construction” (14-15).

As a storehouse of the classics, the modern library exemplifies the “edifice” of modernism. The library is a monument to both the durability and the vulnerability of culture and its artifacts. Archives, similarly, point to the constructedness of literary modernism, the sense that it is composed from an accumulation of paper. And yet, because they are unbound or unfinished, archives epitomize the deconstruction of libraries. The mess of archives belies the order of libraries. An archive is thus an unpacked library. To handle archival material is to interface with, or intimately intrude on, the buried domain of the past. In *Riding with Rilke*, Ted Bishop describes the first time he experienced the “Archival Jolt” (33). Nodding off over Woolf’s manuscripts in the British Library, he comes upon her suicide note. When he realizes that he is holding the letter she wrote to Leonard shortly before she died, he feels a “physical shock”: “I lost

any bodily sense, felt I was spinning into a vortex, a connection that collapsed the intervening decades. This note wasn't a record of the event—this was the event itself. This writing. And it was not for me. I had walked in on something unbearably personal" (34-5). This experience of reading cements Bishop's fate as an "archive junkie" (36). Archives, he discovers, are portals to knowledge and the source of connection. Reading a personal letter addressed to someone else makes him feel like the recipient. For the first time, he considers "Leonard's place in all this" (36). Archives, as the narrator of *The Aspern Papers* discovers, are records intended for other eyes. The reader of an archive substitutes for the original recipient. Reading, in this sense, is an act of exposure or intrusion, as well as a gesture towards contact.

Walter Benjamin experiences a similar jolt in "Unpacking My Library." While handling his books he becomes conscious of the way that memory takes on a material form. His library embodies "a chaos of memories" (60) that surges toward him as he contemplates his possessions. By the end of the essay, however, Benjamin's anticipatory mood as he surveys his piles of books gives way to a more elegiac tone. He admits that "the phenomenon of collecting" is waning (67). Book collecting is becoming an unfashionable activity. The private library is being replaced by public collections, which are "less objectionable socially and more useful academically" (67): "I do know that time is running out for the type that I am discussing here and have been representing before you a bit *ex officio*. But, as Hegel put it, only when it is dark does the owl of Minerva begin its flight. Only in extinction is the collector comprehended" (67). Just as Bishop acknowledges the enduring power of archives to collapse distinctions of time, space, and

identity, Benjamin pays tribute to the dying art of book collecting, as well as the reader's romantic wish to "renew the old world" (61).

This study draws together a number of conclusions about modernist reading spaces and practices. First, modernist writers demonstrate a love-hate relationship with the library and the archive as the embodiment of cultural heritage. As Forster writes in an essay on Woolf, "she belonged to an age which distinguished sharply between the impermanency of man and the durability of his monuments" (*Two Cheers* 261). Books and archives represent the burdensome accretions of the past, and particularly the spectre of literary influence epitomized by the classics. Like Morris Gedge in Henry James's "The Birthplace," who serves as the reluctant custodian and docent of the home of "the supreme" English poet (a thinly veiled allusion to William Shakespeare), the modernists feel stuck in the lumber-room of the past. A sense of responsibility binds modern writers to the past, despite their desire for literary innovation. Libraries and archives are thus places where the past is "hoarded" (Woolf, *Jacob's* 121), the site of "cloisters and classics" (*JR* 90).

The anxiety of influence, in other words, is an anxiety about the archive. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida frames the modernist sense of belatedness as the writer's ambivalence about the value of the archive, which he sees as the embodiment of the literary project itself: "in the end I have nothing new to say. Why detain you with these worn-out stories? [...] Why archive this? Why these investments in paper, in ink, in characters? Why mobilize so much space and so much work, so much typographic composition? Does this merit printing? Aren't these stories to be had everywhere?" (9). Following Derrida's thinking, my second conclusion concerns the modernist's relation to

what Umberto Eco calls “the inundation of the already said” (531). Confronted by piles of paper and rows of ageless classics, the modern writer pilfers from archives and libraries as a response to “the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessary, of writing original works of literature” (Barth 69). Originality is a touchy subject in modernism. The masterpieces of high modernism are texts celebrated for their originality and innovation, such as *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, yet as Joyce and Eliot acknowledge, these works are inconceivable without the classics. Joyce described *Ulysses* as “a sort of encyclopedia” (qtd. in Eco, *Talking* 65), and Eliot’s well-worn maxim is a modernist credo—lesser artists borrow, great artists steal. Like Woolf’s reading “disease” (*Orlando* 72), book-theft or bibliokleptomania is not only a modernist compulsion but a literary technique. With their wealth of literary allusions, these texts aspire to miniature libraries. In this regard, Gedge’s scripted or “phony” spiel about the famous dead poet (Fogel 16) perfectly encapsulates the modernists’ duplicitous relation to the past: their resentful guardianship of the past and their desire to be dispossessed of its relics masks a keen sense of property and a jealous, careful custodianship of the classics.

Despite the anxiety they induce, the classics fuel the imagination and foment writing, as the case of Henry James corroborates. Modernist fiction thus expresses a compulsive desire to appropriate the past in order to forge new classics and to ward off a growing sense of loss, alienation, and disenfranchisement. Private property is imperilled in these fictions. In *The Aspern Papers*, Juliana Bordereau’s impulse to hoard a private archive is challenged by the editor’s desire to publish it. Likewise, Lily Bart fashions herself as a rare book in *The House of Mirth* only to find her “book value” at odds with her market value. Lily’s conspicuousness precludes her rarity; she circulates when she

should stay on the shelf. Industrialization was converting books into easily produced commodities when Wharton composed *The House of Mirth*. Like Lily Bart, books become disposable. Cheap, mass-produced editions replace the expensively bound or hand-written classic. Moreover, books compete with other media newly created by technology, so that the modern reader is inundated by quantity, not quality. Bookish aesthetes such as Lawrence Selden and Newland Archer react to this commodification of culture by retreating to their libraries. Thus, thirdly, I conclude that a host of dilettantes and collectors, librarians, readers, and editors uncertainly negotiate the transformation of the book and the library in this period. These protagonists, like their authors, attempt to claim what they see as their rightful inheritance: private spaces for reading, unlimited access to books and archives, as well as a literary market that prizes the modern classic despite the disposability of books.

Perhaps more than any other generation, the modernists were aware that “[p]recious things—great loves, great buildings, great poets, great papers—are always vanishing” (Tanner, “Henry” 47). More than a literary technique, intertextuality is an aesthetic philosophy that reflects a genuine appreciation of the past. “To bind anew: this is an act of love” (Derrida, *Archive* 21). Modern readers and writers bind books anew. Binding is a pact with a book, a promise to read it again—not just to shelve it beautifully like a museum piece. To bind a book is to acknowledge its lasting value. Classics are, by definition, bound books. Moreover, binding implies connection, a principle at the heart of these modernist texts. The book gestures to something outside of itself, namely the “writing beyond the book” (Derrida, *Writing* 294). Reading and writing are acts that perpetuate textual unity. The book is a library in the sense that it contains all books, or

what Derrida calls “the voluminous binding of all writing” (*Dissemination* 56). As miniature libraries, books are thus precious things in modernist fiction—objects prized for their beauty, their portability, their economy, and perhaps above all, for their destructibility.

The establishment of the Harvard Classics by Charles W. Eliot in 1909 reflects this view of books. The Harvard Classics, a fifty-one-volume anthology of works by the masters, promised instant literary cultivation in the form of a five-foot shelf of books. Eliot believed that the elements of a liberal education could be obtained by spending fifteen minutes a day reading from the classics. The founding of the Harvard Classics recalls the Mechanics’ Institutes libraries, a group of nineteenth-century libraries established for the purposes of self-improvement and education (Ousby 554). Eliot’s reading programme also anticipates Jay Gatsby’s plan, recorded in the back of his boyhood copy of *Hopalong Cassidy*, to “[r]ead one improving book or magazine per week” (174). The classics were the original “self-help” books, as well as a foolproof way to advertise cultural capital. Culture, as Woolf’s Orlando discovers, can be carried in one’s pocket. Fourthly, then, I argue that the modernist achievement entails not only an innovation of the practices of writing, but of reading as well. Reading transforms characters and shapes lives and outcomes in these fictions. As an activity that releases cultural knowledge, reading embodies the open-ended and dynamic quality of modern life.

Consequently, this thesis concludes that archives and libraries are the scene of “archive trouble” in modernist fiction (Derrida, *Archive* 90). Besieged by the classics, the modernists conceive of the library—with its atmosphere of cloistered veneration and

careful preservation—as the site of intrusion, innovation, and rebellion. Virginia Woolf’s call for a “room of one’s own” is a feminist but also a modernist concern. Women readers like Lily Bart strive for access to private spaces like the nineteenth-century gentleman’s library. Lower-class social climbers such as Leonard Bast covet books in the hope of augmenting their cultural capital and improving their social situations. As unorthodox, illegitimate readers—those without conventional educations or access to private libraries—women and autodidacts pose a threat to the cosseted domain of the gentleman’s library. The illegitimate Charity Royall, Wharton’s reluctant librarian, epitomizes archive trouble. She infiltrates the library from outside, claims its authority, and transforms it into a place where romance between lovers from different backgrounds and cultural milieus is possible.

Like Woolf’s “common reader,” who reads for her own pleasure and not to impart knowledge or to amend the opinions of others, modernist readers reflect the shift in the function of books and libraries in this period. Reading is an assertion of personality, cultural taste, and social values. Julia Hedge pores over statistics in the British Museum in *Jacob’s Room*, while Jacob transcribes passages from Marlowe. “[A]nyone who’s worth anything,” muses Woolf’s narrator, “reads just what he likes, as the mood takes him, with extravagant enthusiasm. Lives of the Duke of Wellington, for example; Spinoza; the works of Dickens; the *Faery Queen*; a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages; all the Elizabethans” (JR 39). You are, Woolf implies, what you read. As the source of a liberal education, the modern library is thus a democratic space, the site not of chronology but of connection, as Forster shows in *Howards End* and *Aspects of the Novel*. Books are the property of everyone. By breaking

into the traditionally inviolate domain of the library, with its silent, sobering stacks of the classics, modern readers such as Lily Bart, Charity Royall, Ellen Olenska, and Leonard Bast reflect the modernist desire to renovate the textual and architectural spaces of the past. Like Marinetti and the Futurists, these readers mine the library with forms of subversion in a bid to “make it new.”

Joyce articulates the modernist desire to reconstitute the library in *Ulysses* by invoking disorder in the library scene: “Come, mess” (268). Similarly, in *Jacob’s Room*, Miss Marchmont’s eclectic, precarious pile of books topples over into Jacob’s reading compartment, interrupting his transcription of Marlowe. Like Joyce and Woolf, James, Wharton, and Forster conceive of the orderly library, paradoxically, as the ideal setting for “mess”—for conflict and conversation, for errors, accidents, and ambiguity. “Order is no longer assured,” writes Derrida (*Archive* 5), and least of all in the library. Yet for all their disorderliness, the modernists were writers who thought like librarians: they wanted not merely to service reading but to direct it. They held strong views about the role of books and libraries in public and private life, and they felt compelled to share those views. From Woolf’s “How Should One Read a Book?” to Italo Calvino’s *The Uses of Literature*, twentieth-century writers fashion themselves as editors or anthologists. Reading, like writing, is a form of editing, a way to shape and influence, or to bind anew. We must consult the classics, avows Woolf, because ours is “an age of fragments” (“How It Strikes” 296). We are “sharply cut off from our predecessors,” and “feel ourselves driven to [the classics], impelled not by calm judgement but by some imperious need to anchor our instability upon their security. But, honestly, the shock of the comparison between past and present is at first disconcerting. Undoubtedly there is a dullness in great

books” (“How” 299, 300). Like Forster’s *Commonplace Book*, James’s *Notebooks*, or Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, the modernist text is a composite or collection. The messiness of archives haunts these works, suggesting that cultural attainment in modernism requires the acquisition of peripheral information in addition to more central or canonical knowledge. By including marginal or tangential material, the modernists countered the “dullness” of the classics and broadened the bounds of the canon. Many libraries now honour the scope of modernist collections, such as the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin, which acquired the library of Evelyn Waugh, including his bookcases and various other items of furniture. A guiding modernist principle was to add to the stacks.

Finally, the modern library exemplifies Bachelard’s notion of “eulogized space” (*Poetics* xxxi). The history of the library is a history of acquisition and loss, conservation and destruction. In this regard, modern libraries are the natural descendants of the first libraries in Egypt and Rome. With the wider access to books furnished by the public library movement, the increase in the volume of books published, the rising rates of literacy, and the popularity of commercial libraries, the library undergoes a profound transformation in the modernist period; the fiction of James, Wharton, and Forster reflects that change. Libraries and archives are archaeological sites, revealing texts within texts, eras upon eras, this writer beside that writer. James’s literary editor desires to commune with Jeffrey Aspern by reading his letters. Lily Bart leaves her “real” self behind in Lawrence Selden’s library. Leonard Bast’s uncanny death-by-books is a strangely fitting end for a bibliophile. The impulse to monumentalize the past and to connect with dead writers comes from a desire to pay homage to the masters, but also

from a profound sense of estrangement and alienation from the past. Reading is a form of mourning, a way to elegize the diminishing presence of the past. As Matthew Battles suggests, if the nineteenth century “was about the building of libraries,” the twentieth “was about their destruction” (157). The violent assault on rare books and manuscripts at the library in Louvain, Belgium during the First World War and the Blitzkrieg bombings and Nazi book-burnings of the Second World War indicate that the twentieth century was an era marked by what Battles calls “the crudest form of editorializing” (180), namely biblioclasm or libricide—the censorial, symbolic, and wholesale destruction of books as cultural objects. From the spring of 1933 to the end of the war, “one hundred million books [...] would accompany six million human beings into the flames of the Holocaust” (Battles 167). Modern libraries were literally and figuratively under siege. The trope of the burnt or bombed library, a central feature of later twentieth-century novels such as Canetti’s *Auto-da-Fé*, Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, and Thomas Wharton’s *Salamander*, illustrates a larger ideological conflict over the possession and dispossession of material culture. George Steiner observes that an “obsession with conservation and custodianship is paradoxically instrumental in modernity. [...] The realisation of the mortality of all cultures, as Valéry put it, laid bare by two world wars, has generated a deep-lying anxiety. An inventory must be made, remembrance must be documented and ware-housed before it is too late” (292). Libraries, as these fictions demonstrate, are sites of remembrance and recuperation, proof that knowledge endures.

The modern library continues to be a site of flux and controversy. According to Battles, “Major libraries everywhere are hemorrhaging books by the heap, selling them,

pulping them, or storing them in remote warehouses by the millions of volumes” (212). Space constraints and funding shortages are changing the nature of public and academic libraries, while an increasing demand for efficient access to information is shifting the function of the library from a material repository to a Joycean “portal of discovery” (*Ulysses* 243). As Peter Brophy suggests in *The Library in the Twenty-First Century*, the library of the future “will be less a place where information is kept than a portal through which students and faculty will access the vast information resources of the world” (89).

The modernist concern that libraries too closely resemble mausoleums is, ironically, alive and well. In *The Gutenberg Elegies*, Sven Birkerts cites a senior librarian at the Library of Congress who predicts that libraries will become more like museums: “Just as you go to the National Gallery to see its Leonardo or go to the Smithsonian to see the Spirit of St. Louis and so on, you will want to go to libraries to see the Gutenberg or the original printing of Shakespeare’s plays or to see Lincoln’s hand-written version of the Gettysburg Address” (127). In *Paper Machine*, Derrida suggests that the threat of the extinction of books will result in a renewed fetishism of the book: “This fetishism will sanctify—sanctify once again—the book, the aura of culture or the cult of the book, the body of the book and the body used to the book, the time, the temporality, and the spacing of the book, the habitus of the love of the book that will be revalorized and overvalued exactly according to the possibility of its becoming scarce” (17). As bodies used to books, readers face a peculiar challenge in an age of e-books and virtual libraries such as Google Books. As a disembodied book, a book without a binding, the e-book is pure text and is thus not an aesthetic or material object. The triumph of the book as a technology lies in its simplicity: it can be read anywhere and at any time, without mediation, as long as the reader understands language. In

this sense, books are trans-historical and relatively uncomplicated technologies. Despite its defenders, the book is once again in danger of becoming a museum piece—something to be looked at but not held in the hand—like Elmer Moffatt's library of beautifully bound but inaccessible books in *The Custom of the Country*.

Despite the truth of his observation that "history develops" while "art stands still," the library of the future likely will not be as Forster envisions it in *Aspects of the Novel*, with the novelists "of the next two hundred years" all writing together in a circular reading-room (171). Without meeting-spaces for booktalk, without the Swiftian jostling of ancient and modern books on the shelf, libraries will no longer speak to the like-minded; authors will no longer occupy the same space. As Brophy predicts, libraries of the future will focus on access and knowledge-management, not ownership (89). What is being lost from or left out of the modern library are not only materials such as newspaper holdings and outdated books, but a sense of property and ownership, and a responsibility not only to the past but to the future. In *Howards End*, Margaret tells Helen that "very early in the morning in the garden I feel that [Howards End] is the future as well as the past" (268). Books and archives, furniture and houses act as intermediaries, points of contact between the past and the future. Objects remind us of our obligations to other times. The archive is a "question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow" (Derrida, *Archive* 36).

Henry James, Edith Wharton, and E. M. Forster attempt to recuperate this sense of property and responsibility in their fiction. As Carolyn Steedman suggests, the "general impulse of modernity" is to "turn space into place, and to find a home in the world, by literary and other means" (83). Readers and writers go to archives and libraries

to be at home in the world and also to be alone. Alone, they think, daydream, read, and write. These spaces allow for “the imagining of a particular and modern form of loneliness” (Steedman 72), the kind sought by James’s literary critic in *The Aspern Papers*, by Lily Bart, Ellen Olenska, Newland Archer, and Vance Weston, and by Leonard Bast and Helen Schlegel. Solitude is the necessary condition for elegy. Reading entails a conscious detachment from the present moment, and yet archives and libraries beguile because they furnish “a modern way of being in the world” (Steedman 75). At the end of the library scene in *Ulysses*, when Stephen walks “out of the vaulted cell into a shattering daylight of no thoughts,” he asks himself: “What have I learned? Of them? Of me?” (276). The library spurs such questions, providing a space in which to learn not only of books but also of the self. In this regard, the secrets of the library and the archive are the secrets of the self. The desire to know oneself is a desire to connect with the past and with the future. Archive fever is thus the mark and distinction of the modern self. We read ourselves when we read our books.

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