Amateur Modernism: Literary Responses to Professional Society

by

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Graduate Department of English
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Abstract

Amateur Modernism argues that the rise of professional society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century triggered efforts to revivify and renovate the ostensibly anachronistic concept of amateurism. This project investigates how four modernist writers—Ford Madox Ford, Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dashiell Hammett—all employed the concept of amateurism in their work to signal not a rejection of professionalism, but a struggle against the codified systems and habits of mind it tended to produce. As I demonstrate, many modernist texts position amateurism and professionalism in a productive tension, combining the amateur pursuit of wide-ranging knowledge, pleasurable work, and improvisational thought, with the financial independence and expertise afforded by professional training. Modernists were often ambivalent about the promises of professionalism and invoked amateur attitudes they believed could repair cultural fragmentation, democratize learning, and make working life more pleasurable.

Chapter One argues that Ford, ambivalently caught between his German ancestry and his work writing wartime propaganda for the British government, appealed to amateurism as broad general knowledge transcending national borders, and enabling him to negotiate the tensions between the patriotism that was demanded of him and the cosmopolitanism he admired. Chapter
Two considers amateurism as a spontaneous and rambling habit of mind as it focuses upon Woolf’s efforts to incorporate amateurism into higher education and the professions by encouraging women, who were becoming professionals for the first time, to maintain their capacity to think in non-hierarchical and unspecialized ways. Chapter Three understands amateurism as a bridging impulse as it focuses on Hurston’s attempt to make disciplinary cultural anthropology accessible to a popular audience. Chapter Four examines how Hammett, inspired by the pleasurable work of the gentleman-amateur, argued that lower-middle class workers like his detective characters might covertly derive wry pleasure by improvising between the cracks of professional bureaucracies. By emphasizing the malleability of amateurism and professionalism during the modernist period, this dissertation offers a critique of scholarship that reads contemporary, calcified oppositions between the professions and amateurism back onto modernist debates.
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Introduction

In 1904, between appointments at Princeton and Harvard, literary scholar and editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* Bliss Perry published a small collection of essays titled *The Amateur Spirit*. As Perry explains in his Preface, the unifying element of the disparate essays is an attempt to trace “the significance of the amateur spirit in carrying forward the daily work of our modern world” (vii). He continues, “I have endeavored to illustrate from many fields—from sport and politics, from science and letters—the possibility of combining the professional’s skill with the zest and enthusiasm of the amateur.” On the one hand, he acknowledges the critical importance of “the mechanical conveniences and equipments [. . .] [that] have been wrought out for us by the most patient, the most concentrated activity of professionals” (27). On the other, he speaks to the importance of combining the strengths of professionalism with those of amateurism: amateurism counteracts the worst traits of the professional, namely greed and narrowness of mind, by cultivating a “plasticity of mind” that “touches life on many sides” (14, 24). His essays were part of a larger debate in America around the turn of the century regarding the future of higher education. While influential scholars like the first president of Johns Hopkins University, Daniel Coit Gilman, believed the key to modernizing America’s small religious colleges lay in modeling them on the specialized German research universities, others like Irving Babbitt, Charles Eliot Norton, and Perry himself, believed that the way forward was to focus upon

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1 Perry’s use of the term “spirit” accords with Michael Warner’s account of the resistance to professional literary study during the modernist period: “Humanism, platonism, and Christianity provided powerful grounds for thinking of literature as the locus, in the college curriculum, of truth, the ideal, and the spiritual. Thought of this way, literature could be said to be beyond the reach of mere specialists” (7).
teaching the values of humanism and a general body of knowledge. The latter camp composed what Gerald Graff has termed “the generalist opposition” and what I term, taking my cue from the terminology of the period, an “amateur” approach to scholarship and pedagogy (81). We see such an approach not only in the argument of The Amateur Spirit, but also in its structure: Perry’s apology that the essays within are “piled almost at random” is difficult to read as anything other than a challenge to the narrowness of academic scholarship (vii). In Perry’s conception, amateurism wasn’t to be perceived as a less competent alternative to the professional, but rather, as an admirable trait that could aid national ambitions when complemented with the technological and scientific expertise of the professional. As he explains, amateur traits “will be even more valuable in the future than in the past, if they are employed to supplement, rather than to be substituted for, the solid achievements of professional industry” (30). Writing at the beginning of the new century when distinctions between old and new habits of mind had a heightened resonance, Perry tacitly suggests that both amateurism and professionalism are distinctly new ways to engage with the modern world.

Perry’s belief that amateur sensibilities must be incorporated into (rather than opposed to) the values of an emerging professional society was neither anomalous during the modernist period nor limited to the United States. In a 1932 international symposium on the future of higher education organized by the League of Nations, professor of political science at Cambridge University, Ernest Barker, used similar terms to describe recent changes in British society:

One of the features of the intellectual life of Great Britain, even as late as the middle of the reign of Queen Victoria, was the predominance of the amateur. It was not the professional

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2 Perry presents an interesting case because while he studied in the German research universities at Heidelberg and Strasbourg, he remained skeptical of the philological and scientific approaches to literary study he encountered and instead, began considering the merits of amateurism.
professor, but the private scholar, who made our learning and our culture. [. . .] As learning has become more specialized, it has also become more professionalized: the universities and their teachers are ousting, or have ousted, the amateur. [. . .] The change was inevitable; but perhaps it has not been, in all respects, a change for the better. The professional historian may be more thorough than the amateur, but he may also have less contact with national life, and less understanding of its problems. [. . .] One of the great duties of the university teacher is to remain a man in becoming a scholar, and to keep a rich humanity at the same time that he acquires a large erudition. (Barker 93-94)

Barker, like Perry, suggests that society is best served by the presence of both amateur and professional traits; each ought to be seen as dependent upon the other because each is limited in its capacity to respond to the demands of modernity. Further, both Perry and Barker suggest that the distinction between one’s profession and one’s wider interests as a citizen—one’s “rich humanity”—ought not to be too strictly separated; insights derived from professional and private life are made richer through symbiotic exchange. Finally, on both sides of the Atlantic, the expanding influence of professional ideology, which scholars have since described as the rise of “professional society” or the “culture of professionalism,” was recognized at the time to have a massive impact on the health of civic life. As the arguments of both men attest, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, cultural pressures to professionalize nearly all types of work in America, Britain, and Europe (particularly Germany) cast alternative modes of working and thinking into stark relief.

For Perry, Barker, and other modernists, the “amateur” signified something greater than dilettantism: it became shorthand for a desire to graft the attitudes of the emerging specialist onto the attitudes of what Richard Sennett has described as “the public men of the 19th century” who were able to connect the concerns of their own work with the larger cultural and political issues
of the day (195). Amateurism for the modernists meant many things, but when it was described in a positive fashion, it was an attempt to describe both a catholic range of knowledge catalyzed by a native curiosity about the world, and a “sympathy” for fellow human beings that came as a result of being able to “connect” one’s own private concerns with broader public ones. Perry and Barker’s shared concern that professionals maintain “contact with national life” suggests their interest in the amateur went beyond the groves of academe: they recognized that by discouraging scholars from specializing in increasingly esoteric fields of knowledge they could have a salubrious effect upon the very machinery of democracy.

Can these two relatively obscure passages from Perry and Barker help us to understand how transatlantic modernist cultures interpreted the emerging forces of professionalization? I would argue that they can: the passages are exemplary not only in their efforts to broker a hybridized amateur / professional society, but also in the way they legitimate the category of the “amateur” as more than the negation of the professional. My claim that we might be able to trace broader cultural shifts in British and American modernist society through a method that traces specific usages of a single word like “amateur” is suggestive of Raymond Williams’s “keywords” approach to literary historical scholarship.\(^3\) He argues that keywords are “ways not only of discussing but at another level of seeing many of our central experiences” (15).

Rejecting the idea that “language simply reflects the processes of society and history,” he claims “important social and historical processes occur within language” (22). In choosing to foreground in this dissertation the term “amateur” rather than related terms like “generalist,” “organic intellectual,” or more contemporary terms like “independent scholar,” I want to suggest that the modernists’ attraction to the specific term “amateur” speaks to a distinct effort to

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\(^3\) I am indebted to Melba Cuddy-Keane and the other collaborators of her forthcoming *Modernism: Keywords* for introducing me to Williams’s approach.
democratize the formerly elite ability to love one’s work—as the etymology of the term suggests—and integrate it into the increasingly specialized, standardized, and bureaucratized logic of modern work. As I explain, the cultural history of the terms “amateur” and “professional” confirms Williams’s argument for engaging in cultural keywords work more generally: “changes are not always either simple or final. Earlier and later senses coexist, or become actual alternatives in which problems of contemporary belief and affiliation are contested” (22). While the modernist writers I examine in this dissertation all chose to partake in professional society and recognized its benefits, they also spilled a significant amount of ink considering whether elements of “the amateur spirit” could be incorporated into the concept of the “professional.” The works I investigate not only reflect the historical cultural debates regarding professional society, but also shaped those debates by offering readers new ways to imagine how professionals might participate in public life as well as warning them of the potentially damaging effects of professional ideology.

*Amateur Modernism* argues that the rise of professional culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century triggered efforts to theorize and advocate for the ostensibly anachronistic concept of amateurism. Although figured differently by each of the authors I examine, amateurism signaled not a rejection of professionalism, but a struggle against the codified systems it tended to produce. Modernist authors and thinkers employed the concept of amateurism in order to both influence and situate themselves within professional society. I investigate how they constructed, subverted, and amended professional identities through a range of techniques that all invoked the concept of the amateur. I argue that key to this endeavor was an attempt to inscribe the pursuit of wide-ranging knowledge, pleasurable work, and improvisational thought, into the logic of modern professional ideology, which was perceived to be overly specialized, insipid, and standardized. One of my goals is to demonstrate that
modernists were eager to challenge professional logic because the professions themselves were a surprisingly malleable concept at the time. This allowed modernists to imagine a much greater number of possible vocational identities than our own more calcified definition of the professions allows for today. Incipient institutions, associations, and university departments attempting to determine the boundaries of the professions they represented, fostered a debate about the role of the professions in society that spilled into the pages of literary and popular fiction, newspapers, and journals of the period. By reading the works of four very different modernist writers—Ford Madox Ford, Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dashiell Hammett—I trace the broad influence of amateurism across modernism and its many manifestations in a diversity of genres including propaganda, anthropological ethnography, hard-boiled detective fiction, and experimental literary fiction.

*Amateur Modernism* understands the concept of amateurism to represent a significant strain running through modernist intellectual history and material culture that has been overlooked by criticism on modernism, which itself has been constructed by a number of professionalized disciplines since the 1960s. The embrace of amateur habits of mind in the modernist texts I examine runs counter to critical understandings of modernism which, for a long time now, have equated the period with the professionalization of poetry and criticism, the rise of the professional novelist, and the emergence of the professional-managerial class whose commitment to efficiency and bureaucracy were celebrated and pilloried by authors ranging from H. G. Wells to Sinclair Lewis. The question this project poses is why and in what ways did modernists construct amateur personae or describe amateur habits of mind in texts that didn’t

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4 A good example of the fluidity of “professional” and “amateur” categories during the modernist period is in the famous first issue of Wyndham Lewis’s *Blast* where he catalogues lists of outdated ideas his readers should “blast” and the emancipated ideas of the future that they should “bless.” Under the “blast” category is listed “the specialist” and the “professional,” but curiously, also the “amateur” (16).
nostalgically long for a pre-modern past, but often articulated progressive political and cultural visions for the future. I hope that by exploring the “relations between literary modernism and other aspects of modern culture” (9), as Michael North writes of his own approach that critiques “canonized version of modernism” (10), we might recover a fuller sense of the importance and ubiquity of the amateur, the range of professional identity, and the questions of who could be and how one could be a professional during the modernist period.

The Malleable Professional

Although the ancient professions of law, medicine, and the clergy had been established for many centuries, middle-class educational and vocational reforms during the mid-nineteenth century not only created more professions, but also allowed for the values of professionalism—credentialization, specialization, expertise, and efficiency—to influence broader cultural expectations and transactions. Lois Cucullu notes that in the fierce intellectual climate of the early twentieth century, “intellectuals and artists [. . .] needed to claim a form of expertise or risk forfeiting their standing as cultural interpreters to specialists of other disciplines” (10). The new professional hierarchies that came to dominance in the last decades of the nineteenth century would challenge both aristocratic privileges in England and robber baron capitalism in America. Nearly all vocations in the modernist period sought the wealth and prestige promised by the “professional ideal”: self-regulation that enabled autonomy from the marketplace, credentialed expertise assuring a standard of practice, and a service ethic that placed a priority on contributions to the social welfare. The ideal sought a fine balance between the impressive

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5 The desirability of professional status and the ability to divorce it from class distinctions have always been stronger in the United States than in Britain. H. L. Mencken in his study of The American Language (1919) emphasizes the importance of being considered a professional in America: “In America every practitioner of any
innovative potential of new networks of highly educated specialists, and the risk that these same specialists might abuse their monopolistic control over fields of knowledge that the layman could no longer understand.  

The question of whether the professional ideal could ever be realized or whether, in practice, it simply allowed professionals to dominate fields and profit handsomely, would become a polarizing debate among scholars studying the professions in the later twentieth century. Deep disagreement over the benefits of professional society has led one prominent scholar in the field to conclude that “scholarship concerned with the professions is in an intellectual shambles” (Friedson 5). The Whiggish idealism professed in the scholarship from the 1940s and 1950s led by Talcott Parsons and others, gave way by the late 1960s to poststructuralist critiques of power that looked askance at professional assurances of self-regulation.  

Burton Bledstein, for instance, describes the overwhelming power wielded by professionals in the new culture that came to define twentieth-century America: “common sense, ordinary understanding, and personal negotiations no longer were the effective means of human communications in society. [. . .] Now clients found themselves compelled to believe on simple faith that a higher rationality called scientific knowledge decided one’s fate” (Bledstein, Culture 90). 

As Bledstein notes, the esoteric knowledge of the professional meant that “laymen were neither prepared to comprehend the mystery of the tasks which professionals performed, nor—more ominously—were they equipped to pass judgment upon special skills and technical competence. Hence, the culture of professionalism required amateurs to ‘trust’ the integrity of the trained persons” (Culture 90).  

For an influential and optimistic account of the future of the professions see Parsons.
Bledstein and others are right to raise concerns about the professional system but, to my mind, ultimately limit the critical conversation by their polemical critiques that reduce professionalization to a process driven purely by crass bourgeois careerism rather than a complex response to new demands by consumers for more standardized and credentialed services. More recent studies of the professions offer a less polemical analysis of professionalization and provide valuable statistical data on broad trends. Harold Perkin’s survey of English professional society, for instance, concludes that English society became “structured around career hierarchies rather than classes, one in which people find their place according to trained expertise and the service they provide rather than the possession of lack of inherited wealth or acquired capital” (359). Yet his economic history is perhaps limited by its broad national perspective that struggles to document the debates of everyday Britons regarding the professionalization of their society.

While my work is informed by important studies like Perkin’s, I am wary of the tendency to hypostatize and calcify the professions, thus overlooking the important fact that the question of what defined the professional was much less settled in the modernist period than it is today. My own project attempts to bypass accounts of modernist professional society rooted entirely in economic or sociological methodology, or invested heavily in the debates of their own time—particularly the crisis in the humanities and the rise of Neo-Liberalism in the late 1970s. I take a historicist approach that distinguishes between our own frameworks for understanding professional society and those of the modernists. Rather than subjecting modernism to

8 In another important study of the professions nearly contemporary with Bledstein, Magali Sarfatti Larson argues that “professionalization [is] the process by which producers of special services [seek] to constitute and control a market for their expertise” (xvi). She posits that expert culture “inaugurated a new form of structured inequality,” the implementation of which “prefigure[d] the general restructuring of social inequality in contemporary capitalist societies” (xvii).
9 For a critique of Bledstein, see Haskell.
anachronistic reading strategies, I attempt to recover (although never fully) the understandings of modernists themselves. Bliss Perry’s understanding of an amateur and professional “spirit,” for instance, offers deeper insight into the ways modernists understood professional society than do current sociological definitions or economic statistical analyses.

My methodology calls attention to the ambivalence of many modernists and their attempts to adjudicate between the claims made on behalf of the amateur craftsman or the gentleman amateur on the one hand, and the modern specialist on the other. My interest in preserving the complex and shifting categories of amateurism and professionalism as they appeared to the modernists is reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s genealogical approach to historical study. He argues, “genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes” (81). Instead, the goal of such research, he suggests, is “to disclose dispersions and differences, to leave things undisturbed in their own dimensions and intensities” (89). Such a theoretical approach allows us to arrive at the conclusion that modernists like Virginia Woolf did not denounce or advocate professional culture wholesale, but believed the very concept must be reconsidered as women were able to enter them for the first time. Zora Neale Hurston—a writer whose life was strikingly different from Woolf’s—was similarly frustrated by proclamations of an evolutionary “rise” of professionalism. She worked to reverse the growing specialization of the university, which divorced rigorous scholarship from the general public and isolated it in esoteric academic journals and hermetic university departments. What both these examples suggest, and what my approach allows to emerge, is the realization that modernists believed they had the ability to redefine the very notion of the professional. Modernists felt they often straddled both amateur
and professional positions themselves since the transition from one to the other was often gradual and never absolute.  

The protean definitions of the “professions” among modernists are on display in A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson’s groundbreaking study simply titled, The Professions (1933). Describing both old and new professions including dentistry, law, optometry, physics, and secretarial work, the authors opted for a catholic definition of the professions because, as they readily acknowledged, a “profession” remained a stubbornly ambiguous concept. They noted, “there are few associations more important or powerful than those formed by professional men [yet] there is no more agreement about the boundaries of professionalism than there is about its value” (3). Such a claim speaks to my own argument that literary modernists attempted to defer efforts to erect professional boundaries or reify professional values. Instead, as we will see, their writing often consciously attempted to inject humanist values into the public conversation about the professions and to challenge the rationalist or utilitarian logic of efficiency and specialization. Carr-Saunders and Wilson’s unwillingness to use their professional authority to assign definitive boundaries to the professions was being echoed simultaneously through the modernist aesthetic tendency to blend distinct voices in new contexts and to form new wholes out of cultural fragments.

While contemporary accounts of professionalism have been preoccupied with exposing what they interpret as self-serving efforts to exclude outside competition through credentialism,  

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10 In the case of literary studies, Gerald Graff has amply demonstrated that the growth of the discipline in the United States was not an immediate transition from generalist to narrow specialist, but a series of skirmishes and détentes that went on for much of the modernist period and that modernists at times supported and at times denounced. Carol Atherton, who focuses on the development of literary studies in Britain, similarly notes: “the early professors and academics [. . .] frequently occupied an ambivalent space between the values of the amateur and the institutional status of the professional” (6). She concludes that in terms of critical methods being advocated or performed among literary critics of the 1910s and 1930s, “any notional gap between the ‘professionals’ working within university departments and the ‘amateurs’ who continued to operate outside academia is difficult to detect in practice” (73).
modernists themselves were more concerned with the effects of professionalism on democratic life. Both the problem and the divergent approaches to it are clearly evidenced in debates between John Dewey and journalist Walter Lippmann. Lippmann argued in his 1922 classic study *Public Opinion* that the democratic citizen wants to make wise judgments but is hindered from doing so in large and complex countries like the United States. The fourth estate, charged with providing citizens with the information they need to make informed decisions, fails, according to Lippmann, because it operates “like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of the darkness into vision” (229). A democratic citizenry, he concluded, “cannot govern society by episodes, incidents and eruptions.” Although Dewey agreed with Lippmann’s assessment of public discourse, he disagreed with his proposition that a modern democracy required “intelligence bureaus” that could offer disinterested expert analysis on a world that was “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind” to the average citizen (18). Instead, Dewey argued in *The Public and its Problems* (1927), that the power of experts needed to be balanced by an informed citizenry—what he calls a “great community”—free to debate the major issues of the day (121). As this debate suggests, by commenting upon the developments of professional society, the modernists understood themselves to be debating more broadly about the fate of democratic society. The rise of totalitarian governments during the modernist period made such arguments all the more potent and made many feel that the dictates of experts were too reminiscent of those of dictators. Each chapter of my project reflects the deep connection in modernist debates between democracy and professional society; modernist literary critics and novelists sought ways by which communities of democratic citizens could oversee or work alongside professional experts and specialists who, it was often acknowledged, were a necessary component of modern life.
Literature is a particularly rich medium in which to investigate the debates of professional society: not only is literature uniquely able to provide creative (sometimes utopian) alternatives to the seemingly stultifying effects of institutional expertise; it is also a field that has proven to be particularly skeptical about the promises of professionalization. Louis Menand explains that the very gesture of professionalizing literary study risks “sacrificing all the advantages derived from the general perception of [literature’s] essential difference from respectable kinds of work. Spontaneity, originality, inspiration—qualities viewed with increasing suspicion in the world of practical affairs—were among the very things that seemed to define the artistic” (117). The double bind that professional writers, critics, and teachers of literature found (and find) themselves in, forced them to be particularly attuned to the gains and losses that professional status afforded. Dashiell Hammett, for instance, drew a strong correlation between the limitations that the pulp fiction industry placed upon his own ambitions as a writer, and the constricting limitations that workers—including the private eye—experienced when they were expected to follow bureaucratic guidelines. As the modern history of cultural criticism and theory has aptly demonstrated, institutional literary study has itself consisted of a contradictory series of claims insisting that the study of literature must be professionalized, and arguments demonstrating why literature will always escape professional logic.

11 If literary studies have been consistently skeptical of professionalization, they certainly haven’t been immune from it. Simultaneous to the professionalization of the sciences that saw them subdivide into institutional fields of study such as physics and chemistry, Michael Warner notes that English studies were experiencing similar subdivisions. He quotes James Morgan Hunt: “the fact that what we now call Shakespeariana, Miltoniana and Coleridgiana demands separate sections of our libraries to contain them will afford an instance of that rapid multiplication of material that has resulted from an ever more exhaustive study of any one celebrated author” (15). Of course, many later attempts to professionalize the discipline, particularly literary theory, have resulted in divisions much greater than those of which Hunt complained.
Constructing a Modernist Amateur

Professionals have long been interested in thinking about amateurs. Not only do the ostensibly opposing terms have a parallel etymological history; there is evidence to suggest that as professional culture became more firmly established, people sought more nuanced ways to understand and talk about the amateur. Around the time that professional organizations such as the Modern Language Association (1883), the Geographical Association (1893), and the Historical Association (1904), were establishing themselves, each with corresponding academic journals and university departments, the terms “Renaissance Man” (1906) and “intelligentsia” (1907) entered the English language. Why would these terms that describe non-professional work have entered the language at a moment when there was an overwhelming cultural pressure to align work with narrow institutional expertise? The emergence of these terms appears anomalous unless we consider that the extensive cultural labour that went into the construction of the “professional” required equally arduous efforts to construct a complex conception of what would no longer be considered proper attitudes toward work.12 The Renaissance man whose intellectual curiosity slides across many apparently discrete fields of knowledge, and the member of the intelligentsia who serves the public by not joining an institution but remaining an “outsider [. . .] and disturber of the status quo,” embodied qualities that were distinctly under siege at the turn of the century (Said x).13 In fact, it was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth

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12 Marjorie Garber similarly notes the intimate relationship between the amateur and the professional and explains, “the terms of any binary opposition, amateur and professional [1] are never fully equal, and [2] are always in each other’s pockets. They produce each other and they define each other by mutual affinities and exclusions” (5). I follow Garber’s logic that understands the evolution of binary concepts to be necessarily concurrent rather than sequential; we can paraphrase Barthes and say the birth of the professional is the birth of the amateur.

13 See Heyck and Collini for histories of the intellectual in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
centuries as expanding research universities and corporations pooled their resources and made professionals ubiquitous, that the potential of the “amateur spirit” became most fully realized.14

While there were certainly voices denouncing the amateur in favour of professional efficiency and the Protestant work ethic, the modernist period saw an expanded role for the amateur in popular culture. In addition to the academic sources, one can trace a sudden explosion in the publication of mass-market books aimed at the new middle class who had sufficient leisure time to become amateurs in fields that were simultaneously undergoing professionalization: *The Amateur Mechanic* (1914), *The Amateur Chemist* (1919), *Amateur Nurse: A Practical Book of Home Nursing* (1933) to name just a few. Those living in the modernist period were called upon to imagine their relationship to work in new ways: more of them were finding themselves in professional careers and becoming members of professional societies that hadn’t existed several decades prior, and large numbers of them also had the money and time to engage in what Robert Stebbins has termed “serious leisure.” It is this understanding of amateurism—as an attitude toward work that is serious as it seeks pleasure—that interests me in this project and that, as I argue, interested modernist writers.

Contrary to our customary thinking about the decline of amateurism during the modernist period, the figure of the amateur was a key invention of the modernists which, like many cultural concepts they sought to make new, appeared on the surface to be very old. Although the usage of the term “amateur” to describe the leisured gentleman dates to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries along with synonyms like “dilettante,” “virtuoso,” and “aficionado,” the modernist usage of the term is distinct from its earlier relatives because it doesn’t draw attention to workers’ financial resources, inherent genius, or class background as much as it does to their

14 On the historical interlinking of American research universities and corporations, see Zunz and Newfield.
attitude toward work. Amateurism in the modernist period became an attitude that anyone, regardless of class, gender, or race, could adopt. Although the term gained much of its appeal because it seemed to have its roots in a pre-modern era, etymological and historical evidence reveal the opposite: the OED traces the derivatives of the term ("amateurish," "amateurishness," "amateurism") to the second half of the nineteenth century. As it turns out, the first recorded use of the term "amateurism" is dated to 1868, only twelve years prior to that of "professionalism." The general sense that amateurism was an old-fashioned trait is reflected in a 1931 article in Harper’s Monthly Magazine that urgently called upon readers to recognize that "the amateur spirit [...] the feeling that you are doing something because you want intensely to do it, without any idea of material gain" has been crucial to "the growth of our country" and "permeates our entire civilization" (Tunis 586, 587). The author explains that while amateurism is seriously threatened by modern commercial life, the Founding Fathers themselves operated on the principles of the amateur spirit. A few years earlier in the English Review, Cyril Alington was mourning the fact that in England, too, "the days of the amateur are now passing." He explains, "we live in days when the ordinary individual feels it increasingly impossible to resist the tyranny of the expert" (548). Like the flâneur—another distinctly modernist persona—the nostalgia for a figure whose knowledge ranged across many fields of inquiry only began to gain political and popular resonance once competing modes of engaging with modern society became dominant. In reality, the series of education reform acts in England and the United States in

15 Williams lists another late nineteenth-century neologism, "over-educated," which also suggests an effort to police a boundary between acceptable investment in a field of knowledge and an absorption leading to pedantry that is deemed no longer socially acceptable (112).

16 Janice Radway draws a similar conclusion in her important work, A Feeling for Books (1999), which studies the practices and politics of non-academic readerships. She writes, "I also realized that the ubiquitous subject called 'the general reader,' who surfaced again and again in editorial discussions at the Book-of-the-Month Club, was integral to its self-understanding as an organization and to its daily practice. Moreover, I began to suspect that the
the late nineteenth century meant that, to the contrary, more people than ever were able to comprehend—and some to master—ever more complex material. The following chapters demonstrate that invocations of old-fashioned amateurism served particularly modern purposes and we dismiss them as empty nostalgia at our peril.

This project traces three significant means by which the modernists positively conceptualized the amateur: first, they often imagined amateurs to have a wider breadth of knowledge than their specialist counterparts; second, modernists drew upon the Latinate root of “amateurism” to encourage the pursuit of pleasurable work; and third, they invested the concept of the amateur with spontaneous modes of thought engendering serendipitous breakthroughs. On the first point, Alfred North Whitehead echoed the concerns of many of his contemporaries when he warned that professionalization “produces minds in a groove” (Science 245). The narrow mind of the professional was inadequate “for the comprehension of human life.”

Of course, it was often through distinctly modern technological innovations that the amateur was able to access a wide range of reading material or travel widely in search of knowledge. Woolf’s depictions of amateur reading practices, for instance, are at once pre-modern in their rejection of professional disciplinarity, and distinctly modern in that they rely upon innovations like the Loeb Classical Library first published in 1912, which made Classical texts widely available in translation to those outside academe in the same way that the public library system emerging in

very term ‘general reader’ had perhaps evolved historically precisely as a rejection and critique of some other reader, presumably a reader not general but focused, professional, technical, and specialized” (10).

17 The limits of specialization were not of merely passing interest for Whitehead. In a speech delivered to the Mathematical Association of England in 1916 titled “The Aims of Education” he echoes Bliss Perry and Ernest Barker in suggesting that “England halts between two opinions. It has not decided whether to produce amateurs or experts. [. . .] The object of this address is to suggest how to produce the expert without the loss of the essential virtues of the amateur” (Aims 98).
the late nineteenth century enabled access to texts that were prohibitively priced. Similarly, Ford saw the potential for modern readers to acquire the supposedly pre-modern encyclopedic knowledge of the gentleman amateur by reading the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that revised the reference work for a modern popular reading audience.

Second, the modernists conceptualized amateurism as pleasurable physical or mental labour. For Woolf, pleasurable reading and conversing was desirable because it indicated a freedom of mind that she saw to be absent in the narrow thinking of the pedant. In novels like *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Between the Acts* (1939) she represents the potential pleasure of mental labour when the mind is engaged in reading a book or interpreting a play. However, Woolf was careful to demonstrate that the pleasure she had in mind complemented the type of serious thinking undertaken in the university and was able to produce new critical innovations and combinations. Hurston and Hammett also sought to incorporate pleasure into modern professional work. While Hurston saw aesthetic representation itself as capable of infusing pleasure into the tedious prose of disciplinary anthropology (which she felt certain few people read), Hammett believed lower-middle class workers could enjoy the pleasure of having agency in their work through subversive acts of freedom even within the strictures of bureaucratic routine.

Third, modernists understood amateurism to represent a positive form of spontaneous or improvisational thinking that appeared to be under threat by the standardizing ambitions of modern bureaucracies and academic disciplines. While the division of labour during the Industrial Revolution reduced working-class labour to monotonous drudgery in Dickensian

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18 Although, as Melba Cuddy-Keane notes, we need to remember the intimidation that many uneducated or working-class readers would have experienced in encountering the strict procedures of public libraries during the modernist period. She quotes a librarian who wryly notes that the formalities served to keep books ‘in working order and unpilfered,’ safely out of reach of the ‘reading proletariat’ (Virginia Woolf 109).
England and the textile factories of New England, it was in the twentieth century that aggressive attempts were made to standardize middle-class labour and ensure workers’ routines were hierarchically managed. In C. Wright Mills’s classic study *White Collar: The American Middle Class* (1951), he offers a sociological retrospective of modernist-period labour practices. He notes, “even the physical layout and appearance of the office [is becoming] more factory-like” (196). Commenting upon the standardization of the workday during the first half of the twentieth century, he notes that “personal telephone calls, smoking during office hours, visits from personal friends, and handling of personal mail are restricted, while mechanization and social rationalization—including rest periods, rest rooms, and hospital plans—increase” (198).

Calling attention to the attempts to manage the labouring body itself and to segregate work from everyday life, Mills’s study suggests that modernist representations of spontaneous, improvisational thinking had a particularly salient political and cultural effect. In Hurston’s case, she escaped the tedious procedures of disciplinary anthropology by constructing hybrid ethnographic fictions that combined rigorous analysis with the spontaneity inherent in live theatre. For Woolf and Hammett, the spontaneity of everyday language provided a vital and intractable resource that promised emancipation from the anemic discourse of academic scholarship and bureaucratic reports respectively. As I argue in the following chapters, the contingent, heterogeneous atmosphere created in many examples of modernist literature worked to combat or balance a competing vision of the modern world based upon the principles of efficiency and rationalization.19

19 Since modernism was a plural and geographically diverse phenomenon (Peter Nicholls titles his influential study of the period *Modernisms*), it is important to acknowledge modernist cultural voices like Emile Durkheim, G. B. Shaw, and H. G. Wells that were making Pollyannaish promises about the benefits of specialization and efficiency during the modernist period. The excitement was hardly limited to scholarly circles; mass media bragged of the new leisure time that citizens could enjoy with increasingly efficient domestic appliances and travel technology. See Cobley for an analysis of the proponents of efficiency during the modernist period.
“Professional, Or . . . ”: Equating Modernism with Professionalism

A project such as mine that proposes to align modernism with amateurism risks constructing a correspondingly reductive response to scholarship that equates modernism with professionalism. While I remain attentive to the close relationship many modernist writers had with academia and the apparent difficulty of some of their work which, in retrospect, appears to justify the postwar expansion of professional literary studies, I am careful not to equate professionalism or amateurism with modernist writing itself. Instead, I suggest that debates over the role of each were played out through a broad range of modernist literary works. Thus I distinguish my work from scholarship that draws familiar connections between the works of writers like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, the rise of New Criticism, and the professional study of literature more broadly. Gail McDonald, for instance, rightly calls attention to Eliot and Pound’s anxiety over the future of poetry and the fact that they “wanted poets (and themselves personally) to be recognized as serious, hardworking, professional men who made substantive contributions to the real world” (62). But her analysis slides too easily between describing the ambitions of Eliot and Pound as “professional”—a largely justifiable claim—and extrapolating this claim to the entire period to describe “modernism’s efforts to save literature from amateurism,” a claim my project contests (192). Leonard Diepeveen similarly draws little

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20 In addition to McDonald and Diepeveen who I discuss below, modernism and professionalism have simplistically been yoked together in many critical discussions written over the past twenty years. Tim Armstrong in Modernism: A Cultural History (2005), for instance, states correctly that “the barriers between the professions and other forms of work were codified” during the modernist period, but then insists this “challenged modernist authors into declaring their impeccable professionalism in contrast to their predecessors” (3). In David Trotter’s Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and Professionalization of English Society (2001), a text whose title promises deep analysis of modernist professional society, we find a surprisingly incurious overview of professionalization during the first decades of the twentieth century. Trotter notes that “literature became a profession” and that modernist writers responded in kind (84). Finally, Thomas Strychaz, in Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism (1993), rightly recognizes an “historically significant relationship between literary modernism and the kind of discourses legitimated by professional power” (29); however, he imagines both to have endorsed an “esoteric discourse” (31) intended “to construct and maintain intellectual authority” (32).
distinction between the disparate voices composing literary modernism, suggesting that modernist writers endorsed “modernism’s turn to professionalism” and cultivated a reputation predicated upon “elitism, specialization, and [a] distance from the public” (102). Part of the reason, I would argue, that so many discussions of modernist professionalism are limited in their conceptions of the professional is that they work backwards from the current model of professionalized literary study in search of its origins in the modernist period. (The photograph of Eliot at the classroom chalkboard on the cover of Diepeveen’s book perpetuates such origin myths about the discipline.) Louis Menand is more careful to situate Eliot’s efforts to “divorce [. . .] literary criticism from other kinds of intellectual inquiry” within the particular context of aesthetic debates Eliot had with T. E. Hulme, Irving Babbit, and others during the 1910s and 1920s. Menand emphasizes the unintended consequence of such a position as it was later adopted out of context by those attempting to professionalize English literature in the 1950s and 1960s: “Eliot produced a criticism that could be understood as presenting a highly disciplined, and disciplinary, theory of poetry and critical method. The specialization and professionalization Eliot’s criticism seemed to represent were perfectly compatible with the division of labor in a modern society” (179, my italics). In contrast, when Eliot himself defined the professional in an April 1918 article in The Egoist titled “Professional, or . . .,” his definition—“hard work on style with singleness of purpose” (61)—was much more generous than later efforts to specialize literary study would admit. Eliot eschewed not only the need for genius, but also the need for difficult content or institutional affiliation. He was similarly open-minded about the value of amateur work, insisting that “the opposite of the professional is not the dilettante, the elegant amateur [but] the man of mixed motives.” Although Eliot has long been cast as a rigid conservative mandarin of modernism, the effect of historicizing his ideas suggest that, at least in 1918, he had a democratic understanding of who could be a professional and was careful to
confirm professional writing while not condemning amateurism. Although the writers I study often disagreed with Eliot’s views or had little in common with his life, he instantiates the dynamic understanding of the professions that I am interested in exploring. Thus the elliptical gesture of his title “Professional, or . . . ,” which defers any simple or final responses when considering the professional habit of mind or imagining its opposite, echoes many contemporaneous responses to the rise of professional society that are examined here.

I see my work in conversation with recent scholarship in “The New Modernist Studies” that troubles the traditional account of modernists as elite professionals making intentionally difficult work that would require academic specialists to interpret and teach.21 Lawrence Rainey, for instance, suggests that the stale depictions of elite modernists engaged in writing the poetry and critical theory that the New Critics would then use to sustain their “scientific” analyses, might be reinvigorated by exploring the way modernist literature’s “status as a cultural resource had been secured by an array of institutions quite removed from the tepid confines of the academy” (21). By aligning modernists with the marketplace of publishers, filmmakers, collectors, patrons, and art dealers, scholars have produced laudable and innovative scholarship addressing the commodification of modernist art largely occluded by earlier attempts to position it as aesthetically autonomous. Yet in shifting the affiliation of modernism from the academy to the marketplace, such scholars do nothing to alter the assumption that modernists were thoroughly professional. Rainey and others tap into a conception of the “professional” that was being promoted by commercial elites who were eager, like those in the humanities, to

21 See Mao and Walkowitz’s article for an overview of the “New Modernist Studies.”
appropriate the term from doctors and lawyers in order to legitimate their own work.\footnote{JoAnn Brown notes that all emerging professions have attempted to appropriate the language of established professions. She explains, “physicians [...] borrowed upon clerical authority in distinguishing themselves from ‘laymen’ [and subsequently] psychologists compared themselves to medical doctors” (38, 39).} Thus, “professional” came to be associated increasingly with one who was engaged in the capitalist marketplace and working with other professionals to sell commodities.

If my project seeks to expand the discussion about professional society in one particular strain of the New Modernist Studies, it is indebted to another strain that seeks to elucidate the complex filiations between modernist artists and the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas describes the “public sphere” as both a historical and a normative space in which one finds “private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state” (176). Scholars have revised traditional assumptions about the elite aesthetic of modernist art by pointing not only to complex networks of commodification, but also to the ways modernists responded to the impediments that warfare, limited access to education, bureaucracy, and specialization posed to egalitarian debate among citizens. I see my own project following the work of scholars like Patrick Collier, Melba Cuddy-Keane, and Mark Morrisson who have called attention to the ways modernists saw themselves as public intellectuals and their writing as modeling public sphere discourse for the new and heterogeneous mass reading publics that were emerging in England and the United States.

As I suggested above, modernists frequently invoked the amateur in the context of imagining a community that unites not at the behest of a corporation or a specialized academic discipline, but for the serious pleasure of debating cultural and political concerns. The link between what some modernists called the “amateur spirit” and the public sphere is confirmed in Habermas’s claim that the collapse of the historical public sphere occurred when it “split apart
into minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublically and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical” (175). As recent scholars have demonstrated, modernists were deeply aware of the threat that the expansion of modern commercial, governmental, and institutional influence posed to the public sphere. This project furthers efforts to excavate the palimpsest of literary criticism in order to emphasize the contrast between the ways modernists saw themselves and the accounts of modernism written in the postwar period that tended to recast modernist aesthetics and artists themselves as apolitical and elitist.

Amid a flurry of studies seeking to reinsert the modernist writer into the “professional” marketplace and the mass media, a project titled *Amateur Modernism* might risk appearing regressive and quietist in its ambitions. Yet I argue that by reintroducing the term “amateur” into contemporary critical discussions, we can better understand what was at stake in positioning one’s artistic work within new fields of institutional production. I show in this dissertation that our use of the terms “professional” and “amateur” to retrospectively describe modernists’ activities either in the university or the marketplace must become more nuanced if we wish to further what Rebecca Walkowitz and Douglas Mao term the “expansive tendency” of recent modernist scholarship that seeks to explore the multiple allegiances of modernist writers (737). I understand *Amateur Modernism* to be participating in a challenge to earlier critical claims that posited a “Great Divide” between high and low modernist culture—a claim most famously articulated by Andreas Huyssen in a 1986 book attempting to contrast postmodern cultural hybridity with modernist elitism. I demonstrate that in works of literary as well as popular

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23 Habermas’s analysis accords with other distinctions made in the late-Victorian and modernist periods between different types of communities. In 1887 German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies offered his famous distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, that is, social groupings that emerged by choice and those in which the participants had little choice, such as workers in a corporation.
modernism, we find an interest in combining and reworking the features of professionalism with those of amateurism. Underlying my claims is an understanding of amateurism and professionalism as individual attitudes or habits of mind that are, indeed, able to be honed or discouraged through education, but have no ultimate correlation to credentials or class position.

Because *Amateur Modernism* addresses the modernist propensity to cross boundaries and wander widely, it fittingly adopts a transatlantic perspective that considers an eclectic range of writers as well as genres. The four main writers under consideration have been chosen to represent diversity in gender, race, and class. In addition, the first two chapters explore modernist responses to the rise of professional society in Britain while the final two chapters turn to American modernists. A notable difference in the intellectual currents of the two countries is reflected in the view that British writers understood professionalism as an alternative to notions of class whereas in the United States, the rise of professionalism was seen as furthering the values and ambitions of the middle class. In each case, the critics of professional society believed it introduced foreign elements: many British associated the avidity for modern efficiency with odiously mercenary American attitudes, while Americans worked consciously to prevent their universities from adopting the British tolerance for family privilege above merit.

However, the following chapters more often point to transatlantic connections between the responses of the two cultures toward professionalization. Despite their obvious differences, Ford and Hurston, for instance, were both keenly interested in considering how specialized scholarship could be made broader in scope and more accessible to a general reading public. Woolf and Hammett, meanwhile, both argued that professional structures needed to become less

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24 Compare Chapter 1 of Perkin’s *The Rise of Professional Society* in which he understands professional society in Britain to gradually supersede class-based social structures that thrived between 1880 and 1914 with Chapter 1 of Bledstein’s *The Culture of Professionalism* in which he understands professional society in America to develop out of the values of a broad middle class that had grown throughout much of the nineteenth century.
oppressive and more flexible and open to improvisation if they hoped to accurately gauge the incongruities of modern life. The authors I examine all share concerns about the threat that professional society posed to public sphere debate, all were worried that expertise produced minds that were too narrow and labour that was too dull, and all saw in amateurism a freedom of thought that was threatened by new expectations in modern careers.

Chapter 1, “‘I never had much sense of nationality’: Ford Madox Ford’s Amateur Cosmopolitanism,” argues that Ford was drawn to the figure of the amateur in an effort to understand and defend his cosmopolitan outlook, which was at odds with the nationalist sentiments surrounding the First World War. Ford’s mixed English and German ancestry and his upbringing among Victorian gentleman amateurs left him with an affinity for broad cultural understandings that transcended both national borders and the disciplinary boundaries being established by specialists. The chapter examines Ford in the roles of editor, propagandist, and novelist and concludes that in each we find him attempting to construct a multi-perspectival and multi-vocal text that represents what I call his “cosmopolitan amateurism.” By this I mean his attempt to represent the broad bird’s-eye perspective of the world that he associated with the amateur and to apply it to an empathetic consideration of other cultures and other nations. I end the chapter by looking at his postwar tetralogy, Parade’s End (1924-28) in which Ford’s anachronistic amateur gentleman falters amid the horrors of modern war. I suggest that Ford’s search for alternative sources of amateurism is particularly instructive because it is here that he reaffirms his disdain for the specialist and relocates the source of broad generalist knowledge in the folk knowledge of the rural working class. While Ford was certainly the most hostile toward professionalization among the four principal writers I examine, he was nonetheless eager to spearhead professional endeavours like the English Review in an effort to combine amateurism and professionalism. That is, even though he spoke to a broad amateur sensibility that eschewed
the specialist, he carefully groomed his professional reputation and his work explored the power of the professional writer’s voice as well as its limits.

Chapter 2, “‘This new weapon’: Virginia Woolf’s Transformation of the Professional Mind,” picks up on the previous chapter by invoking Woolf’s own youth spent, like Ford, in the company of Victorian amateur gentlemen, including her father Leslie Stephen. However, while Ford praised their broad “amateur vision,” Woolf reversed the formulation and understood them as representatives of the exclusive patriarchal professions that for hundreds of years rewarded one another and excluded others. This chapter examines Woolf’s belief that women, entering the professions for the first time just after the First World War, could fundamentally redefine the nature of professional training and higher education by incorporating into them elements of amateur thinking. For Woolf, amateurism represented less the expansive breadth of knowledge as it did for Ford, and more a “rambling,” non-systematic engagement with knowledge. In this chapter, I trace the evolution of Woolf’s conception of amateurism from an attitude threatened on all sides by the forces of professional indoctrination as in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, to a symbiotic relationship with professionalism that draws on the benefits of each as in her final novel, *Between the Acts*. Although I emphasize Woolf’s lifelong interest in amateurs and professionals, I focus upon the last decade of her life when she began an extensive research project on the history of the professions that confirmed her earlier belief that professional work could be accomplished without the narrow specializing and self-righteous bullying often accompanying its modern manifestation.

Like Woolf, Hurston was a marginalized figure who challenged the academic men around her through her unorthodox critical and fictional writing. Although doubly marginalized as a black woman, she was able to receive an elite education and converse with many of the major intellectuals of the period including Franz Boas and Alain Locke. In Chapter 3,
“Negotiating the Boundaries of Academia: Reconsidering the ‘Professional’ Zora Neale Hurston,” I call attention to current re-evaluations of Hurston’s work, which give it increasing praise as it has slowly been republished over the last few decades. If Ford defined an amateur habit of mind through its scope, and Woolf by its non-programmatic attention, Hurston understood it to be an eagerness to blend discursive registers like anthropological scholarship and popular drama in an effort to make professional research more accessible to the general public. I take an interdisciplinary approach in order to call attention to the way that Hurston resisted the increasingly hermetic barriers that new disciplines like cultural anthropology were erecting, producing instead writing that sought to combine the resources and accuracy of professional anthropological scholarship with the large audiences and imaginative elements that Broadway or a popular novel was able to garner. I argue that her work on Broadway as well as in mass-market texts like Tell My Horse—which offered readers a hybrid travelogue, ethnography, and political commentary—anticipate contemporary efforts at interdisciplinarity within the university and comment upon the limits of professional attempts to gather knowledge. Amateurism, for Hurston, was a distinctly modern solution to the increasing insularity of the American research university whose findings, she realized, could be translated to the wider public by a marginal figure like herself who was willing to publish in both the scholarly and the popular arena.

While the first three chapters address professionalization in relation to the emergence of new disciplines within the university that cultivated expertise, Chapter 4, “‘It’s a job I like, and I’m going to do it’: Pleasurable Work in Dashiell Hammett’s Bureaucratic America,” argues that for the lower-middle class, professionalization evoked not the politics of the academy, but the imposition of new bureaucratic constraints upon their autonomy. Specifically, I argue that Hammett admired the working pleasures of gentleman-amateur detectives like Sherlock Holmes
in works of mystery fiction and considered how the modern lower-middle class workers in his hard-boiled detective novels could find pleasure of their own. Although his detectives lack the leisured freedom of the gentleman amateur and have little choice but to follow the regulations of the bureaucracies they work within, they find a wry pleasure by improvising within the cracks of normative bureaucratic order. Thus in the final chapter I return to the Victorian gentleman amateur who obsessed Ford. Ford’s ambition to represent modernity more fully by replacing facts with impressions is echoed as well in the skepticism of Hammett’s detectives toward modern bureaucracies, which are capable of ordering the chaos of modernity but only at the cost of reducing it, and so misrepresenting its actual complexity.

Perhaps because of the assumption (although certainly not always the reality) that both the amateur craftsman and the amateur gentleman stand outside the mechanisms of capitalist production, the authors I examine all connect the amateur with their own marginalized positions in society. While the racial and gendered marginalization of a writer like Zora Neale Hurston is obvious and has played a key role in the critical interpretations of her writing, the marginal status of the other writers I focus upon is equally influential on their thinking, although less clear. Although Ford was a central voice of modernism in Britain, mentoring younger writers like D. H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis, his German ancestry left him marginalized in England during the height of anti-German sentiment at the start of the First World War. In the case of Woolf, her socially connected family and her influence on political and cultural life in Britain through the Hogarth Press contrasts with her exclusion from male-dominated Oxbridge and subsequent pathways to public life and power. Dashiell Hammett, despite achieving fame and fortune in New York and Hollywood, felt marginalized by readers and critics of both pulp and literary fiction for attempting to transform the detective novel into serious literature.

Amateurism, I argue, was a means for modernist writers not only to argue for broader and more
sympathetic habits of mind that might transcend new bureaucratic and disciplinary boundaries being erected in the period, but also to process their own particular relationships to power.
Chapter 1

“I never had much sense of nationality”: Ford Madox Ford’s Cosmopolitan Amateurism

Ford Madox Ford’s focus on English national identity is impossible to ignore: he authored a sociological study titled *England and the English* (1905-07), he founded the *English Review*, and wrote two books of propaganda for the British government during the First World War. Patrick Parrinder goes so far as to claim that “of all [Ford’s] literary contemporaries only Kipling [. . .] is so ostensibly concerned with English national identity” (6). Yet Ford’s interest in Englishness never equated to a comfort with it. Born to a German father and an English mother, he often felt himself an outsider in England and spent summers during his youth and young adulthood in France and Germany. He lived in England until 1922 when he moved to France and, later, the United States where he lived out his last years teaching at a small college in Michigan. Despite his fascination with English sensibilities, he explained in a 1933 memoir:

*I never had much sense of nationality. Wherever there were creative thinkers was my country. A country without artists in words, in colours, in stone, in instrumental sounds—such a country would forever be an Enemy Nation. On the other hand every artist of whatever race was my fellow countryman—and the compatriot of every other artist. (It was the Nightingale 74)*

Ford’s ambivalent personal identity became the basis for his vision of an idealized cosmopolitan “Republic of Letters” that would transcend national boundaries, challenge essentialist theories of
national identity, and encourage citizens to cultivate the broad knowledge that he associated with
the mind of the amateur.\textsuperscript{25}

Ford’s cosmopolitan cultural vision was anomalous in the early twentieth century when,
as Eric Hobsbawm writes, across Europe “nationalism gained ground [...] rapidly [as] a
function of both social and political changes, not to mention an international situation that
provided plenty of pegs on which to hang manifestos of hostility to foreigners” (109). In
England, nationalism grew in parallel to concerns that its empire was in decline and that the
vigor of its own citizens was weakening. Ford was particularly attuned to English nationalism
because it resulted in intensified prejudices against Germany, which, under the rule of Kaiser
Wilhelm II, had been increasing its naval power as well as its militant rhetoric since the turn of
the century. In England, the complex tensions between the two nations were reduced to the
contrast between a positive English tradition of liberal humanist education and a negative
German tradition of specialized research. The disparagement of specialization among many in
England, perhaps a curious position to us today, was rooted not only in images of the pedantic
philologist amassing data and collating editions of obscure books, but also in rumours that
German professors had become sycophants to the Kaiser and his focus on weapons research
programs.\textsuperscript{26} Although Ford certainly saw German specialization as a threat, he was deeply
sceptical of the tendency for nationalist rhetoric to hyperbolize regional differences and overlook

\textsuperscript{25} The concept of cosmopolitanism has gained currency in the humanities and political theory over the past decade
partly as a response to the limitations of the multiculturalism professed during the 1980s and 1990s. My own
understanding of the term is derived from Martha Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah’s work. Nussbaum’s
work has proven valuable in its examination of the intersection of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. When I
suggest that Ford’s work advocates a cosmopolitan perspective, I am thinking particularly of Appiah’s definition of
cosmopolitanism as “a receptiveness to art and literature from other places, and a wider interest in lives elsewhere”
(4).

\textsuperscript{26} Criticism of German philology was common among Anglo-American writers of the period. Ezra Pound wryly
explains, “this system was designed to inhibit thought. After 1848 it was, in Germany, observed that some people
thought. It was necessary to curtail this pernicious activity, the thinkists were given a china egg labeled scholarship,
and were gradually unfitted for active life, or for any contact with life in general” (14-15).
cultural similarities, especially as wartime propaganda simplistically assigned virtues and vices to entire nations. Yet his blatantly German name (he was Ford Hermann Hueffer until 1914 when he became Ford Madox Hueffer, and finally Ford Madox Ford in 1919) left him vulnerable in an increasingly xenophobic and paranoid England and forced him to shroud his cosmopolitan sentiments that sought a rapprochement between the nations.27

Yet it was not simply his own transnational heritage that prompted Ford to advocate for broad, amateur habits of mind. When he looked out at the Edwardian public sphere, he perceived it to be dangerously fragmented and its citizens in need of holistic cultural understanding. Believing the modern citizen’s intellectual horizons to be reduced to a “snatching of news, turning swiftly from one short sensational paragraph to another and filling his mind with the short facets of facts hardly at all related the one with the other,” he sought an urgent intervention (*Critical Attitude* 124-25). Lacking works informed by an amateur habit of mind striving to acquire an expansive breadth of knowledge, Ford saw citizens limited to the confusingly fragmented “white spray of facts” offered by newspapers or, equally stultifying, the narrow and tendentious opinion of specialists (123). Mass culture and the specialization of knowledge prevented citizens from acquiring an adequately broad understanding of the world and meant that “the average man [. . .] has abandoned even feeling about any public matter at all” (115). Undergirding both Ford’s literary and critical writing is the question of how, in a professionalized and increasingly nationalistic society, citizens could acquire the broad amateur knowledge and empathy that would allow them to participate in the public sphere and cultivate

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27 Ford’s surname “Hueffer,” had already been anglicised from “Hüffer” by his father, who immigrated to England in 1869. Like Ford, the British royal family had (and still does have) German ancestry through Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. They too anglicised their surname, changing it to “Windsor” in 1917.
the humanistic sensibilities that opposed war on the grounds of a common humanity that transcended national borders.

Seeking a model for a habit of mind that would resist both nationalism and specialization and embrace the breadth of a cosmopolitan public sphere,\(^{28}\) Ford thought back to the Victorian gentlemen amateurs whose minds he admired for their wide-ranging and promiscuous curiosity. As the grandson of painter Ford Madox Brown and the nephew of writer and critic William Michael Rossetti, Ford grew up imbibing the aesthetic ambitions of the Pre-Raphaelites and other “Victorian great figures” who embraced the cultural traditions of Italy and France as well as England (Ancient Lights xi).\(^{29}\) His vision for the ideal modern critical mind was borrowed from the broad perspectives of the Victorian men of letters who cultivated “connected thought” (Critical Attitude 123), and could, as Matthew Arnold put it, “see life steadily and see it whole.” Updating Arnold for the twentieth century, Ford mourned that while “we may contemplate life steadily enough to-day: it is impossible to see it whole” (28). Although Arnold and his contemporaries like Ruskin, Carlyle, Thackeray, Morris, and Swinburne (many of whom Ford met when they visited his uncle’s drawing room), may not have considered themselves to be amateurs, their works suggested, for Ford, certain polymathic achievements, which he thought to be more valuable to cultural and political life than the modern specialist whose dominance was increasingly felt in modernist England. Ford’s tendency to mythologize and embellish meant that his conception of the Victorian amateur gentleman’s mind was never meant to stand as an assiduously researched historical claim, but rather, his own sense of the atmosphere of their

\(^{28}\) In Habermas’s account, the public sphere is linked to wide-ranging and cosmopolitan thinking that Ford associated with the amateur. He explains that is imbued with “Kantian notions of universality, cosmopolitanism, and science” (18)

\(^{29}\) Douglas Goldring describes the Pre-Raphaelite movement in terms that would have resonated with Ford, as a “strange outburst of revolutionary idealism, which was a protest against the way England’s beauty was being defiled by Practical Business Men” (9).
The idealism and abstraction at work in Ford’s imagining of the amateur mind is apparent in a 1907 passage where he describes the traits that a modern cultural critic should possess:

The person who sets himself such a task should [...] be attached by very strong ties to the race of which he writes, or he will write without sympathy. He should, if possible, be attached to as many other races as may be by ties equally strong, or he will [...] be unable to draw impartial comparisons. He must be possessed of a mind of some aptness to interest itself in almost every department of human thought, or his view will be tinged with that saddest of all human wrong-headedness—specialization. [...] He must, as well as it is possible for a single man to compass it, be an all-round man. He must, in fact, be an amateur—a lover of his kind and all its works. (*Spirit of the People* 235)

The elements of this thinly veiled self-description would grow to be foundational to Ford’s vision of writing, of thinking, and of living in the modern world. His later work would echo the attempt in this passage to fuse both the artistic process to a cosmopolitan perspective, and cosmopolitanism to an amateurism that resisted modern efforts to specialize thought.  

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30 Elena Lamberti relates one of the best-known instances of Ford working to project a sensibility for his readers at the cost of historical accuracy: “In *Ancient Lights*, for instance, you have Thomas Carlyle who, at Weimar and disguised as a waiter, serves tea to Goethe and Schiller who are sitting ‘in eighteenth-century court dress beneath a tree’” (“Writing” 99). Carlyle was ten when Schiller died in 1805.

31 There is the risk, especially when interpreting the Victorian or modernist periods, of misinterpreting imperial ambitions as cosmopolitan ones. After all, both require an interest in the wider world beyond the nation, but perhaps only the latter requires one to empathize and enter into conversation with the Other. Ford was occasionally inconsistent about his views on the Empire, as he was with many issues, but Patrick Parrinder concludes convincingly, I think, that while he carried some of the imperialist assumptions of his day, “Ford is not a simple imperialist, since he doesn’t suppose that white settlers that have gone out to, say, Canada and Australia will remain English” (8). Caroline Patey is more definitive about Ford’s anti-imperial stance concluding that “Ford and many of his closer friends were actively involved in puncturing the balloons of national and imperial rhetoric [and] welcomed the idea of a nation without an empire” (88). See Patey and Doggett for analyses of *The Good Soldier* that, according to Patey, “provides Ford with an occasion to take his readers on a sardonic colonial grand tour” to India, [and] South Africa” (87). She continues, “less remotely, imperial policy is also seen through the lenses of the Irish settlers, harassed by endemic troubles and poverty.” As will become clear, the type of imagined transnational
Ford’s attempt to borrow the amateur habit of mind from the Victorians and insert it into modernist cultural life speaks to Max Saunders’s description of Ford’s writing as “profoundly transitional: Janus-faced, looking back to its Victorian and Edwardian predecessors as much as sideways and forwards to its Modernist contemporaries and heirs” (“Modernism” 422). Just as Ford rejected modern specialization for its role in exacerbating the fragmentation of public life, he also recognized that nostalgically calling for a return to the age of the Victorian amateur gentleman was neither possible nor desirable. Although he labels certain Victorians as “deities” and “heroes” in his early memoir Ancient Lights (1911), his praise is couched in irony because it adopts his own childhood point of view. In fact, he bookends such praise with descriptions of the oppression he felt as a child in their presence. Writing to his own children in his dedication he explains, “These people were perpetually held up to me as standing upon unattainable heights, and at the same time I was perpetually being told that if I could not attain these heights I might just as well not cumber the earth. [. . .] Nowadays we have no great figures and I thank Heaven for it, for you and I can breathe freely” (xi).\(^3^2\) He concludes the book admitting: “We could not possibly put up with any of these people [today]” (256). Although the Victorian gentlemen he surveys demonstrated amateur thinking, their intimidating grandeur meant their habits of mind could not be democratized in order to respond to the broader cultural crisis in Ford’s own time.

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\(^3^2\) Stefan Collini critiques the modernist retrospective mythmaking that depended upon the “positing of an earlier ‘wholeness.’” He argues, “one of the main functions served by reconstructions of Victorian culture in the first half of the twentieth century was to give historical location to the ideal of an ‘integrated’ culture, one not stratified between highbrow and lowbrow nor compartmentalized by ‘specialism’” (Common Reading 214). Ford’s despair over the fragmentation of modern society may appear to fall into this trap. However, his acknowledgment of the oppressive and claustrophobic smallness of the Victorian public sphere suggests he was not as naïve about Victorian culture as Collini claims some modernists were.
In this chapter, I focus on three of Ford’s projects that, in name and reputation, suggest a deep allegiance to English nationalism, but, as I argue, in fact, deploy a cosmopolitan amateurism that subtly critiques it. I begin by examining Ford’s role as editor of the *English Review*. Drawing upon scholarship from the field of book history, which has been particularly interested in the development of modernist little magazines, I examine Ford’s arrangement of the individual articles to suggest that he aimed to construct a cosmopolitan public sphere by including voices in his journal that contradicted his own editorials and by challenging readers to find connections between incompatible epistemologies and narratives written by authors of differing nationalities. In the second section, I examine Ford’s propaganda for the British government during the First World War. Perhaps under pressure to prove his patriotism to British authorities, he produced what critics have described as singularly ineffective propaganda. My argument here is that what makes his book on Germany poor propaganda also makes it a very good example of his attempt to advocate for a broad amateur habit of mind that could help us to think sympathetically across national borders. In the final section, I turn to Ford’s postwar tetralogy *Parade’s End* (1924-28) described as “perhaps the most comprehensive fictive exploration of Englishness which the twentieth century produced” (D. Brown 169). I suggest that the tetralogy points to the collapse of cosmopolitan amateur perspectives during the war as ruling class power decayed and the new administrative class proved itself unable to take up the mantle of leadership because it lacked a broad, comprehensive perspective on the war. More significantly for Ford, the war challenged his own assumptions that the novelist or critic could see life any clearer than the readers of fatuous tabloids or narrow-minded specialists. And yet in *Parade’s End*, Ford searches for postwar sources of a unified vision of cultural and political life both in local and rural traditions and, perhaps ultimately, in the novel’s own sprawling,
polyvocal form whose broad perspective is capable of registering empathy for the individual and the bird’s-eye-view of amateur cosmopolitanism.

Seeing the English Review Steadily and Seeing it Whole

Writing to Edward Garnett in 1901 Ford remarked, “why couldn’t one make some sort of nucleus, just some little attempt at forming a small heap on which people could stand and get a point of view with their heads a few inches above the moral atmosphere of these Islands” (Letters 15). His brief tenure as editor of the English Review for fifteen issues from December 1908 to December 1909 marks perhaps his most successful response to his own call for a “heap” where one could stand and see beyond the hermetic and stagnant culture of Edwardian England. At a moment when the liberal political consensus was splintering, and sensational commercial enterprises like the Daily Mail were dominating readers’ attention with puerile scandals, games, and contests, Ford sought to offer readers of the English Review “serious” and sustained thought on a range of issues. In contrast to the mass media and expert decrees that offered “tit-bits” (as one popular tabloid promised) that confused and atomized a citizen’s understanding of the modern world, he sought to construct a cosmopolitan viewpoint that eschewed political or national bias. (English Review 3.11, 484). The goal of bringing together contradictory voices under one cover was to encourage readers to reconsider accepted boundaries between various discourses and to adopt the cosmopolitan outlook exemplified in his quotation from Roman playwright Terence: “the province of the proper man is to say: ‘nihil humanum a me alienum puto’” (nothing human is alien to me) (English Review 4.13, 106). While the title of the English Review would seem to contradict such a claim, Ford’s friend and sometime collaborator Joseph Conrad who, Ford tells us, chose the title, “felt a certain sardonic pleasure in the choosing of so national a name for a periodical that promised to be singularly international in tone” (Return to
Ford’s short-lived success presenting readers of the *English Review* with a cosmopolitan, multi-perspectival representation of modern life with its reports on foreign affairs and diverse literary offerings has not, as I demonstrate, been fully considered due to the attendant complexities of analyzing the periodical form.

While Mark Morrisson has compared Ford’s ambition to establish a journal “capable of accommodating a wide range of heterodox thought” to the prominent Victorian reviews like the *Fortnightly* or the *Mercure de France* (53), Ford’s own editorials in the *Review* suggest a better analogue might be the working-class music halls that he frequented at the time. For instance, in “On the Function of the Arts in the Republic,” Ford, like T. S. Eliot in his later essay “Marie Lloyd” (1922), turns to music halls in search of “pulse-stirring—for any form of any consummate expression of Art” (*English Review* 1.2, 320). He explains that the appeal of music halls lie in their unpredictable pastiche form: “various performers will cast lights, sinister, tragic, depressing or inspiriting, but lurid enough, upon the circumstances and psychology of the very poor” (321). Ford praises the cosmopolitan variety of the acts for their accurate representation of modern life. Their multinational melange is suggested in “the little Cossack dance of Mlle. Kyasht,” or Mlle. Britta’s performance as “Miss Genée” (320), or the “songs sung by Miss Victoria Monks [featuring an] odd mixture of the precise and formal cockney dialect with the negro musical mood” (*English Review* 1.3, 567). In the following issue of the *Review*, Ford contrasts music hall performances with performances by professional musicians who, from the perspective of the audience, seem to be “in another sphere, like angels playing upon celestial

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33 See Harding who examines the un-Englishness of the *Review* despite the resurgence of English nationalism in the Edwardian period. Saunders reports that “E. V. Lucas (a contributor to *Punch*) told Conrad the *Review* was ‘too foreign for its title’” (*Dual Life* 2: 242).

34 In a letter to famed modernist literary agent James Pinker in 1909 Ford wrote: “some devil, or some angel has filled me with a wild desire to write a series of articles on Music Hall Stars,—for some of whom I have a great admiration—and on the Music Hall Stage as a factor in popular life” (*Letters* 38).
instruments, remote indeed from any national necessities” (567). But if professional performance results in rarefied music that is problematically unable to address human concerns, the cause of such a shortcoming lies elsewhere. Ford concludes his essay: “the trouble with the professional concert consists, of course, in the professional. On him or her so much more interest is centred than on the art he dominates.” While his editorial makes clear his preference for the less angelic but more democratic and collaborative performances in the music halls, we are left to wonder how the heteroglossia of the music halls could be transferred to the very different medium of the little magazine.

As I demonstrate below, Ford’s editorial practices disrupted national as well as stylistic uniformity by putting contradictory voices side-by-side. Specifically, I am interested in the way that Ford’s editorial process of culling and arranging the articles themselves within each issue of the journal modeled the broad patchwork of ideas that he admired in the amateur mind. Yet two obstacles stand in the way of such an analysis. First, the relative difficulty of obtaining a complete run of the journal until recently has meant that scholars have privileged Ford’s editorials and ignored the editorial choices he actually made.35 Second, a year after selling and then being fired from the English Review, Ford broke up the cosmopolitan public sphere of his journal by extracting a handful of his own editorials and republishing them in a book titled The Critical Attitude (1911). At the time, it allowed Ford to showcase his criticism while distancing himself from the Review that he had driven to the brink of financial ruin.36 Yet the consequence

35 The digitalization of many modernist magazines by the Modernist Journals Project has democratized access to many obscure journals from the period and begun the process of encouraging scholars to reconsider the original material contexts of many canonical modernist texts.

36 When the journal ran into financial trouble, Ford sold the journal to financier and politician Sir Alfred Mond who promptly ousted him. The differential between Ford’s aesthetic and financial acumen is legendary. Despite publishing stories by Henry James, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Wyndham Lewis, and D. H. Lawrence, the journal could not survive with the financial arrangements that Ford permitted. As Eric Homberger explains, “Ford proposed
of collecting his editorials was that they came to sound monologic, imperious, and repetitive since they were no longer tempered by the other voices in the *Review*. Perhaps without knowing it, Ford obscured his original contrapuntal arrangement that placed his criticism alongside that of the contributors whom he handpicked to enter into productive dialogue each month. The recently available digital *English Review* cannot reveal to us Ford’s original intentions, but it does give evidence for a set of authorial intentions existing prior to those of *The Critical Attitude*, which offer important insight about how he wanted his writing to be read in relation to his contributors.

In the first issue of the *English Review* we can see several examples of Ford’s effort to set up contrasting articles that would play off one another and create a dialogical environment in which no single approach was permitted to dominate. As I will show, even the authority of his first editorial laying out the journal’s core principles is offset by the contradictory and contrasting voices that follow it. In his first editorial, he offered readers a familiar Fordian argument about modern public discourse and the role of the writer. He explains, “what we so very much need to-day is a picture of the life we live. It is only the imaginative writer who can supply this, because no collection of facts, and no tabulation of figures, can give us any sense of proportion” (*English Review* 1.1, 160). Indeed, Ford would remark a few years later, “I don’t really deal in facts, I have for facts a most profound contempt. I try to give you what I see to be the spirit of an age, of a town, of a movement. This can not be done with facts” (*Ancient Lights* to offer one guinea per page for prose, and up to £5 per poem: his generosity soon became proverbial. He paid up to £300 per issue to contributors, and lost the staggering sum of £500 for each number. The *English Review* sold for half a crown. It was a machine to reduce Ford to penury” (61).
Ford, along with Joseph Conrad and other modernists, opted to access truth through the literary impression. For Ford, impressionism was a process by which the artist passively receives impressions and then records a precise rendering of lived experience that often superimposes past and present perceptions of objects or individuals. Yet despite his insistence that impressionist prose was crucial to an understanding of modern life, twenty pages further along in the first issue of his own journal, readers would have encountered an article that relies on both the facts and tables of figures that Ford’s editorial railed against. The article, written by journalist Henry Nevinson and titled “Notes on the Balkans, with a Table,” presents the Balkans demographically: “less than half the population is Orthodox (the rest being Roman Catholics or Mohammedan descendants of people early converted by the Turks), nearly all of them are Serbs by race” (English Review 1.1, 185). Lacking a first-person perspective, the report is bizarrely out of place in the Review and seems of more use to government administrators than individual citizens attempting to understand the wider world. No one, to my knowledge, has commented upon this and other contradictions in style and content resulting from Ford’s editorial decisions at the Review, but I would suggest, even if they were unintentional, they are evidence of Ford’s preference for broad amateur perspectives that tolerated contradictions and contained multitudes.

One wonders whether such polyvocality could be coincidental when, in the same first issue, two articles appear both addressing the problem of unemployment. The first, written by

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37 This passage echoes the impressionist complaint expressed in the trial scene in Lord Jim (1900) in which Jim exclaims, “They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!” (63). While Ford and Conrad’s collaboration on The Inheritors (1901) and Romance (1905) is well known, Saunders suggests Ford had a strong influence on novels like Lord Jim as well (Dual Life 1:117, n.2).

38 But as Wollaeger notes, “Conrad’s impressionism is not Ford’s. [. . .] Conrad disdained the term and referred tellingly to Stephen Crane as a [sic] ‘only an impressionist.’” He adds, “in Conrad’s epistemology, as in Woolf’s, facts retain some empirical heft independent of their implications in theories and values” (137).

39 One of the most thorough discussions of Fordian impressionism appears in Saunders, “Modernism, Impressionism, and The Good Soldier:”
the Welsh poet W. H. Davies, is titled “How it Feels to be Out of Work,” and offers an impressionistic view of unemployment:

> It is generally in spring or summer that a man out of work takes courage to leave his friends and seek work in strange places. [. . .] The man no sooner hears of work being done than he hastens in that direction. [. . .] [He] begins to feel distressed when several weeks go by and still there is no prospect of work. He sees his shoes wearing away and his clothes beginning to change colour. (English Review 1.1, 168, 169)

Davies’s prose encourages us to empathize with the unemployed and recognize the courage required of one who is dependent upon inconsistent seasonal work. The article that immediately follows this, titled “A Complete Actuarial Scheme for Insuring John Doe Against All the Vicissitudes of Life,” also addresses unemployment but is coldly impersonal in tone and depends upon facts not impressions to make its case. It advocates “putting a mathematician” onto the problem of solving unemployment. Not only is the article fact-heavy; at its conclusion, it presents a “tabular statement of the calculations” (171). While both articles address unemployment and offer some form of solution, the first narrative prefers individualistic sensory and emotive descriptions, while the second is technical, requiring a level of expertise on the part of the writer, and knowledge of some economic jargon on the part of the reader. By returning to the original layout of the English Review, we find that its initial readers were shuffled between objective statistical reports and emotional impressions of the modern world and were tacitly prompted, partly through the physical adjacency of discordant narratives within the covers of the journal, not to separate these discourses into specialized disciplines but to consider the way each reinforced the other.

Considering that Ford had such a low estimation of the English public’s cultural literacy, many of his editorial decisions seem based upon the capacities of an imagined or ideal reader...
eager to engage with world culture. Many of the early issues seem overeager to present a cosmopolitan point of view that, based upon the financial fate of the journal, readers were not as willing to be challenged with as Ford had hoped. In the second issue, for instance, a story by Anatole France appears in the original French and stands adjacent to a travel story about Andorra, followed by a story written by Vernon Lee based upon a Moorish ghost story. The reader that Ford imagines here is, rather implausibly, interested as well in keeping abreast of parliamentary activity at home, in Russia, and in the Netherlands. As if this weren’t enough of a hodgepodge, this section is followed by a report from the French legion in Tehran. Although we know the main reason for the journal’s failure was Ford’s financial incompetence, the Review could not have been helped by Ford’s willingness to present to his readers the broad scope of amateur thought at the expense of the journal’s overall readability and cohesiveness. Although Ford believed an amateur cosmopolitan perspective would make world affairs clearer in the minds of his readers, as we will see, his critics enjoyed pointing to the way that his eclectic cultural sensibilities created a jumble of ideas that only produced more confusion.

Insights from the field of book history can help us understand how the meaning of a single article might be affected by how it is physically or digitally situated within a text. Jerome McGann, for example, argues in The Textual Condition that the physical and organizational contexts of texts have profound effects on our interpretations of them. He explains, “literary works typically secure their effects by other than purely linguistic means. Every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes, on the one hand, and the bibliographical codes on the other” (77). McGann not only offers us a useful vocabulary; he also redefines a text’s meaning as “a set of concrete and

40 Indeed, the heterodox and transnational offerings of the journal disappeared when Ford was forced to sell the journal to Austin Harrison whose reign was a “pathetic footnote to Ford’s promising start” (Morrisson 51).
always changing conditions: because the meaning is in the use and textuality is a social condition of various times, places and persons” (21). He suggests we must consider how our interpretations of modernist writing change when they become anthologized: one’s reading experience is significantly altered when a text first published in a modernist magazine alongside other texts including advertisements is republished in a stand-alone edition that refocuses a reader’s attention on the single text.\(^{41}\) When Ford isolated his own editorials from the other contributors to the *English Review* by publishing them in *The Critical Attitude*, he decoupled the linguistic and bibliographical signification of his criticism and, in the process, made his point of view appear more doctrinaire than it was in its original manifestation where it was interwoven with other voices. For McGann, who sees material culture as inexorably linked to aesthetic experience, modernist little magazines like the *English Review* enable us to read modernism in its original context; literature and advertisement, as well as literature and popular fiction appear side-by-side within little magazines, having not yet come under the segregating impulse of anthologists or those committed to establishing a modernist canon.

Read in its original format, the *English Review* advocates Ford’s cosmopolitan amateurism both in the content of his editorials and its aesthetic form. The tendency to study only the editorials he wrote for the journal has meant that we have overlooked the way his editorial composition mimicked, through its inclusion of dissenting voices, the polyvocality that his criticism advocated; that is, his editorial theory reinforced his aesthetic theory. By including

\(^{41}\) See Bishop for a detailed analysis of the relationship between the physical format of little magazines and the literature that was first printed within. He argues that by reading Ford’s “The Saddest Story” (the serialized title of *The Good Soldier*) in its original setting, Wyndham Lewis’s *BLAST*, we see “how crucial the *mise en page* and illustration becomes. The illustration [on the facing page of Ford’s text] by Etchells foregrounds the cubist quality of the narration, a quality emphasized by the double space between the paragraphs. [. . .] If you read it in an edition with a Penguin cover it is already in a sense domesticated. [. . .] It is no longer a Blast but a whimper” (“Re:Covering” 298, 300).
the voices of the specialist and the professional, Ford embraced the paradox of amateurism: while burdened with the task of distinguishing itself from its narrowly specialized opposite, it must incorporate its opposite in order to legitimate its claim of offering a catholic vision of the world. As editor, Ford recognized this paradox and knew that he must offer readers heterogeneous perspectives on cultural and political life if he hoped to construct a homogenous liberal culture in the pages of his journal.

Despite including discursive forms he disagreed with, he surely hoped his readers would see the superiority of his impressionistic epistemology in its ability to represent modern life. Even late in his life, Ford bitterly opposed specialization, complaining, “a culture that is founded on the activities of the applied scientist, the financier, the commercial engineer is not only very little elevated above the state of savagedom but is foredoomed” (Return to Yesterday 394). Although Ford never explained explicitly why as editor of the English Review he included specialists within the public sphere he constructed, I would suggest it had much to do with what drew him to the amateur perspective in the first place: its tolerance toward oppositional ways of thinking. His attempt in the English Review to alert readers to the danger of unwavering commitments to particular points of view and his attempt to broaden their perspectives on the world is undertaken again in perhaps the most improbable of discourses, war propaganda.

The Patriotic Amateur and the Enemy Specialist

On August 8, 1914, four days into the First World War, Ford wrote in his weekly current events column for the journal Outlook: “whichever side wins in the end—my own heart is certain to be mangled in either case. [...] when the world again has leisure to think about letters, the whole world will have changed” (qtd. in Tomlinson and Green 149). He goes on to explain, “because for my sins I am a cosmopolitan, and also, I suppose, a poet so apt to identify myself
with anyone’s suffering as to be unable to take sides very violently, I have probably thought more about these things, and certainly suffer more over them, than most people” (qtd. in Saunders 207, my italics). 42 In one of the strange ironies of history, later that year the same journal would serialize Ford’s first book of state-commissioned propaganda, *When Blood is Their Argument* (1915) which, at one point, calls for the extermination of the German people. Although we know many details about how Ford came to write propaganda for the British government, we aren’t certain to what extent his German ancestry forced his hand or whether he believed it violated his artistic principles. 43 In any case, the bizarre book he produced shares many of the inconsistencies of message and style that the issues of the *English Review* demonstrate, and, I argue, shared many of the same cosmopolitan amateur ambitions.

Ford was writing his first book of propaganda as he was composing his masterpiece, *The Good Soldier* (1915) in which he offers a sympathetic portrayal of the confused John Dowell. Dowell struggles to justify his actions in his relationship with his wife who cheated on him with his close friend Edward Ashburnham who, it is gradually revealed, betrayed him multiple times. Describing his most intimate relationships, Dowell admits, “It is all darkness” (192). His ineptness at “dealing with the queer, shifty thing that is human nature” (285), stands in contrast to what Ford, in his aesthetic theory laid out a few years earlier, believed to be the role of the modern writer: “my business in life, in short, is to try to discover, and to try to let you see, where

42 Ford had a strong sense not only of a cultural connection to Germany, but also a familial connection. In a letter to his publisher John Lane requesting payment for *The Good Soldier* manuscript, Ford darkly prophecies: “shortly you may expect to see me pantingly popping cartridges into garrison guns directed against my uncles, cousins and aunts advancing in pickelhaubes,” that is, the spiked helmets worn by German soldiers in the First World War (*Letters* 61).

43 The risk that English jingoist sentiment posed to Ford was certainly no joke. Mizener reports that “On 2 January 1915, as a result of anti-German feeling, Ford had been ordered by the chief constable of West Sussex to leave the county” (250-51).
we stand” (Ancient Lights xv). The implicit suggestion that most modern individuals share Dowell’s inability to adjudicate the accuracy of modern narratives on their own leaves the modern writer with the important task of offering readers cultural and political insight. By enabling us to see what the self-deluded Dowell does not, The Good Soldier follows Ford’s aesthetic notion that the modern author had an obligation to show the reader where they stand. Yet Ford’s simultaneous work as a propagandist would seem to run counter to his claim; war propaganda ostensibly collapses the multiple truths voiced in a text like The Good Soldier into a singular, unambiguous truth.

Curiously, in “On Impressionism” (1914), published the same year he began writing propaganda, Ford insists that the impressionist “must not write propaganda” and that the impression must not work to “deceive” or “change” the mind of the reader; instead, the impressionist is to imagine the reader as “a much better fellow” than himself (577). Impressionism, thus, acquires a moral dimension that propaganda lacks: it is to be undertaken as well as read by a “homo bonae voluntatis”—man of good will who, by definition, doesn’t deal in deception (576). While propaganda seeks to estrange one group of people (the imagined readers) from another (the imagined enemy), literature, Ford believed, created “sympathies” between readers. At least on the surface, Ford’s decision to write propaganda is a deep betrayal of his impressionist creed as well as his semi-fanciful ideal of the Victorian gentlemen who wrote not only to benefit civic life but also for the love of it: as amateurs.

Mark Wollaeger explains Ford’s seemingly contradictory behaviour by arguing that Fordian impressionism and propaganda have much in common. Both are committed to

44 John Dowell rephrases the assertion in The Good Soldier, “it’s the business of a novelist to make you see things clearly” (130). Both echo Conrad’s famous preface to The Nigger of the “Narcissus” (1897) in which he writes: “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see” (147).
“reinvesting facts with feeling” and both impose a “dehistoricizing and decontextualizing operation” upon the material they analyze (130). But if these qualities have a positive effect when employed by Fordian impressionism, their use risks opening “the door to the propagandistic manipulation of the historical record.” He explains, impressionism and propaganda each “aims to restore wholeness and feeling to information, though for quite different reasons” (143). While I agree with Wollaeger’s argument, I want to offer a slightly different explanation for Ford’s willingness to propagandize: Ford’s “propaganda” doesn’t violate his earlier commitments to showing the public where they stand because it isn’t really propaganda and, in fact, boldly critiques the genre. As I will demonstrate, Ford’s decision to write in a genre that pollutes the public sphere by hampering citizens’ ability to see where they stand, was not, in fact, contradictory to his earlier ambition to reinvigorate public debate because what he ultimately wrote was a multi-vocal text that decentered any one perspective on England and Germany.

The story of how Ford came to write propaganda likely originates with his friendship with the Liberal Member of Parliament C. F. G. Masterman, who had been appointed to head the nascent British War Propaganda Bureau. A month into the war, members of the Edwardian literary establishment including H. G. Wells, G. K. Chesterton, J. M. Barrie, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, were covertly summoned to Wellington House, as the Bureau became known, where they were commissioned to write books that would be distributed not in Britain but in America, which had not yet entered the war and was the richest and most powerful of the neutral nations.45 Although Ford wasn’t in attendance at the initial meeting, Masterman approached him

45 For a detailed version of this story, see Buitenhuis, ch. 2. The activities of Wellington House during the War were not made public until 1935 when J. D. Squires published his British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917.
shortly after and asked him to write a book on the history of modern Germany and later, one on French culture. 46 While it strikes us as bizarre today for a government to surreptitiously employ novelists to sway public opinion, at the time, novelists and poets had a profound influence on the public’s perception of the war. As Paul Fussell explains in his classic study *The Great War and Modern Memory*, the First World War was the first war in which “it was possible for soldiers to be not merely literate but vigorously literary” (157). Further, censoring became a common practice because the war produced “events so shocking, bizarre, and stomach-turning that the events had to be tidied up for presentation to a highly literate mass population” on the home front (178).

The first of the two books Ford wrote for Wellington House, *When Blood is Their Argument*, is worth examining today largely for characteristics that made it decidedly poor propaganda at the time. As Celia Kingsbury explains, much of the text was “inaccessible to all but the most educated and sophisticated readers, and therefore proved virtually worthless as propaganda” (92). Unwilling or unable to adopt the narrow, monological voice of the propagandist, Ford used the opportunity that his Wellington House commission afforded him to repeat the experiment he had conducted in the pages of the *English Review* five years earlier in which he granted generous space to counterarguments. He again offered his readers a cosmopolitan polyphony: German and British scholars share space on the page, and statistical and impressionistic interpretations of culture and politics are both present, allowing readers to decide which offered a truer account of modern society.

46 Ford’s book commission came at a transitional moment when British government officials were recognizing the superior propagandistic potential of film. As Peter Buijtenhuis notes, “when the Asquith government fell in December 1916, the direction of British propaganda rapidly changed. Masterman was demoted and literary propaganda was de-emphasized in favour of the press and film. Newspaper men became more evident in the production and direction of propaganda” (xvii).
At best, Ford’s depiction of the Germans in his propaganda would have appeared tame to contemporary readers, at worst, incomprehensible. First, he avoided rehashing the erroneous and graphic accounts of alleged wartime atrocities perpetrated by German soldiers against women and children during the invasion of Belgium the previous year. These accounts had been widely disseminated in the British government’s Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages (1915) more familiarly termed the Bryce Report. In addition to the Bryce Report, which was translated into thirty languages by Wellington House, posters, pamphlets, and books propagating caricatures of the German soldier as a “‘Beastly Hun’ with his saber-belt barely encompassing his enormous girth, busily crucifying soldiers, violating women, mutilating babies, desecrating and looting churches” served as a casus belli for the British public (Sanders and Taylor 137). In contrast, Ford’s book published the same year as the Bryce Report, deflates and disperses readers’ outrage through obtrusive footnotes, lengthy quotations (sometimes in the original German), anecdotes that are complimentary to the Germans, and seven scholarly appendices.

A reviewer for the London Times picked up on these oddities when he explained that Ford “bases his judgment on evidence of all kinds, from Government papers of the dullest kind to lively recollections of his personal experiences in Germany; from the Emperor’s speeches to the tears of a workman’s wife” (“Books of the Week”). Although the reviewer was unaware that the book was official propaganda, his critique suggests that When Blood is Their Argument lacked the reductive rhetoric that allows propaganda to achieve its aim and instead, offered readers turgid prose that humanized the enemy. The explanation for Ford’s failed propaganda is, I believe, a

47 See Read, who explains that later historians have concluded that the false atrocities described in the Bryce Report were a result not of intentional misdirection but the credulity and poor investigative practices of the committee that, for example, corroborated anecdotes with additional anecdotal evidence.

48 Sanders and Taylor note that although the records of Wellington House have largely been destroyed, the commissioned writers do not seem to have been censored by the Foreign Office. The result of this was that “official propaganda material was often inconsistent and contradictory” (161).
mixture of his lasting affinity for Germany and his commitment to addressing political and cultural concerns from a variety of perspectives that imitated, in his mind, the wide-ranging curiosity of the amateur. Thus, his propaganda attempted to do what propaganda cannot: to find affinities between allies and enemies and demand more subtle delineation than government officials are willing to acknowledge.

If Ford’s depiction of Germany was unique at the time in that it refused to recount atrocity stories, it was common in its use of the “Two Germanys” model. The model averred a good and bad Germany divided either temporally into a culturally rich past and a barren, materialistic present, or geographically into the regions of Prussia to the north and Westphalia to the south. For instance, Ford claims that while the south of Germany has produced valuable culture, Prussia is “a rudely machined organisation [...] whose chief characteristic, whose chief province of life is the provision of ‘monomaniacs interested in their special subjects’” (When Blood is Their Argument xix). Prussian society, he argues, encourages authoritarian indoctrination associated with “kultur,” a term that became ubiquitous in the British press at the start of the war. Even in its spelling, kultur suggested the corruption of the more familiar domestic values of “culture.”

Contemporary readers would have recognized the two competing models of the German mind and Ford’s concern with preserving one while exterminating the other.

In E. M. Forster’s Howards End (1910), for instance, opinions of the Schlegel family divide along the Two Germanys model. Like Ford, Margaret and Helen Schlegel were born to a

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49 The comparison between culture and kultur was active in the United States as well. A United States Army recruitment poster from 1917 depicts a massive gorilla wearing a German military helmet with the word “Militarism” written across it. It is stepping onto land labeled “America” while in one arm it holds a grieving woman and in the other it wields a crude club with the word “Kultur” written across it. The poster reads: “Destroy This Mad Brute: Enlist” (Robertson 140-41).
German father and English mother. As the narrator explains, they were not “English to the backbone” but were also not “Germans of the dreadful sort” (42). In contrast to the German mindset responsible for the “materialism obscuring the Fatherland,” Helen and Margaret’s father was “not the aggressive German” but a “countryman of Hegel and Kant [. . .] inclined to be dreamy, whose Imperialism was the Imperialism of the air.” The novel holds out hope that the militant materialism could, in time, give way to the rich German cultural past that has influenced English culture, as a key scene in the novel demonstrates. The well-known scene describes the characters’ various reactions to the music and reminds us of the claim that art makes to transcend national boundaries; while Helen and Margaret’s German cousin turns the music into patriotic sentiment, focusing on the fact that Beethoven is “echt Deutsch” (45), the music allows for a plurality of responses and ultimately speaks to human values outside of time and nationality. *Howards End* attributes the current state of Germany not only to the military and political machinations of the Kaiser, but also to a fundamental shift in the organization of knowledge. Margaret and Helen’s uncle laments that in German universities “you have learned men, who collect more facts than do the learned men of England. They collect facts, and facts, and empires of facts. But which of them will rekindle the light within?” (43). Like Ford, Forster contrasts dry fact-finding with humanistic “dreamy” creative imagination that can “rekindle” a spiritual and emotional life that has been lost. For both authors, accepting war with Germany required somehow salvaging German cultural masterpieces that had permeated their own cultural imaginations and that of England.

The “Two Germanys” structure is at work in *When Blood is Their Argument* in a division between the early chapters that condemn the dry, statistical thinking of Prussian culture, and later chapters that shift to a loving impressionistic description of southern Germany. The first three chapters develop the argument that German culture had been consistently dogged by poverty and
when it had flourished, it had been in the south. Ford claims that with the rise of Bismarck and the establishment of the German Republic in 1871, the dominance of Prussia over the rest of Germany had meant an overall decrease in culture and an emphasis on nationalism, materialism, and scientific research. Comparing Ford’s propagandist history of Germany to that of professional historians, L. L. Farrar, Jr. concludes, “Ford’s contention that German culture before 1870 was more impressive than after is difficult to deny, but the argument that none existed between 1870 and 1914 is justifiable only as a war cry; and his explanation of creeping Prussianism is simplistic” (154). More importantly, Ford’s dour assessment of German culture shifts markedly at the opening of the fourth chapter as he turns his attention to the southern region of Westphalia. Here, as I show below, his style shifts to an impressionist depiction of Germany that focuses not on the urban universities and factories, but on the pastoral countryside. Although lacking the historian’s impartiality, Ford brings a nuance to the issue of German culture by writing of his own empathy with the Germany people. Although reviewers simply described the shifting perspectives and styles of the text as an occasional unevenness, in fact, it was the mark of Ford’s cosmopolitan amateurism that sought to understand another culture from multiple perspectives and to encourage the reader to feel empathy for its citizens.

We can see such an approach in the way Chapter Four begins with an anecdote highlighting the contingent, local, and folkloric life thriving beyond the view of official political history: “I was walking, six years ago, with a strong-minded old lady in the little town of Telgte, which is in Westphalia” (99). The old lady tells Ford of the slow decay of Westphalia as Prussia appropriated it. She too is decaying: she walks with a crutch and is paralyzed on one side.

Farrar adds that although many historians “would shrink from his exaggerated formulations and explanations which rely on deficiencies in national character [. . .] ‘materialistic’ prewar Germany was to prove a seedbed for European culture in the 1920s” (154).
When Ford first met her in 1900, she spoke at length of her love for British literature; however, when Ford returns to speak with her several years later, she reads Goethe and “was becoming more officially Germanised every day” (114). Midway through this story, Ford explains: “I am devoting this section of the book to personal impressions” (116). Accounts of political leaders and military victories can never express, he tells us, “the immense heat of the day, the cool of the evening [. . .] the tranquility of the great river; the loom of the black mountains; the taste of the heavenly wine and of the cheap, good cigars, and the kindly people who talked about this year’s wine-crop” (117-18). It is the Germany of personal memory, the natural countryside, and everyday life that Ford mourns and is unable to exclude from his propaganda. We find ourselves once again in the world of Ford’s cosmopolitan amateur whose knowledge and sympathies transcend national borders and intermix culture, nature, economics, and politics.

The propagandistic power of Ford’s text is undermined not only by his sympathetic portraits of the locals who share with Britons an anxiety about a creeping German militarism, but also by the presence of a multiplicity of voices unmediated by a central narrator. Sara Haslam describes Ford’s style here as “an intensely egalitarian and pluralistic technique. Allied to impressionism his experimentation with the conventions of history and propaganda, and often self-contradiction undercuts his own narrative drive” (211). In one case, Ford shifts back into his role as editor rather than propagandist as he seems to moderate a debate between an English academic condemning the limited academic freedoms in Germany, and the favourite intellectual villain among British academics at the time, German general and historian Heinrich von Treitschke. Rather than manipulating German quotations either through translation or

51 Saunders sees the “idiosyncrasies” in Ford’s approach to history as anticipating the Annales school in their attempt to “move beyond the wartime obsession with military and diplomatic history, and to understand such things in their social and psychological contexts” (Dual Life 1:476).
explication as British propaganda commonly did, especially when quoting Treitschke or Nietzsche, Ford allows such voices to swell his footnotes and dominate large portions of the page. In one instance, he denounces a speech given by Kaiser Wilhelm II, but believes it to be so “remarkable” that he decides to extensively quote from it in a footnote. Over the course of several pages, the footnote containing Wilhelm’s speech competes with Ford’s own analysis of it in the text proper. By the final page, the footnote dominates the page so that the Kaiser is speaking back to Ford. Through formal techniques such as this, the authority behind the voices of British power is continually eroded within a dialogic relationship with “enemy” voices.

Indeed, we might say that his simultaneous and contradictory emotional and stylistic descriptions demonstrate one of the key features of Fordian impressionism: what he terms in his famous essay on impressionism, “superimposed emotions” (“On Impressionism” 570). Like John Dowell, who tells the same story twice and thus betrays his conflicted feelings toward Edward Ashburnham, Ford renders an impression of Germany that is simultaneously condemnatory and loving as his thoughts of Germany in the present and memories from the past overlap without cancelling each other out.

Unlike more virulent propaganda predicated upon inherent racial or psychical distinctions between the Germans and the English, Ford conceived of the war as a battle between two pedagogical models that could be adopted or discarded at will: the liberal arts education he associated with the Victorian gentleman amateur and the narrow, state-directed, data-driven education of the German research university that produced kultur. Ford’s hyperbolic claim that “the German professoriate consists entirely of specialists” was targeted not at German sensibilities but at “specialists, [who] however strong-minded they may be in their own departments, are apt to take very little interest in, or to know very little of, the outside world” (221-22). This was a critique he deployed against modern specialized thought in general,
including in England. In contrast to such narrow habits of mind, he suggests in the conclusion to *When Blood is Their Argument* that “education should open your mind to the perception of generalisations and of analogies; whilst the business of technical instruction is to turn you into a specialist with disproportionate ideas of the relative value of your pursuit or calling!” (302). Proper education, as his definition suggests, aimed to cultivate amateur thinking that would exceed the narrow boundaries of the nation. By subtly making the enemy *kultur* rather than the Germans themselves (that is, an attitude rather than an essential quality), Ford would then be free to argue that the Germans could be convinced of the aridity of *kultur* and be persuaded to embrace culture instead. He reconciled his mixed cultural background with the urgent necessity to prove his patriotism by turning a political debate into a cultural one. Through such logic, he was able to justify writing propaganda on the basis that it could actually serve, perhaps like his earlier experiments with the *English Review*, as a model for proper curiosity and impressionist response toward everything from the natural landscape, classical music, to food and wine. Ford’s fundamental assumption that the job of the writer (even, as I argue, the writer of propaganda) is to present readers with multiple opinions from a bird’s-eye-view, is reconsidered in his postwar writing where, even though the Allies would win the war, it became less clear that amateur cosmopolitanism was compatible with the modern world. This predicament pervades Ford’s postwar tetralogy, *Parade’s End*, which I turn to below, in which the difficulty of attaining an expansive perspective on current events gives way to a new focus on local and individual experiences, which show alternative means of resisting narrow nationalist or specialist habits of mind.

52 Martha Hanna notes the hypocrisy of this argument: “British scholars, outraged by evidence of German intellectual subservience to the state, nonetheless voluntarily ‘enlisted’ for a government-organized propaganda campaign that found its headquarters at Wellington House in London” (22).
Limited Visions: Encyclopedic Knowledge and Postwar Localism

At the age of forty-two, within months of publishing his first book of propaganda, Ford enlisted and received his commission as a second lieutenant in the Welsh Regiment and was sent to the Front. While taking part in the battles of the Ypres Salient where he suffered shell shock and lung damage, Wellington House commissioned him to write yet another piece of propaganda on his first-hand experiences in the war. The article that resulted, “A Day of Battle” (1916), was never published perhaps because its propagandistic value was as low as *When Blood is Their Argument*. Like his earlier work, rather than denouncing the enemy, “A Day of Battle” concerns itself with the aesthetic challenges of representing the complexities of modern warfare. He explains that while he could recall individual scenes of battles including “men, burst into mere showers of blood and dissolving into muddy ooze [. . .] as for putting them—into words! No: the mind stops dead, and something in the brain stops and shuts down” (37). Although he manages to describe the scene in rather graphic detail here, his point is that the memories of his own experiences were difficult to render into narrative and infuse with meaning.53 As Karen Jacobs in her book on modernist visual culture notes, “what distinguishes the modernist literary response from its predecessors stems from a crisis of belief in the continuity between seeing and knowing” (19). Alluding to the perceived break between realist and modernist prose, Jacobs rightly identifies one of the problems that Ford experienced following the war when he struggled to know what his own experiences actually signified. A related problem, and perhaps one that was more vexing for him, involved the familiar Fordian issue of perspective. Interrupting his descriptions of battle he asks, how it is “possible to see such a vast panorama as a world war?

53 Walter Benjamin comments upon the problem of translating the experiences of the First World War into meaningful language in his essay “The Storyteller” (1936). He writes, “with the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?” (84)
From what vantage point can the novelist gain perspective? What hill can he stand up on? How can he avoid being ‘always too close or too remote?’” (17). Ford’s use of vision as a metaphor for knowledge was not new: he applied it years earlier when he alluded to Matthew Arnold’s ambitions to “see life steadily and see it whole,” and again when describing the role of the modern author as helping the reader “see where we stand” (Ancient Lights xv). Ford had also already voiced concern that the modern world was too fragmented and chaotic for citizens to achieve an expansive perspective on their society. What was new about “A Day of Battle,” however, is that Ford’s own experiences at the Front leave him doubting that the author or critic could see life any better than the average citizen muddled in mass-culture or the modern specialist limited by his field of study. Like other modernist writers attempting to depict the war, Ford suggests there is no Archimedean position by which to view it whole. Reminiscent of the disorienting war scenes in the paintings of Wyndham Lewis or C. R. W. Nevinson, both of whom also served in the war, Ford’s article emphasizes the fragmented and chaotic perspective that the war forced upon its participants.

As a key document in the genesis of Parade’s End, “A Day of Battle” anticipates the central objective of the later work described by Max Saunders as “trying to visualize the whole of a war which figures in the mind as vivid fragments, disparate scenes” (Dual Life 2:199-200). However, the horrors of the First World War shattered Ford’s ideal of the amateur gentlemen’s broad and wise perspective, as many of the gentlemen who held influential political appointments were responsible for pushing the country into the war without understanding the ramifications. Although Ford’s faith in the amateur resurfaced in his late works that tackle ambitious topics like the Great Trade Route (1937) and The March of Literature: From Confucius to Modern Times (1938), in Parade’s End he relinquished the God’s-eye-view of the cosmopolitan or the amateur gentleman and went into the trenches to record the less lofty details
of fragmented everyday lives and everyday people. It was here, low to the ground, that the
novelist must go if, as Ford believed, he hoped to be the “historian of his own time” (It Was the
Nightingale 180). Ford’s anxiety that he had put too much stock in achieving an elevated
perspective of the modern world is registered in an excerpt written during the war that
emphasizes the apathy among those viewing life from such privileged heights: “I don’t see upon
what hill [the average citizen] can stand in order to get their bird’s eye views. Of course there
are remote persons who stand aloof from humanity—but if you stand aloof from humanity how
can you know about us poor people?” (War Prose 62). He continues, “Just as every human face
differs, if just by the hair’s breadth turn of a nostril, from every other human face, so every
human life differs from every other human life if only by a little dimple on the stream of it” (63).
I argue that by its attention to alternative sources of tradition and culture in local, contingent, and
personal connections, Parade’s End indicts the limited vision of those in the ruling and
administrative classes in England who overlooked such small details. Implicit in such a critique
was the assertion that perhaps the professional novelist was unique in his or her capacity to
capture both the broad perspective of the amateur and the microcosmic perspective that
represented the human cost of war.

If Ford’s faith in the omniscience of the writer and critic was shaken by the war, his
mythologizing of the amateur gentlemen of his youth, upon whom he had modeled his
cosmopolitan amateurism, was destroyed by it. As he began to write Parade’s End, Ford
admitted in a memoir that he had “arrived at the stage of finding the gentleman an insupportable
phenomenon” (It Was the Nightingale 199). Gentlemen in Parade’s End either determine that
they must “chuck the country-gentleman business” completely, as Christopher’s brother Mark
proclaims, or stand accused of orchestrating the brutal and, in retrospect, pointless war (Parade’s
End 736). The God’s-eye view of the amateur whose insights bring clarity to the public sphere,
is recast here as the omnipotence of ruling class generals whose commitment to the values of land, class, and nation leave them dangerously disconnected from, and brutally callous toward, the individual soldiers at the Front.

As a member of the landed gentry, the protagonist of Parade’s End, Christopher Tietjens, embodies the decline of the ruling classes and their values. With no way to translate his brilliant amateur mind to the public sphere as Ford imagined the Victorian sages to have done, Tietjens might better be described as a dilettante. His broad-ranging knowledge serves little purpose other than to further his own amusement and buttress his neo-feudal conceptions of the ruling classes as guardians of England’s land and its people. Describing himself as a “sentimental Tory” possessing “no politics that did not disappear in the eighteenth century” (Parade’s End 489), his suffocating priggishness and anachronistic politics leave him paralyzed; his ideas are too abstract and idealistic to have any practical application in the public sphere and, at a personal level, his morality leaves him unable to consider divorcing his abusive wife Sylvia or undertaking an affair with the young suffragette Valentine Wannop.54

Yet Tietjens is both an example of the anachronistic ruling classes (as a brilliant young civil servant for the Imperial Department of Statistics), and a representation of the limited vision of the rising administrative class that was vying for legitimacy during the war. When the first novel of the series, Some Do Not (1924), opens in 1912, Ford is already pointing to the failed visions of the amateur gentlemen and the administrative class. Tietjens and his friend, Vincent Macmaster, admire their own power as they ride a train whose new plush interior and efficient

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54 Andrzej Gasiorek argues that Ford’s “conception of Toryism is highly specific [...]” (55). He quotes Ford’s editorial policy for his second journal, the transatlantic review: its “politics will be those of its editor who has no party leanings save towards those of a Tory kind so fantastically old-fashioned as to see no salvation save in the feudal system as practised in the fourteenth century—or in such Communism as may prevail a thousand years hence” (55).
progress reflects their own unchallenged confidence. Unlike Ford, who worried that language might have lost its signifying power in the war as he struggled to describe what he experienced, both young men believe they “administered the world” through their linguistic and communicative capacities: “if they saw a policeman misbehave, railway porters lack civility, [or] an insufficiency of streetlamps” they would simply write letters to the Times and the problem would be corrected (Parade’s End 3). Although both men are members of the administrative class, Macmaster is not high born and so is more fully dependent upon the recently established professional civil servant hierarchy. Tietjens, on the other hand, born to an aristocratic family, participates in, but is more sceptical of, the instrumental rationalism that eschews class privilege and dismisses the amateur gentleman’s wide-ranging education as inefficient indulgence.55 In introducing Tietjens’s out-dated values and Macmaster’s over-confident faith in the ability of administrators to “pilot the nation through the tight places” (20), the opening scene prepares readers for the broader claim made in Parade’s End that the First World War showed both of these groups unable to manage or understand the complexities of the changing world.

Because Ford found it impossible to adequately put into words the physical violence he experienced at the Front or to determine from what broad perspective he could tell the story of the war, he chose to depict the damage of the war in terms of the destruction to the amateur gentleman’s mind. Early in the tetralogy, we learn that the scope of Tietjens’s mind represents a “perfect encyclopædia” (Parade’s End 5). Yet Ford suggests that in the modern period when specialization was so highly prized, there was perhaps little use for such a mind. He undercuts

55 I borrow the concept of “instrumental rationality” from Jeffrey Matthes McCarthy’s insightful article on Parade’s End where he defines it as a “structure of power that treats people as interchangeable” (183-84). I reconsider the concept in this chapter because McCarthy evades the question of how it applies to Last Post, the final novel of the tetralogy that he, like other critics before him, divorce from the first three novels for its radically different tone and setting.
its value by proposing a bizarre circularity by which Tietjens applies his encyclopedic knowledge to making corrections to the literal encyclopedia itself. We are told he “employed himself in tabulating from memory the errors in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, of which a new edition had lately appeared” and that he thought of this task “as a congenial occupation, like a long drowse” (10). The absurdity of such a pursuit and the suggestion that possessing such factual knowledge was useful only as a soporific, parodies the modern gentleman’s uselessness. The scene speaks to Max Saunders’s point that “Encyclopaedic knowledge was something Ford admired: it was the way he defines the genius of Tietjens”; “it was also something he parodied; an air he put on, in his reminiscential impressions of facts” (*Dual Life* 1: 20). Parodied, but also mourned; while an encyclopedic mind *could* be put to good use in society, something, it seems, has gone wrong and short-circuited Tietjens’s ability to put such knowledge to use. The insularity of Tietjens’s hobby is suggested not only in the name of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that aligns knowledge to the narrow constraints of empire in a way that Ford found small-minded; it also reduces knowledge to trivia disconnected from the public sphere application that Ford had previously addressed.

Ford ingeniously represents the decline of ruling class power and the trauma of war by returning to the trope of the encyclopedia in the second section of *Some Do Not*. A time-shift

56 Tietjens’s pastime is likely modeled on a story Ford told about his friend Arthur Marwood who “would spend days making corrections out of his head on the Margins of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*” (qtd. in Saunders *Dual Life* 1:210). Saunders opens his biography by distinguishing between an “archival ‘truth’ which Ford opposes to ‘the true truth,’ the artist’s romance of the self. Ford understood how he too would ‘romance a little when he talk[ed] of himself’” (1:1).

57 Ford described his father as “a man of encyclopedic knowledge and had a great respect for the attainments of the distinguished. [. . .] He had a memory that was positively extraordinary, and a gift of languages no less great” (*Ancient Lights* 41, 42). In his memoir *Thus to Revisit* (1921), Ford invokes the trope in a eulogy to friend Arthur Marwood, a template for the character of Christopher Tietjens and a member of the decaying landed gentry class who Ford mythologized after his early death from cancer. Ford writes: “he had the deepest and widest intelligence of all the men I have ever met. He had the largest general, the largest *encyclopædic*, knowledge that, I imagine, it would be possible for any one man’s skull to hold” (59).
has occurred: it is now 1917 and Tietjens is on leave from the Front and has suffered shell shock and memory loss robbing him of his encyclopedic knowledge. Sylvia, who has momentarily returned, asks: “What really happened to you in France? What is really the matter with your memory? Or your brain, is it?” (Parade’s End 167). Tietjens explains: “I try to remember things on my own, but I haven’t yet done so. You see it’s as if a certain area of my brain has been wiped white” (170). Ford dramatizes the much-documented civilian disbelief of conditions at the Front through Sylvia’s nonplussed reaction to the symptoms of shell shock. She perceives it as an excuse for soldiers to engage in a “general carnival of lying, lechery, drink, and howling” (168). Sylvia’s inability to conceptualize the toll of the war in anything other than physical injury speaks to Ford’s broader effort to introduce to his readers a mental and intellectual economy that is starkly impacted both by incidents of shell shock and by the narrow thinking of the administrative class that championed specialization. In the same way that the war injury that renders Hemingway’s Jake Barnes impotent serves as a comment upon Hemingway’s own anxieties about the effeminization of modern culture, Tietjens’s injury echoes Ford’s fear that the Western cultural tradition was being effaced by mindless administrators who lacked any cohesive, encyclopedic cultural knowledge.

In a wonderfully ironic turn, the Encyclopaedia Britannica comes to figure again in Some Do Not when the injured Tietjens turns to it not to correct its errors, but rather, to relearn the knowledge he lost in the war. He explains to Sylvia his autodidactic project: “I have gotten as far as K in my reading of the Encyclopædia Britannica every afternoon” (Parade’s End 170). No longer conceiving of cultural knowledge as emerging from aristocratic privilege or a connection to the land, his actions align him with the middle class that professionalized education by standardizing the learning process and developing a mass market to disseminate general knowledge. Without the paternalistic attitude of the landowning class toward the
populace (e.g., helping to root out the errors in a general reference work), Tietjens becomes a beneficiary of the democratization of education in Britain. Ford’s decision to feature the *Encyclopædia Britannica* specifically has a topical resonance for the period covered in *Some Do Not*. Although Ford does not indicate which edition of the *Encyclopædia* Tietjens corrects in 1912 and then later learns from in 1917, the landmark eleventh edition, published in 1911, would be the most likely candidate. The eleventh edition included several innovations that attempted to make the *Encyclopædia* more appealing to the new mass reading public. Articles were shortened, divided, and rewritten to be more accessible to non-specialists; while there were 17,000 entries in the ninth edition, there were 40,000 entries in the eleventh (Einbinder 47-48). Not only were complex articles divided into more manageable subtopics for lay readers; the *Encyclopædia*’s coverage was broadened to include articles on science and technology and English life in general. Unlike previous editions that were issued volume-by-volume, the eleventh was innovative in that it was published as a set of twenty-nine volumes available nearly simultaneously. Further, the decision to print the edition on India paper meant that it occupied three rather than six feet of shelf space, making it ideal for homes that didn’t have the same square footage as a country manor. Finally, the price was cut nearly in half from the previous edition. All of these changes suggest that the effect of the eleventh edition was to democratize access to broad general knowledge. The blurring of class distinctions that Ford enacts by having the gentleman Tietjens read the *Encyclopædia* is similarly at play in the scenes of trench warfare that equalize the various classes and nationalities that Tietjens encounters.

Tietjens’s assured gentleman amateur stance in the opening novel is jolted by his growing recognition and sympathies for the common people in the trenches overlooked by the ruling class generals and administrative lackeys whose delays and mistakes mar progress at the Front. Understanding the humanity of the individual soldiers, Tietjens complains, “it isn’t the officers
and it isn’t the men. It’s the foul system” (*Parade’s End* 224). In Ford’s dedication to *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926), the third novel in the series, he suggests that it is the inhumanity of instrumental rationality that he meant to bring into focus: “This is what the late war was like: this is how modern fighting of the organized, scientific type affects the mind. [. . .] I hope, in fact, that this series of books, for what it is worth, may make war seem undesirable” (*War Prose* 200).

As Ford suggests, the war forced soldiers to adopt a specialist mentality as they were assigned a small role in a much larger operation that alienated them from their own labour. Continuing a line of argument that he began in his propaganda, Ford sought to shift the blame for the inhumane efficiency of mechanized weaponry and poison gases away from associations with the German national mind, and toward the inherent brutality of the modern specialist mind. He condemned specialists for their role in researching modern weaponry, but also for what he saw as their lack of empathy toward others that resulted from a narrow focus on their work. As he did in *When Blood is Their Argument*, Ford suggests in *Parade’s End* that we cannot understand aggression in national terms but only as a pathology arising from the narrowing of citizens’ fields of perception.

Indeed, the tetralogy critiques the administrative rationalizing of society not by depicting the horrific violence it unleashed, but by shifting between its impersonal response to human suffering and the intimate perspective of the individual to show how the former ignores the complex ecology of human sympathies and eccentricities that become evident in the latter. We see Tietjens gradually adopting this latter view when he considers his fellow soldiers after a particularly bloody battle:

All these men toys, all these agonies mere occasions for picturesque phrases to be put into politicians’ speeches without heart or even intelligence. [. . .] But men. Not just populations. Men you worried over there. Each man a man with a backbone, knees,
breeches, braces, a rifle, a home, passions, fornications, drunks, pals, some scheme of the
universe, corns, inherited diseases, a greengrocer’s business, a milk walk, a paper stall,
brats, a slut of a wife [. . .]. The Men: the Other Ranks! And the poor—little officers.

(Parade’s End 296-97)

Ford’s earlier hope, expressed in his editorials for the English Review, that the masses could benefit from seeing the world from the amateur gentleman’s broad perspective is reversed in Parade’s End as Tietjens is offered an education in the diversity of humanity from middle- and working-class soldiers. The list that dominates the passage has the effect of refusing to allow us to perceive humans in the plural. Instead, it approximates the intimacy of the trenches where populations become men and men become known down to their individual body parts (sometimes gruesomely detached). The passage resists a romanticized depiction of the lower classes by insisting that the concerns of the “Other Ranks” are multiple and not necessarily virtuous. As Robert Green writes of Tietjens in the trenches: “The experience of shared suffering has taught him that his obsessive fidelity to his ‘public school’s ethical system’ has been ‘adolescent’” (Green 157). Paradoxically it is the claustrophobic experience of trench warfare that allows Tietjens to think beyond the nation by gaining sympathy for soldiers from across the British Empire, which his earlier God’s-eye-view of humanity made him too aloof to appreciate.

Tietjens’s intimacy with his fellow soldiers and the guilt he feels when two soldiers under his command, O Nine Morgan and Arunjuez, are injured, must be contrasted to the new distance that he feels toward the ruling classes after agreeing to deploy to the Front. As a Captain fighting alongside his men in the trenches, he experiences the superimposed Fordian impressionism as he simultaneously considers the very different scale of the technocratic machinery of warfare that caused “endless muddles, endless follies, endless villainies” (Parade’s
End 296), in contrast to the “the extraordinary complications of even the simplest lives” (319). If Tietjens becomes more conscious of the particularities of life, it is partly because there is simply no other perspective from which to see the world: “In the trench you could see nothing and noise rushed like black angels gone mad; solid noise that swept you off your feet [. . .] Swept your brain off its feet” (Parade’s End 557). Like Ford, Tietjens’s experience of warfare is not a sensory overload as might be expected, but the loss of sensory coordinates from which to understand his own location in the world. The tetralogy insists on continuing the sense of confusion and perspectival instability through to the Armistice party that concludes the third book of the series.

In the final scenes of the third novel, A Man Could Stand Up (1926), Christopher, Valentine, and a handful of soldiers who were under his command, drunkenly dance on Armistice Day. They “were all yelling. [. . .] They were going round them: yelling in unison [. . .] the whole world round them was yelling and prancing round” (673-74). Critics often misread the tone of this scene as celebratory rather than bacchanalian. While the first term fittingly describes many Victorian novels that conclude with a reunion such as we see here, the latter term fits Ford’s modernist open-ended ambivalence about the war’s destruction of traditions that might usher in a less desirable chaos. The description of the party is eerily similar to the earlier description of General Campion’s confusion as he tries to make sense of the war he partly directs. Returning again to the idea that knowledge and vision are linked, the exasperated general asks Tiejtens, “What is language for? What the hell is language for? We go round and round” (Parade’s End 492). Ford ingeniously links the circular confusion of the ruling and administrative classes in wartime with the equally confused and unsettled partygoers celebrating the end of the war.
After the war destroyed Ford’s faith in the amateur gentleman and confirmed his disdain for the instrumental rationality of the specialist, he sought a more serious solution to living in the postwar world than offered at the close of *A Man Could Stand Up*. Valentine speaks to Ford’s own lingering anxieties about the postwar period when she wonders to herself: “Wasn’t it a possibility that there was to be no more Respect? None for constituted Authority and consecrated Experience? [. . .] No more respect . . . For the equator! For the Metric system. For Sir Walter Scott! Or George Washington! Or Abraham Lincoln! Or the Seventh Commandment!” (511). The eclectic range of knowledge that comes to her mind suggests her curriculum as a primary schoolteacher and the encyclopedic knowledge of the amateur, both of which have both been shaken by the war. While Valentine’s anarchic fantasies as a young radical suffragette give her an “inward smirk of pleasure,” Ford took such a problem much more seriously because art itself was among the list of human endeavours that, as Valentine suggests, require some type of authoritative structure to maintain. While Ford’s earlier projects sought to topple traditional genres and redefine aesthetic boundaries by courting chaos, they shared the final goal of furthering the power of language to communicate and construct empathy in society. It is Ford’s recurring fear of chaos that makes it clear why he couldn’t (and why critics shouldn’t) conclude *Parade’s End* with the frenetic party at the end of the third novel as, most famously, Graham Greene decided to do in his controversial Bodley Head edition of the text that omits *Last Post* (1928), the final novel in the tetralogy.

The critical dismissal of *Last Post* began, in fact, with Ford himself. Writing to his publisher Eric Pinker in 1930 he explained: “I strongly wish to omit the *Last Post* from the edition. I do not like the book and have never liked it and always intended the series to end with *A Man Could Stand Up*” (qtd. in Saunders, *Dual Life* 2: 254). Yet a year later, he contradicted himself in a letter to a friend where he wrote, “I think *The Good Soldier* is my best book
technically unless you read the Tietjens books as one novel in which case the whole design appears” (Letters 204). By 1932, he was referring to Parade’s End as a “tetralogy” (Letters 208), but then reverted to thinking of it as a “trilogy” in 1933 (It was the Nightingale 188). Of course, Ford’s cryptic and contradictory comments about his intentions are a form of intentionality themselves. Perhaps Ford, who always, it seems, sought to relinquish his authorial control in his projects by incorporating opposing and multiple voices, got his wish in the end. His ambiguity has led to vastly different editions of Parade’s End and more diversity in the critical responses than would otherwise have existed.

Set several years after the war, Last Post introduces to the tetralogy a pastoral setting, a relative lack of action, and a mythic tone that many critics have found jarring. It opens with the imminent death of Christopher’s brother Mark and the imminent birth of Christopher and Valentine’s child. All have retreated to a cottage in the English countryside and Christopher has become an antique furniture dealer. In much the same way that some readers may have been confused by the inclusion of seemingly superfluous voices in the English Review, many critics have wondered about the tendency of Last Post to give voice to seemingly marginal characters who have little role in the larger plotlines: Mark’s partner Marie Leonie, Christopher and Sylvia’s son Mark Junior, and working class characters like the peasant Gunning and the cabinet maker Cramp who attend to Mark. Most importantly in terms of voice, Christopher is absent for the majority of the novel as he is away in Yorkshire attempting to save the ancestral home, Groby, from its American renters’ disregard for its historical importance. While we can read such a shift in narrative perspective as discordant and incongruous with the previous three novels, I think we need to consider Last Post within the context of Ford’s project of cultivating an encyclopedic scope by incorporating disparate voices into his texts. I suggest that the novel ought to be considered as part of Parade’s End because it demonstrates Ford’s uncertainty about
where the organizing forces of society will emerge in the postwar period. Although largely setting aside the cosmopolitan amateur perspective, *Last Post* is curiously hopeful as it reflects the multiplicity of human experience and demonstrates a different type of amateur knowledge on display in folkways and local culture.

While *Parade’s End* opens with the claustrophobic exclusivity of the train carriage where only the perspectives of the ruling and administrative classes are voiced, *Last Post* is set in an open-air thatch structure where Mark lies prostrate and barely speaking due either to a stroke or a vow of silence taken at the moment he learned that the terms of the Armistice would not allow the Allies to occupy Berlin. With the gentlemen either absent or silent, we hear the voices of peasants, women, and the young. While the novel opens from Mark’s perspective, it is the “heavy elderly peasant” Gunning who dominates his thoughts (*Parade’s End* 677). Surprisingly perhaps, Mark admires Gunning for his broad amateur mind. He thinks of him as an “All-round man. Really an all-round man; he could do a great many things. He knew all about fox-hunting, pheasant-rearing, wood-craft, hedging, dyking, pic-rearing and the habits of King Edward when shooting” (678). The diction here should sound familiar since the “all-round man” was what Ford, in 1907, believed citizens, and the writer above all, must aim to become if they were to accurately understand modern life. Indeed, Mark makes the connection between Gunning’s craftsmanship and art: “Good man, Shakespeare! All-round man in a way, too. Probably very like Gunning. Knew Queen Elizabeth’s habits when hunting; also very likely how to hedge, thatch, break up a deer or a hare or a hog, and how to serve a writ and write bad French” (679). Similar to Tietjens’s realization in the trenches, Mark’s musings suggest the cosmopolitan cultural knowledge of the amateur gentlemen is ineluctably connected to the day-to-day knowledge of the common man. Paul Skinner notes:
the foregrounding of art seems [. . .] to recede in *Last Post*—yet this is not in fact the case. Ford had always taken a broader view of ‘the arts’ than some of his contemporaries, and here the cider-making, furniture-restoring, planting, keeping of chickens and general maintenance, the multifarious tasks performed by Gunning, are treated with seriousness and respect. (xxvi)

In *Last Post*, crafts are described as arts and, more importantly, are given the respect of supposedly more elevated white-collar professions. The local, working-class professions on display in *Last Post* are all productive and generative jobs in contrast to the admittedly contentious description of white-collar professions as destructive forces that organized the war effort and perfected its mechanized weaponry. While Ford’s earlier work had sought an expansive perspective that was transnational, *Last Post* might be the clearest example of the inclusion of the working classes.

In the postwar period, Ford was increasingly drawn not only to the idea of the small producer connected to the land, but also to the continuity of local traditions and their ability to offer some of the same wisdom enjoyed by the cosmopolitan amateur perspective. The importance of local folkways in *Last Post* is suggested by the two fragments of folk ballads that bookend the novel and suggest continuity and a way forward. The first, the novel’s epigraph, is a couplet from “Rookhope Ryde” that commemorates a 1569 border skirmish: “Oh, Rokehope is a pleasant place / If the fause thieves would let it be” (*Parade’s End* 675). Skinner reports that Ford had used the passage previously although doesn’t suggest its purpose in this context. One clue is Ford’s description of it as a “Border Ballad.” The border in question here was an ancient one between the regions of Weardale and Tynedale in modern-day Durham County, which has since, of course, been superseded. When borders are featured in Ford’s writing they serve in the context of his efforts to transcend them through broad thinking and cosmopolitanism. By
alluding to long discarded borders that once seemed inviolable and permanent, Ford both ties *Last Post* to the earlier novels in the tetralogy that see the collapse of national borders and the camaraderie between soldiers of different nationalities, and foreshadows the theme of impermanence that we certainly see in the loss of Groby Manor, the death of Mark, and loss of Tietjens’s status and pomposity later in the novel.

The other ballad that appears at the end of *Last Post*, “The Ghaistly Warning,” is, according to Paul Skinner again, Danish in origin but has roots in northern England and Scotland and was published in the appendix of Walter Scott’s 1810 edition of *The Lady of the Lake* (Skinner 204). Not only do the ballad’s transnational origins suggest the universal message of folk culture; its utterance by Mark Tietjens is symbolic of the levelling effect that Ford hoped his own writing might have upon his readers. Particularly crucial to the ballad’s meaning is its context: Christopher Tietjens has just returned from Groby to announce that its crass American renter has chopped down the Groby Great Tree, symbolic of the family’s connection to the land, and in the process, the wall of the house closest to it has partly collapsed. Hearing this and knowing that his family was at his bedside, Mark struggles to speak a few words from the ballad: “’Twas the mid o’ the night and the barnies grat / And the mither beneath the mauld heard that” (*Parade’s End* 835). The verses, which he directs to the pregnant Valentine, are those that Mark’s own nurse sang to him as a child. The folk wisdom in this ballad that speaks of the love of the mother (“mither”) for the child, not only transcends time and class boundaries, but also offers hope for civilization not in the high-minded topics of the cosmopolitan, perhaps, but in the most fundamental elements of human perseverance.

In the years just after the war when Ford was considering how he would embark on such a large project as *Parade’s End*, he determined that even though the range of the tetralogy was to be much vaster than the claustrophobic world of *The Good Soldier*, he would still have “to fall
back on the device of a world seen through the eyes of a central observer. The tribulations of the central observer must be sufficient to carry the reader through his observations of the crumbling world” (It Was the Nightingale 195). As Robert Green notes, “through the first three parts of the quartet, as far as the end of A Man Could Stand Up, on Armistice Day 1918, Tietjens is the novel’s organising nodal consciousness” (146-47). Ford’s decision to abandon this narrative perspective in Last Post is certainly, as Green maintains, an effort to make “anachronistic both the world of the earlier parts of the quartet and, crucially, the novelist’s way of presenting that world, which, in its deployment of a central observer, was so fundamentally ‘old fashioned’” (148). I would also add that Tietjens’s absence in the final novel allows readers both to appreciate a perspective of life at the level of the local and the individual, while also creating in us some longing for the perspective of the “all-round man” that Tietjens once was, who could make sense of the wandering and mystical narrative of Last Post.

It is precisely the blending of the bird’s-eye and microcosmic perspectives that Parade’s End (treated as a tetralogy) accomplishes; it presents an intimidatingly vast scope without balking at the possibility that local and rural folk traditions could serve as sources of renewal and continuity. For Saunders, the tetralogy succeeds in “rendering the complexity” of the broader war while also registering “the play of conflicting voices, volitions, attitudes, and viewpoints” that were only apparent at the level of the individual and that (Dual Life 2: 211), I would contend, are better represented through the novel form than the non-fictional historical account. If the multiplicity of Parade’s End is in itself a case for the potential for cosmopolitan amateurism in the postwar period, it would have to be because the tetralogy is able to be multi-perspectival while remaining empathetic to events at the personal and local levels. The same might be said for all the projects I have examined in this chapter; Ford believed that the role of literary culture was to present readers with an amateur habit of mind that was both larger than
constructs like the nation-state, but also highly sensitive to the workings of the individual mind. In the case of Parade’s End, Ford’s greatest achievement is the way he maps Tietjens’s broadening and maturing relationships with Valentine and Sylvia onto similar examples of growth and change at the geo-political level.

Nearly two decades before writing Last Post, Ford had complained: “Rightly or wrongly, the general thinker—the man whose speculations cover wide fields—is regarded with suspicion by the world. Versatility is taken to be an evidence of shallowness, and the mind which occupies itself with more than one subject is suspected of a want of application” (English Review 4.13, 109). In this chapter I have argued that in Ford’s role as editor for the English Review as well as in his role as propagandist, and as novelist, he worked to vindicate a mode of thinking “whose speculations cover wide fields.” I have suggested that the origin of his interest in broad thinking (that he, himself connected to the “amateur”) was his own mixed ancestry, which left him particularly vulnerable as the divisive nationalism of the early twentieth century was exacerbated by the First World War. His lifelong sense that he was a “homo duplex” (a divided man), as he frequently described himself, made him particularly receptive to discourses that placed seemingly anomalous or antagonistic voices into conversation with one another. While his experience fighting at the Front reinforced his initial belief in the importance of working to transcend the borders of the nation-state, it also left him less convinced that a writer or critic was capable of achieving such a feat. Parade’s End, which is centrally concerned with such an endeavour, is admittedly much more hesitant about the potential for cosmopolitan amateurism than his earlier works. But it too, I think, demonstrates Ford’s refusal to accept simple solutions to the problems of knowing and judging the modern world. Ultimately, Ford’s intervention as a writer, critic, and editor was to provide readers with a broad perspective on the world during a
period when the forces of nationalism, the mass media, specialization, and instrumental rationality all sought to restrict the individual’s range of thought.
Chapter 2

“This new weapon”: Virginia Woolf’s Transformation of the Professional Mind

In Chapter One, I argued that Ford Madox Ford sought to incorporate into modernist culture his own cosmopolitan amateur sensibilities that he modeled on the Victorian gentlemen amateurs he encountered during his youth. Like Ford, Virginia Woolf both admired and felt threatened by the intimidatingly large personalities (and sometimes intellects) of these men.\(^\text{58}\) While Ford’s ambivalence lay in his anxiety that the intellectual achievements of the Victorians could not be equalled by artists of his own generation, Woolf’s ambivalence was rooted in her knowledge that despite encouragement from her father, Leslie Stephen, to educate herself in his personal library, he was part of a professional patriarchy that barred women like herself from formal higher education, leaving them financially dependent and politically impotent. While Woolf’s critique of male privilege is well known, her argument that women should respond by entering the professions and then transforming them to make them more rewarding for both male and female professionals is less understood.\(^\text{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Woolf sounds very much like Ford when she wrote twenty-four years after her father’s death that if he had lived beyond her thirteenth year, “his life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; —inconceivable” (Diary 3: 208).

\(^{59}\) Of course, women stood to gain the most during the modernist period from a transformation of the professions since they would no longer be financially dependent upon their fathers or husbands. But the relationship that Woolf articulated between professional status and public sphere participation was meant to apply more broadly to all marginalized members of society and has resonance in contemporary debates about the effect of economic disparity on civic participation.
In what follows, I examine the complex tensions that exist between amateurism and professionalism in Woolf’s work. I argue that they warrant further study because they play a central role in her thought on a range of issues from gender relations, education, democracy, and professional life. Critics have recognized Woolf’s interest in both sides of the amateur/professional binary: they have studied her concept of an amateur, non-specialist “common reader,” as well as her promotion of professions for women so they could afford a room of one’s own. Yet her celebration of the amateur and the professional has overwhelmingly been framed as an opposition, or has been divided so as to focus upon one term exclusively. Instead, I propose that the concepts are inextricably linked in Woolf’s writing as she struggles to place them into a symbiotic relationship that would both temper the aggression of professional ideology and make public the amateur habits of mind that she worried could be too marginal and private. Thus, it is only by shuttling between Woolf’s many representations of amateurs and professionals that we can perceive how she combined the strengths of each and, in the process, rejected both a professionalism confined to the ivory tower as well as an amateurism confined to the gentleman’s library.

Scholars have presented Woolf’s conception of amateurism and professionalism as antagonistic and oppositional at least as far back as Q. D. Leavis’s famously acerbic 1938 review of *Three Guineas*. Leavis believed that Woolf sought to “penalize specialists in the interests of amateurs” (208). She misunderstood Woolf’s vision of a university that would teach a new form of professionalism and thought the result “could only be a breeding-ground for boudoir scholarship.” At least part of Leavis’s misreading can be attributed to her assumption that

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60 See Stewart for an analysis of Leavis’s review in the context of her other writing on education. Stewart explains, “a large part of what makes *Three Guineas* unpalatable to Leavis is its suggestion that women need a different kind of education than men. Leavis herself advocated the measuring of female academic achievement by the existing high (albeit male-determined) standards” (68).
specialists were incapable of adopting amateur habits of mind that would allow them to understand their specialty within a broader context. Woolf’s malleable conception of the professional permitted her to imagine specialists who make the goal of their research “not to segregate and specialize, but to combine” (Three Guineas 43). Sensing that “the moment is short” for bringing change to the professions—by the late 1930s Woolf thought it may last “five years; ten years, or perhaps only a matter of a few months longer” (76)—she believed the professional system could be transformed by implementing a pedagogy that would train specialists without destroying their abilities to think in a non-linear fashion that she associated with amateurism. Thus Woolf’s contribution to the debates about professional life was her suggestion that amateur habits of mind could be infused into university pedagogy in order to help specialists to think in a more generous and creative manner.

While Leavis’s depiction of Woolf as a self-pitying Bloomsbury elite whose writing was nothing more than “a conversation between her and her friends” (203) has been convincingly overturned by decades of Woolf scholarship, Leavis’s equally rebarbative idea that Woolf condemned professionals and advocated a leisured and implicitly feminine, dilettantism—which is just as flawed—has proven more resistant to revision. In otherwise impressive works of recent scholarship, critics sound strikingly similar to Leavis on this point. Patrick Collier, for instance, argues that in Woolf’s writing, “the word professional is almost always negatively inflected” (“Virginia” 378). Other scholars, examining efforts by modernist female artists to attain professional status, again leave us with only one side of the amateur / professional binary when they include Woolf among women writers who didn’t want to be “dismissed as amateurs” (Elliott and Wallace 25). Carol Atherton suggests that Woolf’s essays often feature just this type of feminine amateur personae, entirely divorced from modern professional society: “leisured, free of the pressures of time and procedure to which journalists and academics were subjected”
(104). She sees Woolf’s amateurs as lazy and antiquated in “their casual, almost careless nature standing in marked contrast to the developing norms of academic study.” In all these examples, the scholars ignore the particular ways that Woolf employed the terms “amateur” and “professional.” She perceived amateur thinking not as a retreat from the modern world but as a necessary habit of mind for a transformed modern professional life, which she encouraged women to join. As Michèle Barrett writes, Woolf “argued in support of women’s colleges, despite her hostility to academic hierarchies, since she saw them as the only chance for women to acquire independence and the right to earn their own living” (7). While Woolf scholarship has been eager to celebrate the innovative ways she thought about gender relations, it hasn’t fully explored her innovative efforts to redefine amateur thought and professional status.

For Woolf, “amateur”—a term she frequently employed in her work—suggested a habit of mind marked by a discontinuous rambling engagement with ideas (both intellectual and otherwise) resulting in serendipitous connections that she believed eluded modern specialists trained to think in narrow grooves. Woolf’s amateur thinking courts distraction and inaccuracy and can, indeed, suggest inattentive leisure as in “How Should One Read a Book?” (1932) when she asks, “Is there not an open window on the right hand of the bookcase? How delightful to stop reading and to look out!” (Collected Essays 2: 5). Yet despite the apparent insouciance of the amateur’s engagement, she imagined him or her (the term isn’t gendered for Woolf) to be in the service of a radical pedagogy that sought to break up the dictatorial voices of the lecturer or politician and allow for students / citizens (concepts intimately linked in Woolf’s mind) to think critically for themselves. The descriptions of leisured reading in her work that some critics have

61 All subsequent references in the text to Woolf’s Collected Essays will be abbreviated “CE.”
read as elitist or quietist are meant, I would argue, to demonstrate to her readers the skill of free critical inquiry that she wanted all citizens to practice for themselves.

The question of how to read well was central in Woolf’s mind because she saw the pluralism and freedom of reading practices as a metonym for democratic participation in the public sphere. She knew reading to be a complex process requiring multi-perspectival critical skills and believed that citizens could transfer their critical reading habits to the political realm where they might then resist demagoguery. As Melba Cuddy-Keane has argued, Woolf “promoted the ideal of a classless, democratic, but intellectual readership” during a period of “increasing standardization or ‘massification’ of the reading public” (*Virginia Woolf* 2). In the revisionist interpretations of Cuddy-Keane and others, Woolf, while not an activist in the traditional sense, was far from apolitical. Cuddy-Keane observes that “running consistently throughout [Woolf’s] writing, regardless of genre, is an interest in mind modeling, approached not as a rarified subject but as the most basic element in life: the process through which we think, the structures in which we write and speak” (238). The free, democratic spirit of reading was, Woolf believed, threatened by the dictates of specialists ensconced in increasingly influential departments of English literature.

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62 Woolf’s defence of reading is rather different from arguments made by later thinkers like Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum who also explore the connection between democracy and reading. The latter propose a model in which examples of empathy in the plots of great works of literature could translate to empathy on the part of the reader, while Woolf argued that the very process of reading literature (not always great literature) could hone one’s ability to navigate complex discursive structures in the public sphere. See Schudson for an overview of Rorty and Nussbaum’s arguments on this point.

63 See Bradshaw’s extensive study of Woolf’s lukewarm anti-fascist political activity in the 1930s.

64 In a letter to her nephew, Julian Bell, who was considering becoming an English teacher, she makes clear that the inherent value of literature is lost when it is specialized: “But why teach English? As you say, all one can do is to herd books into groups, and then these submissive young, who are far too frightened and callow to have a bone in their backs, swallow it down; and tie it up; and thus we get English literature into ABC; one, two, three; and lose all sense of what its about” (*Letters* 5: 450). As Gerald Graff and others have demonstrated, throughout the history of English literature as a discipline, a tension has existed between preserving the subjectivity and spontaneity of interpretations to literature and creating means of testing students’ literary knowledge.
In this context, the importance of amateur habits of mind becomes clear: citizens able to ramble across professional discourse designed to ensnare the mind could engage critically and skeptically in the public sphere and reject efforts to establish intellectual monopolies in previously democratic arenas like literature or human psychology. Because of the pedagogic and democratic qualities of Woolf’s criticism, her “amateur” doesn’t refer to an elite gentleman as it did for Matthew Arnold or Woolf’s own contemporaries, John Middleton Murray and A. R. Orage, but rather, is an attitude that anyone, of any class or educational background, could adopt. Yet exactly how someone could undergo the rigors of professional training, come to possess both the financial and material freedom gained through professional work, and still maintain the capacity for associative, non-hierarchical qualities of thought that Woolf and others aligned with amateurism, was a question that would both frustrate and fuel her writing.

In the first section of the chapter, I focus upon Woolf’s early representations of amateur reading practices. I argue that while these texts display her effort to evince the great freedom and curiosity enabled by amateur thinking, they struggle to transfer the insights of the amateur to the broader public sphere and into the professions. In the second section of the chapter, I argue that we can trace a conceptual shift in Woolf’s thought as she increasingly presents a symbiotic amateur / professional relationship in her massive documentary project on the professions taken up in the last decade of her life. Although Anna Snaith is right to warn us against “teleological readings [that] run counter to Woolf’s own comments” to the effect that creative writing doesn’t

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65 This is a distinction that I think Carol Atherton misses in her otherwise excellent book on modern literary criticism and the institutionalization of English studies. The Victorian “sage,” whose authority Guy and Small note, emerged from “superior intellect” and was “mysterious in origin,” stands in direct opposition to the professional critics who understood critical skills to be learned through formal education and therefore to be teachable (385). Woolf critiques both of these models: the first for the patriarchal authority it represented, and the second for its patriarchal authority and its interest in transforming reading and literature into testable systems. Woolf believed intelligent reading was teachable, but that the teacher ultimately had no more authority than the student in the debate over meaning or value.
evolve but moves in fits and starts (Negotiations 4), Woolf’s work of the 1930s is distinct from her earlier writing that was unable to move amateur thinking into the public sphere. As a professional writer, critic, and publisher, Woolf experimented in her own working habits and gradually developed techniques for professional researchers to think amateurishly in a public format, and for amateurs to share in the process of professional inquiry. In the third section of the chapter, I shift my focus to Woolf’s final novel, Between the Acts (1941). It dramatizes many of the ideals that Woolf had been arduously working through over the previous decades: citizens as perpetual students, professionals as amateur thinkers, and education as public conversation. Although the novel takes place in a small nameless village away from the centres of professional academic and commercial power, I argue that it aids us in understanding how amateur habits of mind could be taught, and how they could have profound political consequences. Although like Ford, Woolf believed amateur habits of mind to have strong associations with a nation’s educational and political systems, her focus on the transformative potential of women’s entry into the professions following the First World War caused her to be much more sanguine about the future of professionalization than Ford, whose confidence in amateur thinking had faltered after the war.

“Alone among books”: The Problem of the Private Amateur

In much of Woolf’s writing from the 1910s and 1920s, modern amateurism is represented as a problematically marginal and eccentric activity within an increasingly professional society. Her early essays and novels often replay the ambivalence she felt toward her own education,
which granted her access to knowledge but came at the cost of isolation.\textsuperscript{66} While she cherished her “free run of a large and quite unexpurgated library” \textit{(CE 4: 79)}, she conceded that an “education (alone among books) was a very bad one” \textit{(Letters 6: 420)}. Her exclusion from the rambling debate and incongruous conversations that her male contemporaries enjoyed helped her to realize amateur habits of mind were crucial components of education. Her concern is already evident in a 1903 letter to her brother Thoby where she complains: “I don’t get anybody to argue with me now, and feel the want. I have to delve from books, painfully and all alone, what you get every evening sitting over your fire and smoking with [Lytton] Strachey etc.” \textit{(Letters 1: 77)}.

In this early letter we see Woolf beginning to articulate a pedagogy that opts for public dialogue and shared inquiry that necessarily would bring women out of the private home and into the public sphere. Although as a teacher at Morley College in London between 1905 and 1907 Woolf recognized the public role that amateur thought could play in encouraging students to engage in a range of issues, as I suggest below, her early work struggles to demonstrate the complementarity of amateur thought and professional status.\textsuperscript{67} Repeatedly we encounter amateurs cowed into silence by specialists and trapped within the privacy of their own minds.

\textsuperscript{66} See Jones and Snaith’s joint article for recently discovered documents contradicting “the impression given by Woolf’s biographers, and indeed by Woolf herself [. . .] that she was almost entirely self-educated” (2). The article presents evidence of course records, exam pass lists, and registration for Woolf between 1897 and 1901 at King’s College, London. The evidence shows that Woolf “was not only registered for courses in a range of subjects, but reached degree-level standards in some of her studies, and also took examinations” (4). However, neither she nor her sister Vanessa were “matriculated students, regularly following a course of study leading to a London or Oxford University degree” (6). According to Jones and Snaith’s research, Woolf registered for classes in English history, continental history, Latin, Greek and German, although it is unclear if she passed them all. Between 1897 and 1901 she was always enrolled in at least two classes and registered for at least thirteen discreet classes over the five years including “Greek Advanced” (41). Despite this new evidence, Woolf was certainly denied a full university education or membership in the culture of Oxbridge enjoyed by men like John Maynard Keynes and T. S. Eliot with whom she associated.

\textsuperscript{67} Beth Rigel Daugherty’s work on Woolf’s early teaching career at Morley College clearly demonstrates that Woolf was considering the potentially beneficial relationship between institutions and solitary amateurs. It was Woolf’s classroom experience as a young teacher that helped her develop a pedagogy based upon amateur reading and learning that eschewed the singular voice of the lecturer. As Daugherty explains, “in her essays, Woolf creates a teaching / learning space where class can be muted, where access is encouraged, where being welcomed into the
In her essay, “Hours in a Library” (1916), for instance, although the young amateur reader appears to stand opposed to the modern professional scholar who “searches through books to discover some particular grain of truth” without experiencing the pleasure of literature, the amateurs are unable to translate their insights to the wider world (CE 2: 34). On the surface, the amateur is much freer than the scholar because for the latter, says Woolf, “reading is more of the nature of brisk exercise in the open air than of sheltered study; he trudges the high road, he climbs higher and higher upon the hills until the atmosphere is almost too fine to breathe in; to him it is not a sedentary pursuit at all.” Woolf’s amateur is distinct from the scholar not only in his love for reading and his associative reading technique, but also in his anti-institutional stance that holds: “if knowledge sticks to him well and good, but to go in pursuit of it, to read on a system, to become a specialist or an authority, is very apt to kill what it suits us to consider the more humane passion for pure and disinterested reading.” Woolf admires not the young amateur’s critical capacities (she acknowledges that mature judgment takes years to develop), but rather the excitement and “passion for knowledge” that the amateur reader feels (36). Although as a professional critic and writer herself Woolf recognized that instrumentalist reading was sometimes necessary, it violated her belief that the act of reading at its purest was a sensuous experience. Writing in her diary she exclaims, “What a vast fertility of pleasure books hold for me! [. . .] I looked in & sniffed them all” (Diary 4: 173). But for all the pleasures of amateur reading recounted in this essay, the experience is as difficult to translate beyond the private mind as the pedantic scholarship to which it stands in apparent opposition. Despite the freedom and

community of readers is more important than gatekeeping” (“Morley” 133). The institutional setting enabled her to identify with her students’ own marginalization from higher education and join them in forming a community of amateur inquiry.
iconoclasm of the amateur reader, Woolf suggests that amateur thought is something undertaken “privately by ourselves” in our “solitary walks and sleepless hours” (CE 2: 36, 38). It is only toward the end of the essay when Woolf notes that “no age of literature is so little submissive to authority as ours,” that she begins to suggest the promiscuous amateur reader could potentially influence public taste or the opinions of professional critics (38-39). While the essay suggests that our privately gleaned insights from reading works by Shakespeare and Milton could enact cognitive changes affecting our perceptions, it is much more hesitant to suggest that amateur habits of mind could impact the wider world as well.

In developing her most famous amateur persona, the common reader, Woolf acknowledges that modern amateurs face particular challenges that those before them did not. She describes the common reader as “worse educated” than the scholar or critic. He “reads for his own pleasure” and is “hasty, inaccurate, and superficial” but ultimately creates “some kind of whole” (Common Reader 1: 1). Borrowing the term from Samuel Johnson, Woolf saw that it was easier to succeed at being a common reader during earlier centuries. She suggests that common readers like Montaigne were able to achieve a balance between their amateur and professional habits of mind resulting in “a miraculous adjustment of all [the] wayward parts that constitute the human soul” (67). Montaigne, she claims, came to feel that “all extremes are dangerous” and successfully mediated his amateur love of reading and study with his public service as a counselor at the courts in Bordeaux (61). Common readers living before the twentieth century, and thus before professional culture was so pervasive, had less trouble, it would seem, incorporating rambling and creative habits of mind into public life. Woolf emphasizes this period distinction when describing the success that the nineteenth-century entomologist Eleanor Ormerod had in determining her own professional life. The series of vignettes that form the essay emphasize Ormerod’s humility: “I don’t altogether like writing
LL.D. after my name [. . .]. All I ask is to be let go on in my own quiet way” (132). Ormerod chose to eschew the more ostentatious elements of professionalism that men encouraged her to adopt: when a male doctor suggests a statue ought to be erected in her honour, she laughs off the suggestion; when he gossips about her professional “enemies,” she returns the conversation to her scholarship. Unlike many professional men who sought to become solitary experts in their fields, she preferred a shared professionalism, explaining, “I do believe all good work is done in concert” (133). By concluding the essay by mentioning Ormerod’s death in 1901, the first year of the new century, Woolf suggests that Ormerod’s capacity to participate in professional society as she wished was no longer an option for twentieth-century professionals.

Perhaps Woolf’s first novel, The Voyage Out (1915), offers the most prominent example in her early writing of the fragility of modern amateur thinking and the hostility of modern professional society. The novel follows Rachel Vinrace’s tumultuous entry into adulthood as she accompanies her aunt and uncle aboard the Euphrosyne on a trip to South America. Rachel’s innocence, symbolized by the pleasure she derives from her self-directed encounters with literature and music in the privacy of her cabin, is challenged by older university-educated men who chastise her reading choices and practices. With a modicum of formal education, she reads broadly and unprogrammatically; reading a few lines from Tristan, she then turns to Cowper’s Letters, and from Cowper’s Letters to Wuthering Heights. Rachel’s aunt, Mrs. Ambrose, rightly senses Rachel’s vulnerability as both a woman and an amateur in the presence of professional men. She seeks to insulate her by voicing her objection to Rachel’s preference for “modern books” (124) and ensuring that Rachel’s room at the South American hotel was “cut off from the rest of the house, large, private [. . .] a fortress as well as a sanctuary” (123).

Woolf’s tendency to privatize amateur thinking in The Voyage Out is, if not justified, at least explained by the intimidating professional (and sexual) hauteur of the men Rachel
encounters. The simultaneous sexual appeal and threat of older men, like the avuncular Richard Dalloway who shocks Rachel by suddenly kissing her in her private cabin, seems as much of an assault on Rachel’s innocence as the supercilious remarks of her uncle Ridley Ambrose, a scholar of Classics, who asks her why she would read at all since she doesn’t know Greek. In this novel, literary knowledge operates not as a means to conversation and sympathy as Woolf had hoped, but rather as a weapon in the battle for professional and sexual dominance. The two recent Oxbridge graduates, Terence Hewet and St. John Hirst, shamelessly use knowledge as a weapon as they perversely court Rachel by browbeating her into adopting their own literary tastes formed by institutional fashions. Hewet patronizingly confronts her: “God, Rachel, you do read trash! [. . .] And you’re behind the times too, my dear. No one dreams of reading this kind of thing now—antiquated problem plays, harrowing descriptions of life in the east end—oh, no, we’ve exploded all that. Read poetry, Rachel, poetry, poetry, poetry! (Voyage Out 292). While Hewet is ostensibly upset because Rachel reads the wrong literature—wrong temporally and generically—the final tedious repetition in his harangue suggests that Rachel’s amateurism threatens a more fundamental element of his identity, namely the professional system that underwrites his credentials and legitimizes his social status.

The tension developed in The Voyage Out between the beneficial freedom of thought permitted by undirected amateur engagement on the one hand, and the problematic powerlessness produced by solitary study on the other, is one that I see Woolf attempting to work out continuously throughout her career. While Rachel’s freedom is vaunted in the novel, her isolation makes her ignorant of the world and works to perpetuate the Victorian cult of domesticity that Woolf would later describe her own battle against the “Angel in the House” (CE 2: 285). Although Rachel “read what she chose” (Voyage Out 124), her lack of institutional training or affiliation leave her too sheltered and timid to share with others the “shivering private
visions” that amateur reading affords (66). Susan Stanford Friedman argues that Rachel’s inability to stand up to bullying male academics led Woolf to symbolically kill her off in order that more confident and independent amateur readers can take her place. Friedman is right that Woolf would later seek to incorporate a more mature critical judgment and a better knowledge of historical and critical tradition into amateur reading practice. However, Friedman’s oppositional gender politics erroneously suggest that Woolf sought to distance readers like Rachel from the “authority of the [male] scholar and critic,” when, in fact, Woolf’s strategy encouraged women to share the professional authority of the university with men and, in the process, change what such authority entailed (119). While Friedman proposes an unnecessarily combative reading of Woolf’s work in which amateur readers like Rachel needed either to become as domineering as the men who dominated them or escape the world of male professionalism entirely, as my argument below suggests, Woolf’s later work is successful in locating points of connection between amateurs and professionals, as well as between women and men.

For instance, two years after her first novel, Woolf identifies a positive amateur / professional partnership in her essay “The Perfect Language” (1917), which reviewed the recently established Loeb Library of Classics. Recognizing the emerging connections between universities, publishers, and general readers enabled by the mass literary marketplace, Woolf sees the Loeb Library as evidence of a symbiosis between amateur readers who gain access to important texts printed bilingually, and professional scholars who gain new readers reliant upon their translations. She writes:

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I again take issue with Patrick Collier who asserts that Woolf supported “an eccentric configuration of “privacy as an alternative to professionalism”’ (Fleet Street 74). He claims that Woolf participated in a “feminist eschewal of the professional authority many of her modernist colleagues were claiming.” I argue instead that Woolf was frustrated at the obvious lack of power that private amateurs had and sought ways for them to acquire professional power (that she equated with freedom of thought) while remaining amateur in spirit.
The existence of the amateur was recognized by the publication of this Library, and to a great extent made respectable. He was given the means of being an open and unabashed amateur, and made to feel that no one pointed the finger of scorn at him on that account; and in consequence, instead of exercising his moribund faculties almost furtively upon some chance quotation met in an English book, he could read a whole play at a time, with his feet on the fender. (Essays 2: 114)

In contrast to analyses that highlighted the moral or didactic guidance that amateur readers could gain from academically-sanctioned works like the Loeb Library, Woolf calls attention to the way the texts are able to extend and emancipate the amateur’s pleasure that heretofore had been limited to snippets of translated Classical texts. No longer does the amateur need to read furtively, sensing that he was poaching upon texts reserved for specialists. The specialists, who formerly looked with “scorn” upon the amateur’s secret reading, now work to create translations that make public the pleasures of the cognoscenti. Crucially, it’s the attitude, not the class of the reader, that interests Woolf here: gorging himself on an entire play rather than pedantically dissecting it like Rachel Vinrace’s uncle; casually reading with legs elevated next to the fireplace, rather than formally studying at a desk. Although specialists still control how texts are translated, the amateur reader determines how he will engage with it. I call attention to this relatively obscure essay because it is indicative of the relationship between professionals and amateurs that Woolf would attempt to cultivate in her essays and fiction over the subsequent years. Abandoning the antagonistic relationship between amateurs and professionals suggested by The Voyage Out, Woolf was increasingly successful at wedding the two ostensibly opposing terms.
Nowhere was Woolf more acutely aware of the potential interplay of amateur and professional habits of mind than in her own writing and reading practices. For instance, in May 1921 she writes in her diary,

sometimes I suppose that even if I came to the end of my incessant search into what people are & feel I should know nothing still. [. . .] I was thinking about this in the Strand today—wondering whether I am after some play or novel, as I go on ferreting away. But I’m to [sic] scatterbrained to get it right. [. . .] I’ve a notion of reading masterpieces only; for I’ve read literature in bulk so long. Now I think’s [sic] the time to read like an expert. (Diary 2: 119-20)

Notice Woolf’s assumption that expertise, like amateurism, is based not on credentials but on technique and performance: while first allowing her mind to wander, she then organizes her thoughts by reading like an expert. As her comments upon her own reading suggest, reading freely does not mean denouncing expert opinion or expert practices, but rather, being sufficiently self-aware to shift between different modes of reading and then comparing them with each other.

As a professional critic, Woolf was highly attuned to the difficulty of maintaining amateur thinking habits while ensconced within professional life. Although in 1905, after publishing her first reviews for The Guardian, Woolf tells a friend with pride that she thinks of herself as “a professional lady” (Letters 1: 190), she was constantly aware that this status gave her an authority that could result in the domineering and dictatorial attitudes that she abhorred. Thus in her professional criticism she was careful to tell readers that her opinion was only one of many and that, as she writes in “How Should One Read a Book?,” “nothing can be more fatal than to be guided by the preferences of others in a matter so personal” as deciding what books one liked (CE 2: 5). While she believed that thoughtful critics could, indeed, mediate the crucial relationship between authors and readers, too often, she felt, the intimate connection was
corrupted by the definitive proclamations of professional reviewers and the mercenary impetus underlying their reviews. Writing about professional critics in “Essay in Criticism” (1927), she acknowledges the power of the voice of the professional and how easily it can dominate. She explains that the reader “begins to think that critics, because they call themselves so, must be right. […] He begins to doubt and conceal his own sensitive, hesitating apprehensions when they conflict with the critics’ decrees” (252). As Woolf’s reputation increased throughout the late 1920s and 1930s and she had more freedom to write as she wished, she used the marketplace to promulgate an alternative to the hierarchical professional power that dominated the private home, the university, and the marketplace itself.

**Imagining a “Shared” Professionalism**

The patriarchal oppression underlying the historical development of professionalism led Woolf overwhelmingly to represent the professional as male. (The patronizing tone, ineffective dictates, and privileged attitude of Dr. Bradshaw in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) come to mind.) But in the 1930s, she became more explicit about the ways that modern women might make a living as professionals without betraying the generations of women who had been excluded from professional power and had come to think in different ways from men. While Woolf acknowledged that women had the potential to act oppressively and that not all men were oppressors, she increasingly felt that a professional woman was capable of thinking differently.

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69 Woolf often agreed with her character Lucy Swithin that people in the past were “only you and me [. . .] dressed differently” (*Between the Acts* 118). Woolf’s interest in the question of whether women had biologically changed over the centuries appears to have been a pervasive one at a time of rapid social changes for women. Woolf’s friend Ray Strachey anticipates Woolf’s arguments in a 1933 article in *The Lancet* comparing Victorian and modern women. Strachey asks, “Are the young ladies of to-day different from the young ladies of 1830, or are they just the same creatures, differently dressed?” (1072). She concludes that they are not because “women, even during the darkest age of subjection, were strong and independent by nature” (1073). On Woolf’s views of history, see Cuddy-Keane, “Varieties.”
from professional men because “her experiences are not the same. Her traditions are different” (Pargiters xxxiii). Although women in Britain had gained access to the professions under the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, many writers during the 1930s were interested in examining the experiences of professional women to determine their progress and outline future battles. As Marie-Luise Gättens notes, despite legislative achievements, there was reason to be on the defensive in the 1930s as a growing “backlash against women’s tentative steps toward equality [...] gained momentum as economic difficulties increased” (8). In addition to major studies like A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson’s *The Professions* (1933), societies and committees devoted to seeking support for specific legislative initiatives relating to women’s rights continued to flourish. Woolf’s friend, the feminist activist and writer Ray Strachey, remarked in her book *Careers and Openings for Women* (1935) on the “wide gap between legislation and action” that persisted in England between male and female professionals (qtd. in Nettels 251). Although legally, as Doris Kilman tells her young pupil Elizabeth Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway*, “law, medicine, politics, all professions are open to women of your generation,”

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70 While Woolf clearly believed that allowing more women into positions of power would temper male tendencies for violence, scholars disagree on whether Woolf believed women were inherently nonviolent. Jane Marcus offers strong evidence from *Three Guineas* that “Woolf did not believe that nonviolence was innate in women” (xviii). Marina MacKay, however, argues “the reflective and representative mind is, for Woolf, a female attribute and a female role” (135).

71 Elsa Nettels argues that *The Years* and *Three Guineas* demonstrate that “Woolf [was] impressed by the persistence, not the diminishing, of gender inequality, [and was] far more moved to demonstrate the power still exercised by men in the professions than to celebrate the success of women in overcoming that power” (251).

72 Harold Perkin notes that although after the First World War attitudes toward women had changed forever, the demobilizing of British men at the end of the War meant that “many of these gains were nullified” as men replaced women in the labor force (235).

73 See my Introduction for an extended discussion of this work.

74 See Berman ch. 4 for a detailed discussion of Woolf’s admiration for the democratic sentiments of women’s groups like the Women’s Co-Operative Guild and her efforts to urge them to conceptualize “community” in a broader sense beyond party politics or policy positions.
many critics in the 1930s noted that, in reality, women professionals were still marginalized (143).

While some aspects of Woolf’s writing about professional women was typical of the period, I argue below that she was unique in her effort to broaden the conversation to consider the state of modern professional labour itself. While she supported the professions because they allowed individuals to benefit from the material and discursive power that an independent income granted them, she also recognized the oppressive power of patriarchal professionalism on display in “the pedagogic, the didactic, the loud-speaker strain” that she heard in everything from the poetry of the Auden Generation to Hitler and Churchill’s voices on the BBC (CE 2: 175). She believed the professional system taught people to think too narrowly, and perhaps worse, develop greedy, self-righteous, and aggressive attitudes that informed their professional behaviour. As she writes, the “cash value” of current professional life was greater than “its spiritual, its moral, its intellectual value” (Three Guineas 87). She feared that unless professional women changed the professions, they would become like professional men who had “no time to look at pictures [. . .] no time to listen to music [. . .] no time for conversation.”

Importantly, women’s access to the professions represented much more, for Woolf, than a paycheque. She describes it as “this new weapon, our only weapon” because it turned women into a radical vanguard who had the power to transform the professional social structures as they entered them (Three Guineas 50).

As much as Woolf’s focus was centered upon the lives of past and present professional women, it is important not to overlook her sense that professional patriarchy also failed the men

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75 See Elliott and Wallace, who note that Woolf’s argument that financial independence was critical to women’s equality was common to the period. They point to articles in The Freewoman that “consistently argued that the ability to earn a living wage was more crucial to women’s independence than the vote” (66).
who were its most powerful representatives. By broadening her inquiry to ask “how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings” (96), she both acknowledges the damaging effects of patriarchy while shifting our attention beyond gender to social institutions and labour practices that affect us all. For instance, she blames the pressures of professional life that leave the “professional man […] with so little pleasure to himself” that she worried he was left a “half-man” (Three Guineas 132). Similarly, in A Room of One’s Own (1929), her argument for gender equality is accompanied by a broader assessment of the modern professional system that she describes as a form of bondage. When her persona reflects upon her exclusion from the university library and professional life more generally, she concludes: “I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in” (24). In her subsequent decade-long project that she described as “my Professions book” (Diary 4: 323), she documented both the “unpleasant” feeling of being locked out of the professions, and her belief that honest intellectual inquiry required not being “locked in” patriarchal professional structures. It is these broader questions about professional status that emerge in the works of her 1930s study of the professions that Jane Marcus describes as “a huge documentary project that never quite came off” (“Introduction” xlv) and that Woolf herself described as having been “like a long childbirth” (Letters 5: 31).

Throughout her writing of the 1930s, she imagines not an opposition, but a dialectic whereby outsiders (often women, but working-class men too) would enter the professions and then transform them from the inside by drawing upon the resources of amateur thought that they honed while on the outside. Woolf’s increasingly symbiotic conception of the professional and

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76 These feelings escalated into indignation as she began a scrapbook in the 1930s documenting the many historical inequities between men and women. See Pawlowski for an extended discussion of Woolf’s scrapbooking. Jane Marcus notes the political symbolism in which Woolf, like Doris Lessing after her, “took that domestic staple of family life, the scrapbook, and used it for recording public events” (xxvii-xxviii).
the amateur tends to loop back upon itself in unexpected ways as it does in her notion of an “outsider’s society” whose members would reject the honours and titles of traditional professionalism while working to “obtain full knowledge of professional practices” (Three Guineas 132). Although the outsiders are, in fact, insiders, once inside the professions, they continue to think as outsiders. For Woolf, outsiders are not anti-professional but, instead, work to “create new professions in which [they] can earn the right to an independent opinion” (130) and where they can “practise their profession experimentally, in the interests of research and for love of the work itself” (133). Her model of an utterly transformed professionalism is simultaneously utopian, and—as it gets articulated over the course of Three Guineas and other texts—reasonable (why shouldn’t professionals expect to love their work and look warily upon the corrupting influences of titles and money?).

Yet underlying Woolf’s idealism was an anxiety that professional women would fail to transform the professions and would instead, become trapped in professional hierarchies and lose their feminine strengths and ambitions. In The Years (1937), for example, which follows the Pargiter family through the changes in English society between 1880 and 1937, the effects of women’s new professional status are found wanting. Peggy Pargiter, a doctor in her thirties in the “Present Day” section of the novel, and her aunt Eleanor, a volunteer charity worker who is in her thirties in the 1891 section, both feel dissatisfied with their identities and feel themselves to be on the outside of social life. Eleanor’s lament that “she did not exist; she was not anybody at all” (90) echoes Peggy’s later struggle to extend her personal insights to the larger society who seek her expertise and cannot understand her unhappiness. Peggy appears to other characters as

77 Woolf refused an honorary doctorate from Manchester University in March 1933, writing in her diary: “nothing would induce me to connive at all that humbug” (Diary 5: 206). She refused another from the University of Liverpool in 1939.
“bitter, disillusioned, and very critical of everyone” (374). Her recognition of the limitations of professional knowledge leaves her “daily impressed by the ignorance of doctors” (312). When asked a question about medicine she responds, “Oh, doctors are great humbugs” (339) and “doctors know very little about the body; absolutely nothing about the mind” (365). Although Peggy holds the professional status that Woolf hoped more women would attain, her recognition of the hollowness of specialist knowledge and her self-doubts about not conforming to patriarchal expectations leave her paralyzed and unfulfilled. While Peggy is more self-aware than her male counterparts and demonstrates none of “their possessiveness, their jealously, their pugnacity, their greed” (Three Guineas 100), her mind has grown “hard; cold; in a groove already” (The Years 336). Peggy’s experience explains why Woolf’s thinking about the future of female professionals was both more ambitious and more vexed than many of her contemporaries who saw the issue as either a fait accompli or as a purely legislative concern.

Woolf’s solution to the lonely and bitter professional life that she imagined for Peggy Pargiter was the notion of “sharing.” Rather than organizing committees, holding meetings, and signing petitions, which seemed to her too narrowly focused and too likely to result in professional tyrannies among their members, Woolf believed that the most valuable activity women could engage in was shared conversation with one another about how they wanted to transform the professions. In her talk to the London Society for Women’s Service on January 21, 1931, she applauds women’s legal victories and their increased presence in the professions, but qualifies her excitement by urging the women in her audience to begin having conversations.

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78 See Anna Snaiht’s “‘Stray Guineas’: Virginia Woolf and the Fawcett Library” for a summary of the revisionist scholarship on Woolf’s political engagement as well as a specific instance of her assistance to the Women’s Service Library in 1938 in the form of money and books. She quotes Woolf in a letter to Ethel Smyth stressing the importance of access to books for women who are “bookless at home, working all day, eager to know anything and everything” (23).
about how they plan to “share” their professional status and knowledge. “Sharing,” here, signals several different ambitions that Woolf had for a new professional system: it indicates her hope that women professionals wouldn’t feel isolated from one another as Peggy Pargiter does; it suggests a spirit of exchange and collaboration across gender and class divides; and finally, it encourages the intermixing of amateur and professional modes of knowing the world.

Woolf opts for dialogic rather than legal solutions to the impasses that professional women still faced. As she tells the young women in her audience, “even when the path is nominally open—which there is nothing to prevent women from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant—there are many phantoms and obstacles [. . .] looming in her way. To discuss and define them is, I think, of great value and importance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved” (CE 2: 288). Sharing comes to define women’s professional practices against those of men that encourage alienation through hierarchies and compartmentalized specializations. In this spirit, Woolf modifies her earlier idea of a room of one’s own so that she can emphasize the potential for isolation in this concept. Unlike the isolated male pedant who appears in a number of her works as a foil to the liberated amateur, women professionals must not occupy their rooms alone. She explains, “this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared” (289). Because professional women can’t afford to repeat the errors of earlier professionals who excluded outsiders with intimidating pomp and ceremony, Woolf asks her audience, “With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms?” Sharing becomes both the key feature that women introduce to professionalism as well as a warning to any women who might want to exclude men entirely from their professional lives.

*Three Guineas*, the most important descendant of Woolf’s talk to the Society for Women’s Service, broadens the discussion of shared inquiry in the professions and makes
particularly clear that Woolf has, in many ways, solved the problem of the solitary amateur who reads and thinks alone. The text documents a conceptual shift in which the amateur is no longer a troublingly private individual in Woolf’s mind, but is confidently eager to join in the process of shared inquiry alongside professionals. For instance, the first lines of *Three Guineas* bridge the professional/amateur divide by presenting a fictional male barrister who supposedly writes to Woolf asking her to share her views on how to end war forever. The achievement of this narrative device is that it not only challenges some readers’ expectations about gender relations, but also challenges expectations about the relationship between laypeople and professionals. Thus, while Jane Marcus presents *Three Guineas* in oppositional terms claiming that Woolf “creates authority and then teaches the reader how to dismantle it” (xlvi), in my view, the more prevalent tactic in this text is to disrupt the exclusivity that power depends upon by encouraging outsiders to share in the process of thinking and writing about important ideas and, by doing so, alter the established opinions of insiders. Although twice in *Three Guineas* Woolf polemically argues that women should burn down the old colleges and “set fire to the old hypocrisies” (45), overall the text is more interested in promoting a slightly more subtle form of dissent.

Throughout, Woolf urges her readers to courageously enter into important debates regardless of their credentials or whether they feel invited to participate. Through such an approach, amateurs could simultaneously have their voices heard and contest underlying assumptions about who is eligible to speak on important social issues.

Woolf models such an amateur participation in professional debates when she takes issue with the comments of Professor Grensted who “has said the psychology of the sexes is ‘still a matter for specialists’” (*Three Guineas* 154). Without any formal training in psychology, Woolf coyly acknowledges, “it would be politic perhaps to leave these questions to be answered by specialists” only to continue: “But since, on the other hand, if common men and women are to be
free they must learn to speak freely, we cannot leave the psychology of the sexes to the charge of specialists.” She suggests, instead, we ought to “grop[e] our way amateurishly enough among these very ancient and obscure emotions which we have known ever since the time of Antigone and Ismene and Creon at least [. . .] but which the Professions have only lately brought to the surface and named ‘infantile fixation,’ ‘Oedipus complex,’ and the rest.” Woolf demonstrates for her readers that they need not be intimidated by esoteric terms passing as “new” knowledge but are merely common knowledge repackaged by specialists in order to legitimize their power. Woolf insists that specialist knowledge is, in fact, widely “accessible”—both in the sense that it can be comprehended, and that it can be found easily in sources outside the exclusive walls of the university (133). As she explains, “even outsiders can consult the annals of those public bodies which record not the day-to-day opinions of private people, but use a larger accent and convey through the mouths of Parliaments and Senates the considered opinions of bodies of educated men” (35). Woolf’s optimism—here and elsewhere—of the growing power of the amateur in the face of rising specialization was based in her belief that increasing literacy rates and access to information would lead to a period particularly amenable to the amateur’s participation in the public sphere.

In many of her works, Woolf encouraged her female readers not only to take up research themselves, but also to turn to topics that have been intentionally cast aside by male professionals. In A Room of One’s Own, for instance, she asks “why does not some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton supply [. . .] a mass of information” about historical women? She suggests they look to “parish registers, account books” since this knowledge would be “scattered about somewhere” (45). In an early short story “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906), Woolf had already imagined how a professional woman might approach historical documents differently than men. The fictional modern professional historian, Miss
Merridew, explains that she has “won considerable fame among my profession for the researches I have made into the system of land tenure in mediaeval England” (Complete 33). Her reputation is either based upon, or exists despite, her scholarly methodology that is critiqued by ostensibly male critics who understand history in terms of statistics and politics. In contrast, her approach considers the cultural context of the legal documents she studies and offers “some scene from the life of the time” in her work that brings into focus the medieval lives of women and children (34). Not only does she differ from her male colleagues in her approach to history, but she also differs in her interaction with laypeople like Mr. Martyn, whose house she visits in her efforts to seek out medieval documents. Despite her professional fame, she does not announce her credentials at the door and likely gains trust by obliquely approaching her objective and then respectfully listening to Mr. Martyn describe the ancient documents in his possession that record his family genealogy. Although she may disagree with the way Mr. Martyn thinks of his ancestors as his contemporaries (“a man likes to keep his family round him” he tells her), she thoughtfully considers his approach to history and describes it respectfully (43). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf seems to begin a similar recovery project by describing the challenges faced by a number of nineteenth-century professional women. She describes the “ambitions” of Anne Clough, the first principle of Newnham College, Cambridge, who worked without pay and read “books her brother lent her” (92). Later, she mentions the struggles of Sophia Jex-Blake, who became one of the first female doctors in Britain. Jex-Blake had to face not only her own father’s insistence that she not be paid for her work since she was a woman, but also the

79 A more problematic reading of this story might note that Miss Merridew has a good reputation among scholars at Oxford and Cambridge but it is not clear that she, herself, is actually a member of these institutions. Her title and her relationship to professional institutions would suggest she is an independent scholar. While this text demonstrates that Woolf was considering very early in her career the ways that women might function differently in the professions than men, it was in the 1930s that she began wrestling with how women could have the same institutional training and subsequent power as men but still maintain amateur habits of mind.
denunciations from a crowd of university men blocking the gates to the Royal College of Surgeons.

Although the anecdotes of professional women in *Three Guineas* share some similarities to Woolf’s earlier descriptions of obscure women in *A Room of One’s Own* or her essay on Miss Ormerod, they are intended, I would argue, to serve a very different purpose. While the earlier texts employ an imaginative sympathy that fills in the biographical lacunae of women’s lives, the descriptions of women in *Three Guineas* are curiously partial portraits that neither flesh out the lives of the women in question nor satisfy our desire to hear of their triumphs. For instance, although Woolf tells the story of Jex-Blake twice over in the text (likely to reinforce the fiction that multiple letters are being composed to different recipients), in neither telling does she reveal whether Jex-Blake was ultimately successful. When Woolf returns to Jex-Blake’s story nearly one hundred pages after first mentioning her, we think she will conclude the story, but instead, she shifts us to an earlier moment in Jex-Blake’s career when she was first “offered a small sum for teaching mathematics” (156). Woolf’s narrative takes a similar approach in discussing the nineteenth-century explorer Mary Kingsley. She repeats Kingsley’s admission that “being allowed to learn German was all the paid-for education I ever had” three times (one for each letter) and mentions her name many more times as a shorthand for the sparseness of the education available to Victorian women. Here again, though, we’re offered a bit of knowledge rather than provided with a broader exposition of Kingsley’s struggles.

Woolf’s game with her readers can feel frustrating and disorienting, but it has a serious end and helps demonstrate why her feminism should be contextualized within a broader conversation about modern professional society. In *Three Guineas*, her goal isn’t to educate us fully on the injustices professional women have faced or the triumphs they have doggedly achieved, but rather, to tantalize us so we will want to educate and empower ourselves and by so
doing, commence a process of shared intellectual inquiry. Although Woolf’s polemical style
doesn’t permit us to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of Jex-Blake’s life, the biography that
she relies upon is referenced twice in the notes so we can read about the triumphant career of
Jex-Blake that Woolf won’t provide us. Woolf’s endnote on Kingsley plays a similar game of
cunning evasion with the reader that works to introduce him or her to new voices that understand
professional society differently than in the works penned by professional men. The endnote
follows up the source of Kingsley’s quotation with a quotation from Clough, which is then
followed by a quotation from nineteenth-century writer and activist Elizabeth Haldane, and so
on. Woolf’s extensive use of endnotes in *Three Guineas* not only has the practical purpose of
pointing readers to the resources of an alternative history, but it also has the symbolic effect of
appropriating professional male power by invoking the solemn authority of the ponderous
endnote only to parody its pedantry.

In *Three Guineas* Woolf seeks to transform the professions not only by working to
encourage those who are outside professional institutions to study the human experience for
themselves; she also attempts to transform the education that molds the thinking habits of
professionals. Crucial to this project was developing a pedagogy that disrupted patriarchal
professionalism. She envisions a college in which the books are not chained down and the goal
of learning is “not to segregate and specialize, but to combine. It should explore the ways in
which mind and body can be made to co-operate; discover what new combinations make good
wholes in human life” (43). The habits of mind that Woolf’s future university would teach are
the key features of amateur thinking. Aligning herself with the next generation of teachers she
suggests, “If we are asked to teach, we can examine very carefully into the aims of such
teaching, and refuse to teach any art or science that encourages war. [. . .] If we are asked to
lecture we can refuse to bolster up the vain and vicious system of lecturing by refusing to lecture.
And of course, if we are offered honours and degrees for ourselves we can refuse them” (*Three Guineas* 46). Such a model doesn’t decry specialization, as Q. D. Leavis understood it to do. Rather, it renounces the way professional culture shuts down conversation through direct intimidation or subtle social mores that suggest alternative viewpoints aren’t welcome.

In her earlier essay “Why?” (1934), we get a better sense of how the social conventions of professional society stymie the free exchange of ideas and work to promote an unequal balance of power in society. The essay contrasts the traditional university lecture setting in which a bored and passive audience sat in “several rows of rather small, rather hard, comfortless little chairs,” with an alternative outdoor setting (*CE* 2: 279). Thinking of the traditional lecturer she wonders, “Why should he not have printed his lecture instead of speaking it? Then, by the fire in winter, or under an apple tree in summer, it could have been read, thought over, discussed; difficult ideas pondered, the argument debated. [. . .] Why not bring together people of all ages and both sexes and all shades of fame and obscurity so that they can talk, without mounting platforms or reading papers [. . .]?” (280). By changing the environment of the lecture, she suggests, amateurs would feel encouraged to interact with the speaker, discussing his ideas democratically and advancing the conversation in stimulating ways.

Woolf’s point is not to suggest that no one has been innovative enough to update the lecture format, but that it and other ineffective teaching techniques survive because they maintain

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80 One of the subtle ways Woolf critiques the traditional patriarchal professions and connects them to warfare in *Three Guineas* is by creating a counterpoint between her descriptions of photographs depicting children killed in the Spanish Civil War and the five photographs periodically inserted in the text itself that are not of these gruesome descriptions, but of professional men including prime minister Stanley Baldwin and Boy Scouts founder Lord Baden-Powell participating in formal ceremonies. Her desired effect of blurring the distinctions between photographs of war and photographs of esteemed men is achieved by presenting the latter one-by-one throughout the text (rather than clustered at the front of the text) so that as she makes a case for the connection between English professional men and foreign warfare over the course of *Three Guineas*, our interpretation of the evident sartorial splendor, medals, and ranks of the figures in the photographs becomes increasingly negative upon each new encounter.
power relations. As she explains, lecturing at an audience means a speaker can avoid “the little twisted sign that comes at the end of a question [that] has a way of making the rich writhe; power and prestige come down upon it with all their weight” (278). The intersection of power, wealth, and pedagogy introduced in “Why?” is probed throughout much of Woolf’s writing. Her sensitivity to the way that conversational range is largely determined by social cues and physical features (a raised podium versus level ground outdoors; the spoken lecture versus the printed lecture), runs throughout Three Guineas and become even more central to her understanding of professional and amateur discourse in her final novel Between the Acts.

The New Professional and the Pedagogy of Inattention

While Woolf had wanted Between the Acts to feature “real little incongruous living humour” (Diary 5: 135), its characters are filled with anger and helplessness; they feel “caught and caged,” “manacled to a rock,” as “the doom of sudden death hangs over” them (Between the Acts 120, 41, 79). While critics have generally attributed these feelings to the novel’s composition on the eve of the Second World War, my own reading works to explore the role of patriarchal professionalism in amplifying these reactions. Set on a single June day in 1939 at the pastoral country estate of Pointz Hall, the novel highlights the ubiquitous influence of professional power in modernist England: war planes fly across the sky, the local reverend insists on having his voice heard, and “festoons left over from the Coronation” celebration for George VI litter the barn floor (72). Yet as I argue below, the novel also suggests that the violent energy of professional “pageantry” discussed in Three Guineas might be redirected to create an empowering “pageant” that professionals in the community amateurishly perform in and later
Continuing her 1930s project of imagining professionals who infuse amateur habits of mind into their work, Woolf imagined the playwright, Miss La Trobe as helping the embittered and isolated professionals to think in amateur ways that momentarily bring them together and allow them to become more self-aware. But, as the novel demonstrates, this democratic and multivocal mode of cultural engagement often results in interpretative modes like inattention and inaccuracy that violate the expectations of professional scholarship. I argue that Woolf urges us to see these acts of inattentive and inaccurate cultural discussion as paradoxically productive and regenerative means of engaging with culture even if they offend our specialist sensibilities.

Just as the novel emphasizes there is no escape from the auguries of war, it also argues that one cannot escape professional ideology. *Between the Acts* shows us that professional injustices are systemic and that most of us are invested in the logic of professionalism even as it oppresses us. William Dodge, for example, is marginalized by his sexuality but is nevertheless introduced as “urban, professional,” a member of the patriarchal professions that Woolf critiques (*Between the Acts* 27). Giles Oliver, who works as a stockbroker in London “where he now wore the black coat and white tie of the professional classes,” is also a victim of the professional system (146). His “rage” results both from his “vision of Europe, bristling with guns, poised with planes” (37) and his sense that he was pushed into his profession: he “was not given his choice [. . .] one thing led to another; and the conglomeration of things pressed you flat” (33).

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81 “Community,” like many terms in *Between the Acts*, is invested with multiple meanings and we must be careful not to assign it a purely positive connotation. As Patricia Klindienst Joplin emphasizes, the Nazis depended upon what Walter Benjamin termed the “aesthetization of political life” through forced participation in state-sponsored folk celebrations. Joplin concludes that “as a woman and a feminist, Woolf had excellent reason for distrusting most expressions of mass solidarity” (95).

82 I consider *Between the Acts* to emerge out of Woolf’s professions project of the 1930s because, although it was published posthumously in 1941, she began making notes for the novel as early as August 1937.
Woolf works to nuance our understanding of professional society by suggesting that for many in England, the forces of suburbanization and modernization left few options aside from entering the professions.

The novel adds further complexity to the process of professional oppression by demonstrating how local and familial relationships play a role in reproducing professional ideology. Giles, for instance, perpetuates the system that oppresses him by oppressing his wife Isa, who “loathed the domestic, the possessive, the maternal” yet finds herself “captive” at Pointz Hall, where she must hide her poetry “in a book bound like an account book” (*Between the Acts* 35). As John Andrew Miller notes, “Isa quietly subverts her husband’s commercial values in a fashion that nevertheless takes for granted their social and cultural dominance” (43). Giles’s father, Bart, also symbolizes the link between public patriarchal violence and the private psychic violence committed against the family. Bart becomes “angry” after frightening his young grandson who he concludes “was a cry-baby” (*Between the Acts* 9). His dismissive attitude to his sister Lucy, who, as Karen Schneider notes, “he has arbitrarily renamed Cindy (also ‘Sindy’ in the text), thus asserting his ultimate authority to name her,” works to devalue any thought processes not condoned by and formed in public school (116). Woolf’s point in showing us professional oppression at the familial level is to suggest that any transformation of professional society would require a fundamental rewriting of the cultural fabric of English society rather than legislative or policy changes.

In contrast to the familial relationships that operate by policing and censoring individual behaviour, the novel’s communal relationships tend to generate pluralism and creativity through shared conversation and public art. Knowing that Woolf conceptualized amateurism as a “rambling” habit of mind, we shouldn’t be surprised that the results that come of encouraging amateurs to read and think on their own terms are instances of forgetting, misreading,
inaccuracy, distraction, and inattention. The effect of inattention and inaccuracy in *Between the Acts* means that while, according to Melba Cuddy-Keane, the novel “may well be Woolf’s most allusive work” (“Introduction” lii), the cultural allusions themselves are mangled and misremembered by the characters who quote extemporaneously without the aid of anthologies edited by specialists. Cuddy-Keane’s description of the text as “strikingly thickened and deepened with multiple layers of other texts” resulting in “a vast cultural root system descending fibrously into the past” (liii) prompts us to wonder whether a cultural heritage can still nurture and anchor readers when transmitted piecemeal and inaccurately. I suggest that the novel demonstrates that they can. Woolf contends that amateur engagement with art both refreshes art’s relevance and ensures that the power of art will be used to challenge political tyrannies rather than reinforce them.

In an early instance of amateur cultural engagement in the novel, Bart, Lucy, Giles, and Isa entertain their guests by playing a game of recalling literary quotations to mind. Mrs. Manresa quotes as much of Hamlet’s third soliloquy as she can remember and then nudges Giles to continue. When he does not respond, Isa “supplied the first words that came into her head by way of helping her husband out of his difficulty” (*Between the Acts* 38). Isa’s contribution, from Keats, not Shakespeare, is quoted inaccurately, but is enough to trigger William to recall, “The weariness, the torture, and the fret,” where “torture” ought to be “fever.” Poetry, in this game, returns to an oral tradition where accuracy is less important than serendipitous poetic echoes that help perpetuate a communal engagement with art. We could go so far as to draw a parallel between the way Shakespeare reinvigorated Holinshed’s *Chronicles* by retelling and mistelling them in his plays, and the way that Giles, Isa, and the others accomplish something similar with *Hamlet* in their game.
In fact, the odd memory game echoes Woolf’s own experiments exploring the creative potential of misrecollection late in her writing career. John Whittier-Ferguson describes how Woolf composed *The Years* by intentionally relying on her faulty memory when trying to weave together its earlier and later sections. He explains that Woolf wanted the novel to “record the history of its own making in its incompletely realized echoes, its slightly misrecalled allusions to preceding chapters” (298). As she was preparing to write the “1918” section, rather than reread her earlier draft, she decided, “I shall summon it back—the teaparty, the death, Oxford & so on, from my memory” (*Diary 4*: 221). From this perspective, being too devoted to factual accuracy destroys the creative potential of literature. According to Hermione Lee, misquotations were as valuable to Woolf’s writing as accurate quotations were. “In her essays,” she argues, “the distinction is eroded between reference, imitation, tribute, and stealing; she works up her subjects out of a tissue of quotation and paraphrase. Her mind is full of echoes” (“Crimes” 133). Elsewhere, Lee cautions that “the blurring of compartments in her notebooks doesn’t suggest that she was messy and absent-minded. She wanted boundaries to overlap: it was a form of cross-fertilization” (*Virginia Woolf* 413). Woolf’s partial draft memoir, “A Sketch of the Past,” written intermittently between 1939 and 1940, repeatedly raises the problem of fragmented memory and suggests that literary works that foreground inaccuracy are, in a sense, truer to life than those in which characters deliver flawless speeches. As she attempts to write about her own life, she finds herself able to recollect many “floating incidents” and “clear moments,” but much of her past is concealed by “muffled dulness” (*Moments of Being* 77, 93). A five-page draft of a story

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83 There is evidence in the first typescript of *Between the Acts* that Woolf saw the process of forgetting as an equalizer between men and women, and the formally educated and self-educated. The first draft has Lucy frequently entering the library to ask Bart questions about history because “All this had been laid down in him in the lower forms at Harrow” only to find that this knowledge is remembered “not very accurately.” There is an irony in Lucy entering the library not to consult the books but to consult her brother who can only offer inaccuracies: “‘The sack of Constantinople,’ he replied. [. . .] ‘When was that?’ He had forgotten; she had forgotten” (*Pointz Hall* 51).
titled “Incongruous / Inaccurate Memories” written at the same time as the memoir lends further credence to my hypothesis that the positive virtue of inaccuracy was a major concept that Woolf was working through in the last years of her life. The draft not only has a title highly suggestive of the type of cultural recall on display in *Between the Acts*; it was actually found interleaved among the pages of the *Between the Acts* manuscripts (Lee *Virginia Woolf* 749). 84

Of course, as educators, we hardly wish to teach our own students a reception model that encourages inattention and inaccuracy; indeed, such habits of mind seem to threaten learning and the liberal exchange of ideas. Yet in the context in which *Between the Acts* was written, inattention comes to symbolize not the breakdown of liberal discourse but the break up of fascist monologism. Indeed, non-specialized modes of reception and interpretation running throughout the novel should not necessarily be equated with carelessness. Instead, the word “distraction” takes on a positive connotation as it becomes associated with creative, associative, and empathetic thinking that breaks up dominant discourse. We can find a precedent in *A Room of One’s Own* where Woolf’s persona compares her own “helter-skelter” amateur research in the British Museum with the scholar who has “some method of shepherding his question past all distractions till it runs into its answer as sheep run into a pen” (28, my italics). As Woolf understands the term, “distractions” enable one to think outside the constraints of convention. In the text, her persona’s major insight about professional men is gleaned not from serious study in the British Museum, but serendipitously in a nearby restaurant where she distractedly glances at a discarded evening newspaper. It is an article in this common document, not the monographs of specialists locked away in the Museum, which helps her to realize that while the professional

84 Bishop in “Metaphor and the Subversive Process of Virginia Woolf’s Essays” describes the draft as “a 1930 essay in which Woolf notes how some words go on living in the mind, growing and changing after their context has been forgotten” (585 n.3).
man controlled the “power and the money and the influence [. . .] he was angry” (33, 34). Her own amateur habits of mind allow her to locate alternative sources of knowledge and, in doing so, think critically about patriarchal professionalism. As Walter Benjamin would observe a few years later, “reception in a state of distraction” allows citizens to resist falling under the auratic spell of propaganda and encourages revolutionary modes of thought (239-40).

The phenomena of inaccuracy and misremembering are, for Woolf, rooted not only in her experimental aesthetics, but also in a politics of attention that is present in much of her 1930s writing on the professions. She believed many of the visible features of patriarchal professionalism worked nefariously to control and dominate the attention of a small audience or an entire nation. Throughout her life she saw the public face of professionalism (its titles, honours, processions, and ceremonies) working to paralyze critical thought by overwhelming the senses and captivating the attention of viewers and listeners. Jonathan Crary’s study on the history of attention in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries can help us understand why the issue of distracted and inattentive perception seemed particularly urgent during the modernist period. In Suspensions of Perception (1999) he argues that:

It is in the late nineteenth century, within the human sciences and particularly the nascent field of scientific psychology, that the problem of attention becomes a fundamental issue. It was a problem whose centrality was directly related to the emergence of a social, urban, psychic, and industrial field increasingly saturated with sensory input. Inattention, especially within the context of new forms of large-scale industrialized production, began to be treated as a danger and a serious problem, even though it was often the very modernized arrangements of labor that produced inattention. (13-14)

As Crary emphasizes, “modern distraction was not a disruption of stable or ‘natural’ kinds of sustained, value-laden perception that had existed for centuries but was an effect, and in many
cases a constituent element, of the many attempts to produce attentiveness in human subjects” (49). That is, states of attention were not historical norms that modernity suddenly disrupted, but were the product of modern professional life itself. Attempts to cultivate artificial states of attention were particularly pervasive as Britain again prepared for war. Parliament passed two Emergency Powers (Defense) Acts in 1939 and 1940 that legalized totalitarian measures in Britain. The atmosphere within Britain was becoming less amenable to the type of amateurish reading or listening approaches that Woolf had been developing. For instance, a one-page leaflet widely distributed in July 1940 by the Ministry of Information titled “If the Invader Comes—What to Do and How to Do It” explains that the fall of Holland, Poland, and Belgium was partly due to the fact that “the civilian population was taken by surprise. They did not know what to do when the moment came. You must not be taken by surprise. [. . .] read these instructions carefully and be prepared to carry them out.” Anna Snaith has tracked down another example of power dictating to the British citizenry in a notice published in the Sussex Daily News from July 19, 1940. It directs citizens not to “give any German anything. Don’t tell him anything. Hide your food and your bicycles. Hide your maps” (qtd. in Snaith Negotiations 131). I’m drawn to these passages that appeared contemporaneous to Woolf’s writing of Between the Acts because, although they of course offered citizens vital and often comforting instructions at a frightening moment, their dictatorial tone reinforces the notion that thinking amateurishly as Woolf understood it (cultivating a rambling attention) was a highly politicized activity in an environment where paying attention constituted a patriotic act.

In contrast to the demands for attention made by authoritarian professionals, Woolf offers us a different type of professional in Miss La Trobe. In many ways, La Trobe embodies the elements of the new professional Woolf had been imagining in Three Guineas. Although it isn’t clear whether La Trobe has received formal professional training, she is a member of the
professional theatre community and demonstrates a strong knowledge of casting and props. For instance, she knowingly surveys the location of the play, noting approvingly that “the lawn was as flat as the floor of a theatre. The terrace, rising, made a natural stage. The trees barred the stage like pillars” (Between the Acts 52). Unlike the amateur cast members she directs, she knows that “a dish cloth wound round a head in the open looked much richer than real silk” (45). And yet, despite her expertise, “she was an outcast. Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind” (143). During the play she awkwardly hides out of sight behind a bush and later, drinks alone at the public house anticipating her next project, knowing “another play always lay behind the play she had just written” (44). She is a professional but seeks no fame or fortune and urges her audience to think amateurishly. We might even see her as a member of Woolf’s Outsider’s Society, satisfied with the fine balance between the power she wields over a community “swathed in convention” (45), and her marginal status in the village where “very little was actually known about her” (40).

La Trobe embodies Woolf’s new professional attitude in which professionals share their power with those that they serve, going so far as to encourage dissent. While at one moment La Trobe tries to control her audience and “had the look of a commander pacing his deck” (Between the Acts 43), she later encourages the dismantling of her own play: “Let’s break the rhythm and forget the rhyme” (127). Not only does La Trobe want to disrupt her play’s conventional review of English history; like Woolf she also knows that creative authors are not above the dictatorial impulses deeply imbedded in Western culture and she must consciously work to relinquish some control to the audience or risk producing propagandistic or moralizing art. Melba Cuddy-Keane suggests that “by having only momentary power, La Trobe is saved from the negative effects of power; by following her own impulses, she is saved from the stultifying effects of group conformity” (“Politics” 279). One way La Trobe limits her own power is through writing
interruptions into her work. Unlike the photographs in *Three Guineas* whose outdoor settings are intended to amplify the spectacle of professional processions (four of the five photographs are taken outdoors), for La Trobe, the benefit of performing in nature is the inevitable interruptions that distract the audience’s attention. At one moment, a sudden rainstorm interrupts her play and throughout the performance, the wind carries away the words of the actors, disrupting the steady flow of narrative. While Jed Esty refers to these mistakes as “the accidents and indignities of amateur theater,” we might instead see them as La Trobe’s professional handiwork that disrupts the audience’s ability to follow a single message or a single voice (92). Although the pageant revival in England during the modernist period generally worked to reinforce patriotic sentiment, in the hands of Miss La Trobe, the pageant replaces dictatorial order with communal disorder. Miss La Trobe, who has often been seen as an analogue to Woolf herself, creates art that has transformative potential while urging her audience to be skeptical of all forms of discourse and to understand her play on their own terms.

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85 Recent critics have called attention to the way that not only La Trobe, but also the novel as a whole, foregrounds the ability of art to create interruption and flux that might disrupt oppressive and univocal discourse. For David McWhirter, these effects make *Between the Acts* a proto-postmodernist novel. He argues, “Woolf’s point […] is that there is no ‘right one,’ no privileged form or perspective or voice, just as there is no one ‘in charge’” (804). Patricia Koldiernest Joplin points to the way the novel echoes Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of the “carnivalisation” of literature in which literature functions like a medieval carnival offering members of hierarchial feudal society a limited release of tensions. Michele Pridmore-Brown has made a similar argument that focuses on “the noise or static inherent in communications technology (i.e., *the surplus*: what exceeds official messages sent or recorded)” (408). She examines the novel in the context of various wave theories developed by prominent physicists of the day including Albert Einstein and Sir James Jeans, whom Woolf had read. See Scott for a discussion on how technology subverts power in *Between the Acts.*

86 This moment is echoed when rain interrupts another act of dominating pageantry at the British Empire Exhibition in “Thunder at Wembley” that concludes by observing: “The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins. For that is what comes of letting in the sky” (*CE* 4: 187).

87 See Ayako Yoshino’s article that discusses the short history of the modern village pageant that, “Woolf must have known,” was “invented” in 1905 by Louis Napoleon Parker and was particularly in vogue in the years leading up to the First World War. Yoshino quotes Jane Marcus who writes: “The pageant was and is the perfect form of propaganda […] for populist revisions of history” (52). Although, as Jed Esty writes, “Woolf had always been suspicious of British nationalism (linked as it was to patriarchy, imperialism, and xenophobia)” she puts a pageant at the centre of her last novel because “pageantry was a dramatic genre that could allow for the emergence of a choral voice, giving form to communal values rather than to individual impressions or divisive ideologies. The desirability of a collective or impersonal voice had become an urgent political as well as aesthetic matter in the period” (87).
Her play raises fundamental questions about modern life and then passes the job of interpretation over to her amateur audience members. As the audience members walk to their cars to go home at the end of the play, they become critical interpreters of the pageant: “I thought it brilliantly clever . . . O my dear, I thought it utter bosh. Did you understand the meaning? Well, he said she meant we all act parts [. . .] why leave out the Army [. . .] what about the aeroplanes? . . . Ah, but you’re being too exacting” (134). They persist in their struggle to make sense of the many historical periods, texts and genres covered by the pageant: “No, I thought it much too scrappy [. . .] Did she mean, so to speak, something hidden, the unconscious as they call it?” (135). Another amateur critic attempts: “I like to feel sure if I go to the theatre, that I’ve grasped the meaning . . . Or was that, perhaps, what she meant? [. . .] that if we don’t jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same?” (135-36). Michael Tratner writes of this scene, “everyone becomes a critic, refusing simply to submit to the seemingly authoritative interpretation of the Reverend Streatfield [. . .] the audience treats such expert opinions as simply more text to be interpreted” (118). But what Tratner overlooks here is the way Woolf once again places amateurism and professionalism in a productive tension with one another: the amateur debates are induced and encouraged by a professional. Also, many of the amateur cultural critics, we are told, are professionals in other areas of life. La Trobe seeks to teach the skills necessary for communal debate with fellow citizens because she knows the village (which “had attracted a number of unattached floating residents”) must continue to practice amateur habits of mind in order to repair the exclusivities and divisions wrought by patriarchal professionalism (52).

In the way that La Trobe treats her audience, we can see her as the type of teacher that Woolf herself wanted to be at Morley College many years earlier and that she frequently was for the readers of her many essays. In contrast to Reverend Streatfield who preaches to the audience
and is consequently “laughed at,” “condemned” and deemed “irrelevant” (129), La Trobe favours a Socratic, conversational pedagogy that nimbly assesses and reacts to the responses of her audience. Like a teacher leading a discussion, La Trobe allows her audience periodically to talk directly to one another while maintaining some control of the larger conversation. Beth Rigel Daugherty suggests that Woolf’s reports and journal entries on her own experience as a teacher reflect an ambition to develop a similar pedagogy. Woolf had to adjust her lessons for her largely adult working-class students who were often eager but, she reports, had little context for their lessons and so had to “piece together what they [hear]; to seek reasons; to connect ideas [amid the] disconnected fragments” of lectures and make them “part of a whole” (qtd. in Daugherty, “Virginia” 64). Her early journal entries suggest that she encountered similar challenges to La Trobe: “Directly I begin to read, their attention wanders” and must similarly adjust her practices: “only writing short notes, which I shall put into words on the spur of the moment.” La Trobe (and the mature Woolf) are more skeptical of the value of cultural wholes and are happy to deal in fragments that might result in new, contingent, and personal visions of wholeness. For instance, La Trobe’s success at the end of the play is measured by her ability to enable her audience to comprehend the play in a diversity of ways: “On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flowers gathering on the surface; others descending to wrestle with meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted” (Between the Acts 128).

As we have already seen, Woolf’s representations of new professionals grounded them in shared inquiry and the transformation of educational practices.

La Trobe’s play (and Woolf’s novel) encourages the process of monolithic wholes cleaving into “scraps, orts, and fragments” (or “orts, scraps and fragments” as Isa misquotes describing “what she remembered of the vanishing play”) so they can be rearranged again (Between the Acts 128, 146). My positive reading of the inaccurate and fragmented allusions in
the novel contrasts with that of Alex Zwerdling, who reads the fragmentation as symbolic of Woolf’s despair over the impending war and concomitant cultural decline. Zwerdling writes “the whole literary tradition has ceased to be meaningful to the characters [. . .] the poetic tags [. . .] become mere cultural detritus, bits of flotsam and jetsam floating about in the characters’ minds like fragments of a sunken vessel” (316). Forgetting in this novel does, indeed, represent the decay of art, but it is a necessary decay that permits its rejuvenation and reinvention. It is striking that as Woolf was writing in her diary, “we pour to the edge of a precipice” (Diary 5: 299), in Between the Acts she was developing a living and mercurial representation of knowledge that resists decline because it must be continually interpreted, half-remembered, created, and forgotten. The fallibility of human memory reinforces the instability, but also the continuing necessity, of artistic performance. Following the conclusion of the pageant, the narrator observes: “Still the play hung in the sky of the mind—moving, diminishing, but still there. [. . .] In another moment it would be beneath the horizon, gone to join the other plays. [. . .] it was drifting away to join the other clouds: becoming invisible” (144). Woolf represents both how an audience receives a play, and the process by which the details of it dissipate in the conscious mind but remain in the subconscious. The inherent tendency of performance art to slip, shift, and fade from memory stands as a challenge to professional efforts in the modernist period and after to produce a stable canon and standardized, “scientific” procedures of analysis that could

88 Carolyn Heilbrun lists the disastrous events that filled Woolf’s last years: “Germany invaded Norway, Denmark, Holland, and Belgium; France fell; Italy came into the war on Germany’s side. The fear of the invasion of England was real, and the Woolfs, sensibly fearing Hitler’s armies, acquired against their advent a lethal dose of morphia from Virginia’s brother Adrian. [. . .] The Battle of Britain began, with daily air raids and planes fighting over Sussex. [. . .] [In 1940] the Woolf’s newly acquired home in Mecklenburgh Square and their old house in Tavistock Square were bombed, the latter left in ruins” (247). This said, Zwerdling, Sallie Sears, and Susan Squier allow these events and Woolf’s subsequent suicide to overshadow textual evidence suggesting we should read these events less apocalyptically.
cement the status of English literature as a discipline.\textsuperscript{89} Here and in many of her works, the evanescence of aesthetic experience is heightened and defined against the demands of textual and interpretative permanence made by professional critics and scholars.

Woolf’s call for a drastic transformation of the professions is important not only to our understanding of modernism, but also to broader considerations of the ontological boundaries of the “professions.” Texts like \textit{Three Guineas} collapse the binary between amateurs and professionals by imagining a non-patriarchal professionalism that comes to resemble amateur thinking. However, we might ask, are there certain characteristics of a vocation that must be present in order to describe it as a “profession”? Can competition, titles, and hierarchy be removed from professional ideology without voiding the concept of meaning? Harold Perkin, in his magisterial study of the professions in Britain, suggests that there are limits to how we conceptualize the professions: they must be based upon “human rather than material capital and on trained intellectual rather than manual labor” (390). He suggests that “individual arrogance, collective condescension towards the laity, and mutual disdain between different professions” are perhaps inevitable features of the professions because they are inevitable features of human beings. Although some of Woolf’s ideas about transforming the professions can seem utopian, I think that she was more perceptive of, and less bothered by, the limited and tentative nature of her ideas than has sometimes been acknowledged by critics. For instance, she recognized the limits of her ambitions when she acknowledged that “reality” interrupts her vision of the new women’s college (\textit{Three Guineas} 45). The voice of reality insisted that “students must be taught to earn their livings” and that “if they are not going to earn their livings, they are going once

\textsuperscript{89} Michael Levenson has recently drawn a distinction between \textit{textual} and \textit{gestural} Modernism, noting that “we need to acknowledge the special character of gestural Modernism, a major lineage within the period constituted by unrepeatable spectacles” (247). He continues, “the unrepeatable event and the evanescent gesture that ‘take the place of poetry’ were crucial to the adversary culture.”
more to be restricted to the education of the private house” (47). Even in moments that do seem to be beyond the realm of possibility, her willingness to imagine idealistic social structures serves to satirize the injustice and traditionalism of patriarchal professionals that were being challenged in her own time as women entered the professions.

The irony inherent in an effort to highlight Woolf’s respect for amateurism is that Woolf’s own novels have helped to fuel the very type of professionally mediated literary engagement of which she was dubious. Undergraduates often still consider Woolf’s novels to be inaccessible and highly demanding, thus further legitimizing the specialization of literary studies. Yet to some extent we must attribute such evaluations of her work to arguments emerging from the university itself that have claimed certain literary works to be too “difficult” for common reading. Woolf’s efforts both to join in solidarity with common readers, urging them to “trespass freely and fearlessly” into the supposedly exclusive realm of professional criticism (CE 2: 181), and her experiments with amateur habits of mind in her own professional work, suggests that she would approve of recent scholarship seeking to document the responses from the common readers of her work. ⁹⁰ As Beth Rigel Daugherty summarizes, the fan mail that Woolf received reveals a much broader readership that was much more willing to wrestle with her experimental style and radical ideas than we might expect. Many of the letters show Woolf correct in her belief that readers of all backgrounds were capable of thinking and reading in ways that challenged the monopolies of specialists. One common reader, for instance, tells Woolf, “You are not one of those [. . .] scribes, who for all their good writing make it clear that their word is law [. . .] You have always, it seemed to me, had a game with your reader [. . .] Conversation is like a game of tennis—there are 2 sides to the game—and each must keep its end up” (qtd. in

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⁹⁰ For reception studies of Woolf based upon her fan mail, see Cuddy-Keane, “From Fan-Mail”; Snaith, “Wide Circles”; and Snaith Virginia Woolf, particularly Chapter 5, “Respondents to Three Guineas,” 113-29.
Daugherty, “Letters” 5). Such letters suggest that common readers sometimes understood the complexities of Woolf’s project better than experts like Q. D. Leavis whose views were determined by Woolf’s Bloomsbury connections.

Woolf understood that her extensive writing on amateur habits of mind occurred within, and was enabled by, her professional status. Professional structures (magazines and book publishers and advertisements) mediated and made it possible for her to model amateur thinking to the public sphere. As a professional woman working to deadlines for the TLS and other publications, she sought ways to preserve an element of amateurism within modern professional life and used her own experience as a test case. For instance, commenting upon her own struggle to mix habits of mind she curses “the remorseless severity of my mind: that it never stops reading and writing [. . .] is too professional, too little any longer a dreamy amateur” (Diary 3: 210). Throughout her life she responded to the hubris and competition of patriarchal professional society not by retreating into the private spaces of the mind, but by entering into the public sphere with the intention of transforming the very definition of the professions by urging the introduction of amateur habits of mind into professional training so specialists could think more broadly, less aggressively, and improve their own lives by feeling more fulfilled by their work.

In this chapter I have argued that throughout Woolf’s writing she worked to place amateur habits of mind in a symbiotic relationship with social structures of professional power. Writing during the most tempestuous and frightening decades of the twentieth century, during which individual freedoms were curtailed and marginalized groups targeted, Woolf worked to transform the patriarchal professional system that standardized, narrowed, and dehumanized thought and labour. In the months leading up to her death she was planning a new essay collection that suggests an even fuller confidence in the amateur sensibility. She was drawn to
the project, first titled “Reading at Random,” because it would allow her to go “ranging all through English lit” much like her early depictions of amateur readers (Diary 5: 180). Her belief that communities of amateurs could change unjust professional power structures invests amateurism not only with a politics, but also with an ethics that makes amateur thought a potent and necessary feature of modern life.
Chapter 3

Negotiating the Boundaries of Academia: Reconsidering the “Professional” Zora Neale Hurston

What does it mean to label Zora Neale Hurston a “professional”? Hurston’s growing status as a major figure in twentieth-century anthropology, English literature, black studies, and women’s studies over the past three decades, has focused critical attention upon the unstable representations of race and gender, and more recently, the concept of culture in her work. Yet many of these conversations depend upon subsidiary claims that position Hurston herself within professional structures that were expanding during the modernist period, nowhere with more influence than in the university.91 There has been little attention paid to the way such claims do important critical work: Francesca Sawaya, for example, states in a footnote that Hurston must be regarded as a professional anthropologist (172); Deborah Gordon, instead, believes racial politics relegated Hurston to the professional margins and prevented her from achieving the status of anthropologist (162), while Marc Manganaro claims in his influential study of twentieth-century deployments of “the culture concept” that Hurston’s Mules and Men (1935) “smacks of amateurism” (180). These and other recent critical examinations downplay Hurston’s role in the construction of professional disciplinary boundaries by which we now re-evaluate her work and judge its professional qualities. Critics who signal Hurston’s legitimacy as a major American writer by incorporating her into the professional matrix confuse her

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91 There exists a strong correlation between gender and racial issues and access to the professions. Natalie Sokoloff explains: “the ability to enter and rise in a profession has always been regarded as assuring middle-class status in American society. [. . .] [Professions] have always offered relatively greater control, autonomy, power, and rewards than have the ‘nonprofessional’ occupations. [. . .] Nevertheless, the vast majority of women and black men do not acquire professional status” (4).
intellectual contributions with her professional membership. Throughout this project I caution against permitting the term “professional” to be used as if it were one-dimensional and not in need of elucidation.

Positioning Hurston as entirely “resistant to,” “subversive toward,” or “complicit with” professional power not only ignores the many negotiations she made with patrons, publishers, and academics as a scholar and novelist from the margins, but also overlooks Hurston’s peculiar conjunctions of professional and popular discourses, which she believed would aid in interracial and interclass understanding. Recognizing Hurston’s negotiation of professional society challenges critics’ accusations that she was politically naive by revealing what I term her “multi-allegiance discourse,” a discourse that sought to mediate between academic and popular audiences, anticipating current interdisciplinary projects within the university as well as efforts to collaborate with the wider non-academic community. Approaching Hurston’s work by recognizing first that she was conscious of and actively determined her relationship to academia recovers a Hurston who had agency rather than one who reacted to or was oppressed by her historical moment.

In the previous chapters, I have focused on Ford’s and Woolf’s critiques of institutional pressures that were moving rigorous debate and serious ideas out of the public sphere and into the rarefied sphere of academic specialists. Below I argue that Hurston was more sanguine about the specialization of knowledge (specifically the knowledge of black folklore) because she believed specialist discourse that prized objectivity and procedural rigor could combat the

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92 Hurston’s reputation declined in the late 1930s as critics came to regard her fiction as quietist in contrast to the social protest fiction of Richard Wright. Her political judgments were again called into question in 1955 when she published an article in the Orlando Sentinel titled “Court Can’t Make Races Mix” in which she argued against the Brown v. Board of Education decision outlawing segregation. She erroneously argued that black schools in Florida offered adequate education to students and therefore didn’t require government intervention. For a summary of the controversy, see Boyd 423-25.
tendency of scholars to infuse personal prejudice into their interpretations of black culture. Nonetheless, although she was less prone to labeling herself an amateur than Ford or Woolf, we can apply the term positively to the subject position that she constructed for herself. Refusing to isolate herself from popular audiences whose opinions, she realized, would have a profound impact on the future of race relations in America, she positioned herself with one foot in academia and one in popular culture. Of all the modernist writers I examine, her amateurism is closest to what we today might recognize as that of the public intellectual: she sought to adapt her academic scholarship for public consumption and had no compunctions about publishing opinion pieces in newspapers or giving radio interviews. One of Hurston’s strongest skills, one essential for a public intellectual to possess, was making her message resonate with a range of audiences: white academics for her scholarly articles, an educated popular audience for her ethnographies, a less-educated popular audience for her revues, and sometimes white and sometimes black readerships for articles in popular magazines and newspapers. By introducing the insights of scholarship to non-academic audiences, Hurston practiced an amateurism defined by an indefatigable effort to challenge the boundaries between “academic” and “popular” discourse that professionalization seeks to erect.

While older accounts divide Hurston’s career between professional anthropology and literary fiction—her first biographer limits her to a “career as a professional folklorist between 1927 and 1931”—more inclusive definitions of what constitutes both ethnography and literature have forced a reconsideration of such definitive chronological divisions over the past few decades (Hemenway 102). Scholars such as Michael Elliott, Marc Manganaro, and Susan Hegeman have included Hurston’s work in their recent examinations of the ways literature and the social sciences tended to borrow from and redefine one another during the modernist period. These projects exemplify what has been called the “cultural turn” in anthropology, which seeks
to displace traditional scholarly narratives that told of anthropology’s influence on literature (e.g., Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and Eliot’s *The Waste Land*), shifting focus to the literary nature of much modernist ethnography. This chapter intervenes in the conversation by proposing that attempts by Hurston and other intellectuals to define culture and address the problems of its authenticity and representation bear the traces of, and thus cannot be read in isolation from, the simultaneous rise of professional institutional society in America.

In the first section that follows, I show that the incipient state of disciplinary anthropology in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s triggered Hurston’s effort to combine the distancing and dispassionate observational techniques of anthropology with literary techniques, and thus to avoid the confining effects of the institutional structures in which professional anthropology was then situated. In the second section, I explore Hurston’s turn to popular culture, namely the theater, in her effort to present academically rigorous depictions of black folklore to a broader public beyond the hermetic academic community. In contrast to arguments that suggest her efforts to record the black folk idiom positioned her against northern cultural elites, I argue that Hurston’s lifelong correspondence and collaboration with academics suggests a more complicated response in which she recognized the potentially symbiotic relationship between the black south, which could preserve its authentic folk lore through anthropological documentation, and northern academics who could gain access to southern communities they hoped to study. In the final section, I turn to Hurston’s second ethnography,

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93 At the center of many of these important projects are the efforts by Franz Boas and his students to redefine “culture” as plural and non-hierarchical rather than a single evolutionary measure of “civilization” or “the best which has been thought and said,” as Matthew Arnold famously formulated it in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). The key texts exploring the overlap between the social sciences and literature during the modernist period include Elliot, Hegeman *Patterns for America*, and Manganaro, *Culture, 1922*.

94 It is true that Hurston had little patience for what she perceived to be the eagerness of black educated elites to imitate dominant Anglo-American cultural traditions; she took issue with W. E. B. DuBois’s concept of the
Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica (1938). While critics have often panned its confusing narrative strategy and dubious politics, I argue that Tell My Horse is valuable because it contains Hurston’s attempt to write an account of her own failure to achieve the insights she had hoped to gain during her research trips to Haiti and Jamaica. Although she fails to produce an adequate ethnographic account of either culture in this text, by acknowledgment of her failure to access cultural secrets she succeeds in producing a sober examination of the limits of professional knowledge gathering. Through a reckoning of her own failures, she suggests professionals ought to adopt the attitude of the amateur traveler who accepts her outsider role and the pleasures of unobtrusive and partial glimpses of other cultures.

“Centrifugal Tendencies” and “Vocational Schizophrenia”

The unaffiliated and disorganized anthropological studies undertaken by missionaries, eccentrics, and gentleman amateurs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were gradually sidelined at the end of the nineteenth century by the development of professional societies and university departments. The major institutions of anthropology experienced sudden and rapid growth: the American Folklore Society was founded in 1888, Boas formed the first anthropology department in America at Columbia in 1896, and the American Anthropological Association was founded shortly after in 1902. Yet anthropology shares with other disciplines an uneven development. Historian of anthropology George Stocking, Jr. dismisses the narrative of a steady, progressive development of the discipline as the “most potent version of the mythistory of

“talented tenth” and derisively relabeled black intellectuals the “niggerati.” Her sense that urban black intellectuals were opportunist in their support of black artists became even more pronounced after her mentor and founding voice of the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke, negatively reviewed Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937). She subsequently described him in a letter to James Weldon Johnson as a “malicious, spiteful little snot” who “thinks he ought to be the leading Negro because of his degrees” (qtd. in Kaplan 413).
anthropology” (280-81). Indeed, the effect of what Stocking terms a “centrifugal tendency” in
the discipline meant that by 1945, “one third of the anthropological professionals [in America]
were in subdisciplines oriented toward their own professional associations” (158, 159). In new
disciplines like anthropology and English literature, the process of professionalization that began
at the end of the nineteenth century took many decades to complete and often resulted in a
splintering of consensus and the proliferation of authorities, only some of them situated within
academic disciplines. The more accurate account of the growth of professions during the
modernist period suggests that there were many cracks in the dividing wall between professional
discourse and popular culture. It should come as no surprise that intellectuals like Hurston
would seek to exploit these gaps with the aim of benefitting those on both sides of the divide.

Hurston’s amateurism paradoxically emerged not from her disdain of professionals, but
from her deep admiration of the procedures by which they analyzed contentious cultural
phenomena (such as black folk traditions) in order to achieve accurate and “scientific”
understandings of them. Hurston’s account of her training under the father of American
professional anthropology, Franz Boas, attests to her pride in counting herself a member of
professional societies. In her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road (1942), she boasts: “I had
been admitted to the American Folk-Lore Society. Later, while I was in the field, I was invited
to become a member of the American Ethnographical Society, and shortly after the American
Anthropological Society. [...] To me these honors meant something, insignificant as they
might appear to the world” (684-85). Here, her ambiguous “something” registers the complexity

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95 Consisting of three phases, the myth of anthropological development begins with the “ethnographic amateur” in
the figure of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century explorer or missionary, followed by the “armchair
anthropologist” of the late nineteenth century most often associated with E. B. Tylor and J. G. Frazer, and finally,
the professional “academic fieldworker” associated with Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas. Proposing such
sharp periodic divisions, as many have done, overestimates the professionalization of the discipline by the 1920s and
1930s.
of her position within the professional matrix where she experienced the limitations it imposed as much as the pride it could bring her. In fact, in both *Dust Tracks* and *Mules and Men*, she attributes the failure of her initial foray into ethnographic fieldwork in part to her professional status: “The glamour of Barnard College was still upon me. I dwelt in marble halls. I knew where the material was all right. But, I went about asking, in carefully accented Barnardese, ‘Pardon me, but do you know any folk tales or folk songs?’” (687). While her undergraduate classes in anthropology had provided her with the social scientific tools to investigate her own culture, her professional accreditations and accouterments proved a burden. If learning anthropological research techniques brought Hurston closer to what she believed to be the authentic folk, the “diploma and a Chevrolet” that accompanied their acquisition intimidated potential informants and thus threatened to undermine, or at least distort, the very project they authorized (*Mules and Men* 9). The doubts raised by Hurston’s early professional experience spurred her ambitions, leading to her most significant intellectual innovation: wedding the rigor and accuracy of academic research with the large audiences of popular culture. As the bibliographic record attests, Hurston took great care in adapting her academic scholarship by adding to it literary and performative elements so it might reach a much wider popular audience.

Critics have most often found evidence of Hurston’s professional allegiance in a few early pages from *Mules and Men*. The text signals Hurston’s professional status not only through the imprimatur of Boas’s brief foreword, but also through Hurston’s own introduction where she famously develops the metaphor of the “spy-glass of Anthropology” that enabled her

96 The concepts of the “folk” and “authenticity” have been troubled by African-American cultural scholarship. While Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. identify the oral cultural traditions of working-class blacks as a central difference between white and black literary culture, other critics have challenged what they view as reified conceptions of black literature that dismiss middle-class black culture as impure or compromised. J. Martin Favor is representative in his complaint that “By privileging certain African American identities and voices over others, the critic of African American literature often restricts too severely his or her scope of intellectual inquiry into the construction of racial identity.” For an overview, see Favor 3.
to objectively analyze the folklore she had previously been too intimately acquainted with to examine critically (9). However, describing the challenges of collecting folklore from African Americans, Hurston positions herself both as the observer and observed:

folk-lore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, ‘Get out of here!’ (10 my italics)

Her perspectival shifts are more than the “continuous tacking between ‘inside’ and outside’ of events” that James Clifford claims is indicative of all participant observation (Predicament 34). I read them as slyly hinting that her textual interaction with us might well be strewn with the same pleasant evasions or “feather-bed resistance” that is used by the black folk she studies (Mules and Men 10). Hurston’s introduction models for us an interdisciplinary analysis attuned to irony and “signifying” practices that permeate her version of scientific discourse. She subtly contradicts her own professional insights symbolized by the spy-glass and suggests that objective reportage of cultural practices is exceedingly difficult and must be approached from multiple generic registers.

More complexly embedded in the opening pages of Mules and Men is Hurston’s attempt to negotiate the many demands placed on her by whites who wanted to control how she described what she saw through her spy-glass. Our interpretation of her unstable authorial voice must, I

97 See Gates for an extensive analysis of the concept of “signifying” to describe a literary device at the heart of African American culture that involves repetition and then revision in an effort to critique a dominant discourse.
98 Brian Carr and Tova Cooper argue that any discussion of Hurston’s place in modernist literature must contend with the fact that she and other writers of the Harlem Renaissance inhabited and critiqued the racialized capitalist exchange in which their work circulated. They argue, “while the self-fashioned modernists aspired to exist outside
think, acknowledge that her jubilant description of the intellectual freedom gained through professional study hides a much darker subtext. In September 1935, one month before *Mules and Men* was published, she confessed to controversial white author and photographer of the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Van Vechten, “I have lived thru a horrible period of grim stagnation” (qtd. in Kaplan 358). Nine months prior, Hurston was readying to finally pursue the doctorate in anthropology at Columbia that she had delayed for several years because her wealthy white patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, refused to fund it. Simultaneously, she was “full of tremors,” attempting to allay Boas’s concerns over the accuracy of *Mules and Men*, while her publisher, Bertram Lippincott, was complicating this task by insisting that she add a section on hoodoo and make it “a very readable book that the average reader can understand” (308). Within months she was writing to Edwin Embree, the head of the Rosenwald Foundation who had invited her to apply for their research fellowship, asking why his foundation had in large part rescinded its pledge to fund her doctoral studies in anthropology.99 Embree’s decision remains something of a mystery, since he had been a strong supporter of African-American education and the fund he oversaw was developed explicitly for that purpose.100 Complex, imbricating layers of white authority (academic mentors, publishers, foundations, and patrons) made a series of contradictory demands on Hurston’s scholarship and time. The multi-allegianced amateur

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99 The Rosenwald Foundation’s initial offer of $3000 for two years of study was reduced to $700 for a seven-month period. Biographers have largely vindicated Franz Boas’s role in this debacle, noting that he wrote to Embree urging him to reconsider his decision.

100 See Beilke who explains that in 1934, the year Hurston won the fellowship, the Rosenwald’s board of trustees narrowed its munificence due to the economic pressures of the Depression. However, in the same year, Hurston’s rival in anthropology and theater, Katherine Dunham, was awarded the same fellowship for nearly the same amount of money to study in the Caribbean as Hurston had intended.
discourse that she would develop in her fiction and her ethnography in subsequent years was a response to these conflicting pressures and the professional system that allowed them to exist.

Hurston’s refusal to participate in the construction of a great divide between “high” professional scholarship and “low” popular culture perhaps originated with her early experiences with the anthropology department at Columbia University. Minority students like Hurston often found themselves in the unenviable position of serving as ethnic representatives asked to share their unique cultural knowledge with university departments still largely composed of faculty members who had earned their doctorates in other fields. As Stocking notes, during this period the incipient state of many of the subfields including African American cultural anthropology meant that the normal flow of knowledge from the professoriate to students was often reversed: “research institutions, although providing certain training functions, were consumers and not producers of anthropological personnel” (128). Melville Herskovits himself, the premier anthropologist of African-American culture during the first half of the twentieth century, hints at the knowledge deficit in his discipline in a letter of recommendation for Hurston’s Guggenheim fellowship: “I think it is not saying too much to state that Miss Hurston probably has a more intimate knowledge of Negro folk life than anyone in this country” (285). Although his praise may have been hyperbolic, the major emerging anthropology departments in New York, Chicago, and Berkeley, needed ethnic minorities like Hurston and her contemporary, Ella Deloria, to bring “authentic” material gathered from the rural periphery back to urban centers. As María Eugenia Cotera suggests, minority scholars in their unique role as “informed natives,” often published scholarship in which they challenged “the very representational practices that

101 St. Clair Drake notes in his history of professional anthropology’s attitudes toward African Americans: “ethnography was something done on Indians in the U. S. A., and the study of African survivals could not achieve the importance in the eyes of Afro-Americans that they necessarily did in Haiti or Brazil, or even in Jamaica and Trinidad, where they were very obvious” (19).
had served to normalize colonialist relations of rule” (28). Although Hurston faced subtle forms of racism and exploitation at Columbia, as her comments several years later suggest, she was most upset at the lack of academic rigour she encountered: “there was nothing to help me in my study of the Negro. I could bring more to the Dept. [of Anthropology at Columbia] tha that [sic] it could give me in the matter” (qtd. in Kaplan 372).

By the early 1930s, Hurston believed academia offered too limited an outlet for her creative talents. Having already published in the scholarly Journal of Negro History and the Journal of American Folklore, she had for several years felt “the pity of all the flaming glory of being buried in scientific Journals” (Kaplan 315). Hurston’s often-quoted admission following the Rosenwald debacle that “I have lost all my zest for a doctorate” (351), must be interpreted within the context of limited disciplinary resources and her growing belief that academic credentials, which were increasingly a prerequisite to publishing, were largely pretentious distractions and should not determine whether one could engage in or contribute to rigorous scholarship. Her disdainful reaction to reading the work of established white folklore scholars Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson is indicative of her reaction against academia as it stood. Hurston, who viewed Odum and Johnson as her competition both academically and in the marketplace during the 1920s, wrote to Boas and others from the field as she read their latest collection, The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South (1925). She complains that Odum and Johnson “could hardly be less exact. They distort by tearing segments

102 Although Cotera focuses upon ethnic marginality, Hurston’s efforts to gain recognition within professional life must, of course, also be considered from the perspective of gender marginalization. Penina Migdal Glazer and Miriam Slater note that “the process by which a group of occupations was transformed into powerful and rewarding professional endeavors [in the early twentieth century] occurred independently of women’s interest” (3-4).

103 As Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt notes, in 1927 when Hurston completed her undergraduate degree at Columbia and began her fieldwork in Florida, “not a single American university had a folklore department. Collections of Afro-American folklore, especially by black collectors, were almost nonexistent” (86, 87).
from a whole and bloating the bit [sic] out of all proportion. Let them but hit upon a well turned phrase and another volume slops off the press. Some of it would be funny if they were not serious scientists! Or are they?” (qtd. in Kaplan 151). On the one hand her letter reaffirms the ideology of professional anthropology by echoing back to Boas his own argument that ethnographies ought to represent whole cultures rather than impose an evolutionary hierarchy upon selected cultural artifacts. On the other, it questions the entire professional enterprise by suggesting Odum and Johnson use the term “professional” fraudulently and that their scholarship is hackwork meant to bring them fame rather than further the public welfare.

The question of what obligations a professional had to the public welfare was one that was being negotiated in the field of anthropology and many other professions in these years. Two different models of professionalism were emerging during the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand was a model that gave professionals hermeneutic control over large areas of human knowledge, and in exchange, it was assumed their scholarship would be disinterested and work to further the public welfare. On the other was a newer model that equated professionals with “experts” and “specialists,” whose work would largely be cut off from the wider public and who would report to and be affiliated with industry, the government, and the marketplace. Steven Brint explains this paradox at the heart of professionalism: “As an ideology, professionalism had both a technical and a moral aspect. Technically, it promised competent performance of skilled work involving the application of broad and complex knowledge, the acquisition of which required formal academic study. Morally, it promised to be guided by an appreciation of the important social ends it served” (7). While the newer technical model would gradually come to dominate conceptions of the professions, Hurston’s commitment to expanding public appreciation of accurate and authentic black folklore allied her with the older moral model of
“social-trustee Professionalism” (9) that sought to link professional discourse with public welfare.

She responded to the inchoate state of disciplinary anthropology, whose storehouse of knowledge was inadequate, by searching for means of combining the analytical approach and premium on accuracy that academia prized with the freedom and wide influence of popular culture.\textsuperscript{104} Hurston’s solution to her highly mediated and managed professional status was to interweave her ethnographic scholarship with her literary writing that first brought her to the attention of the New York black cultural elites of the Harlem Renaissance in the mid-1920s.\textsuperscript{105} Ingeniously, by working within and across literary, social scientific, and, as I demonstrate below, popular discourses, she could reach the wider audience she desired and escape the oppressive control that resulted from working exclusively within any one of these spheres. Rather than pathologizing her shifting intellectual allegiances by terming them “vocational schizophrenia” as her first biographer Robert Hemenway does (63), we should instead describe Hurston’s distinctive style positively as a multi-allegianced discourse able to investigate and represent black folk through a variety of genres and media. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in her theatrical productions that challenged popular cultural representations of black life while benefiting from the genre’s broad appeal.

\textit{Bringing Scholarship to the People}

\textsuperscript{104} Cf. Baker for an opposing argument underscoring the profound influence of Boasian anthropology upon American legal decisions and cultural attitudes regarding African Americans. While the cumulative effect of Boas and his students theorizing “culture” as plural and equal was indeed profound, it does not change the fact that Hurston was right to recognize she would have a broader immediate influence by seeking out a non-academic audience.

\textsuperscript{105} Although Hurston was certainly not alone in seeking literary solutions to methodological impasses within the field of anthropology, I argue that she was unique in allowing these tensions to register profoundly in her writing throughout her career. See Handler’s discussion of literary experimentation by anthropologists.
Hurston’s effort to blur professional academic boundaries was on display as early as the mid-1920s and early 1930s prior to the publication of her most important texts. In these formative years, she was most intimately engaged with academia and would publish her only academic articles, yet she was also most active in writing and producing musical revues and concerts featuring black folk music and dance for a popular audience.\(^\text{106}\) In her application for the Rosenwald Fellowship in December 1934, she attributed her dissatisfaction with academic scholarship not only to its narrow audience, but also to its inability to fully register the dramatic elements of black culture: “In my humble opinion, it is almost useless to collect material to lie upon the shelves of scientific societies. It should be used for the purpose to which it is best suited. The Negro material is eminently suited to drama and music. In fact it is drama and music and the world and America in particular needs what this folk material holds” (qt’d. in Hemenway 207). According to Carla Kaplan, “her letters reveal that theatrical production was, in fact, much more important to her [than her scholarly publications]. She saw drama at the heart of the black experience” (171-72).\(^\text{107}\) Yet more was at stake in Hurston’s dramatic work than simply exploring the performative nature of black folk expression. She wanted her productions to reappropriate the discourse of authenticity that commercial theater during the Harlem Renaissance utilized in promoting “primitive” African Americans whose wild and impulsive behavior was indicative of their “natural” performance. Although often overlooked today, Hurston’s shows in major cities, including New York, Chicago, and St. Louis, served as dramatic

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\(^\text{106}\) Early recognition of Hurston’s talent came partly from her invitation to the *Opportunity Magazine* award banquet in New York after winning second prize for her 1925 play, *Color Struck* (Hemenway 20). Indicative of the important role that theater played in Hurston’s artistic sensibilities during these years, she wrote “dramatics” as her primary extracurricular interest on a Barnard occupational interest form (Boyd 103).

\(^\text{107}\) Jeremy MacClancy and Chris McDonaugh suggest another reason that Hurston may have sought a wider audience for her scholarship: “Until the 1930s, most anthropological articles and books could be read by an educated person with a sense of dedication. But within two decades the language of university-based anthropologists had become sufficiently abstruse and their analyses sufficiently arcane as to bar the majority of readers who had not been trained in the subject” (14).
embodiments of a competing definition of “authentic” and “real” cultural representation anchored in the participant-observation techniques of professional anthropology. Hurston set out to convince white audiences that authenticity ought to be measured not by the exotic nature of the drama or the race of the artist, but by whether knowledgeable professionals oversaw the production of such performances.

Although as early as the landmark Broadway musical *Shuffle Along* (1921), white audiences had encountered fully realized black characters written and performed by African Americans, Kaplan explains that overall “the public preferred white dramas about blacks—where holdovers from minstrelsy such as shuffling, banjos, and overblown speech were still being shown” (173). Hurston’s dramatic work sought to correct stereotypical depictions of blacks that persisted in hugely popular Broadway productions written by whites including Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1920), DuBose and Dorothy Heyward’s *Porgy* (1927), and Marc Connelly’s *The Green Pastures* (1930). In contrast, Hurston wanted to show the American public “the real Negro art theatre,” which originated and continued to thrive, not in academic or cosmopolitan centers but in the rural “jooks” (bar-cabarets) of the deep South (116). Yet Hurston’s attempt, in her academic fieldwork, to extricate the folklore of “the negro farthest down” from European white aesthetics relied upon disciplinary methods that were themselves rooted in European scientific traditions.

\[\text{108} \text{ Cf. Gill’s exploration of the complexity of Eugene O’Neill and Paul Robeson’s dramatic collaboration encourages us not to dismiss all white productions featuring black actors as regressive and stereotypical.}
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\[\text{109} \text{ There is disagreement over whether Hurston believed that part of the ethnographer’s role was to “salvage” the African and Native American cultures studied. While Marc Manganaro identifies “the ethic of salvage so characteristic of most Boasian anthropology” (Culture 177), in the opening pages of *Mules and Men*, in Hurston’s letters to Hughes and elsewhere, she consciously distanced herself from the salvage mentality of cultural anthropology.}\]

Hurston was one of many black intellectuals who made claims about how black folk ought to be represented in modern art during the Harlem Renaissance. The movement was inaugurated by Hurston’s mentor at Howard University, Alain Locke, whose seminal essay “The New Negro” (1925) called for black genteel “enlightened minorities” to counteract the image of “The Old Negro [who was] a stock figure perpetuated as an historical figure partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism” (9, 3). While Locke and other black intellectuals like James Weldon Johnson argued that modern African American art ought to draw from black folk sources, they did not believe it was politically advantageous to present black folk art unabridged to white audiences. They wanted, instead, to reconstruct the image of the race by filtering it through cosmopolitan “high” art and selecting from folk tradition in order to demonstrate the modernity of the black race. Hurston was simultaneously a member of the Southern folk community that intellectuals like Locke hoped to analyze and a member of Northern academic and artistic circles interested in theorizing the future role of African-American culture within American culture more broadly. Although she criticized the black elites of the Renaissance for their manipulation of folk material, she did the same by collecting and then presenting the stories and songs of the folk according to the theories of professional anthropology. Like Locke, she recognized her role as an interpreter of black folk culture for white audiences, writing to a friend, “I know what is true but I dont [sic] know how much truth the public wants” (qtd. in Kaplan 260). Hurston’s challenge would lie in the fact that popular audiences often had trouble distinguishing between her “truth” and the stereotypical depictions of black life that had become deeply ingrained in white American culture.

In a series of articles she contributed to Nancy Cunard’s landmark modernist collection *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), Hurston drew a causal link between the health of American society and the wide dissemination of accurate representations of black folk. The principle of accuracy,
not assimilation, when it came to black culture, became the cornerstone of her aesthetics and her politics from the 1930s onward. Her work in these early years (it is likely she wrote the articles for the anthology in 1930) would set the groundwork for her later attempts to use professional knowledge to mold public opinion. In “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” she describes the robust nature of rural black culture insisting that, “Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man: nothing is too old or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low, for his use” (836). Focusing on the syncretic qualities of black vernacular, she writes that the “American Negro has done wonders to the English language” in the form of metaphor and simile, double descriptives like “low-down” and “sitting-chairs,” and verbal nouns like “funeralize” (831, 832). Underscoring the hybrid nature of art she concludes, “It is obvious that to get back to original sources is much too difficult for any group to claim very much as a certainty. What we really mean by originality is the modification of ideas. The most ardent admirer of the great Shakespeare cannot claim first source even for him. It is his treatment of the borrowed material” (838).

Yet while Hurston characterized black expression by its continual flux and synthesis of new material, she condemned middle-class blacks who performed what she called “face lifted” folk songs, which, rather than seeking to alter white musical traditions, aimed to assimilate black expression to a dominant white culture (845). In another of her essays from the Anthology, “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” for example, she distinguishes between the continual cultural innovations of rural black communities and the assimilative tendencies of the black urban middle-class. While she praises the former for building upon existing tradition, she complains that the latter, like the Fisk University Jubilee Singers, drain black expression of its unique vitality. She argues that the “jagged harmony” of black spirituals were spontaneous and no one could “be trained to reproduce it. Its truth dies under training like flowers under hot water”
Her description exemplifies the wrong kind of relationship between the public and the university in which the latter works to strengthen the distinctions between popular and academic discourse. She was equally critical of white hack writers of Broadway who trafficked in preconceptions of Southern black life. She complains they “take all the life and soul out of everything. [. . .] Its [sic] sickening at times” (qtd. in Kaplan 224). Hurston saw herself not only as a scholar of black folklore, but also as an arranger, an ambassador, and a teacher of that folklore to audiences that had their conceptions of black culture formed by the dominant influence of white culture. In order to avoid the inaccuracies caused by cultural and personal prejudices, Hurston was careful to root much of her own dramatic work in her academic research. She buttressed her impressive talent for noticing and remembering verbal and musical nuances with new audio and visual recording technologies to document the precise intonation of song and choreography of dance; she was one of the first folklorists to utilize technology to more accurately report the contingent and regional inflections of folk life.

In Hurston’s most successful popular concert, *The Great Day* (1932), she was able to achieve the Boasian ambition of generating cross-cultural understanding through anthropology by dramatizing her academic research from a trip to the Bahamas several years earlier. The project offers a good example of her talent for writing “scientifically and in a moderated form for the general public” (qtd. in Boyd 251). We can trace the process by which she adapted her 1930 article in the *Journal of American Folklore*, “Dance Songs and Tales from the Bahamas,” for the

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110 Hazel Carby argues that Hurston constructed a utopian rural folk in her effort to combat the emerging urban mass culture of the Great Migration. Also see Jones who challenges Hurston’s commitment to accuracy in black cultural representations by calling our attention to the signs of industrial development in her film footage of the Loughman lumber camps that are absent in her ethnographic descriptions of the camps in *Mules and Men*. 
popular audience of *The Great Day*. Her article offers a relatively dry, analytical description of the Bahamian fire dance for a narrow scholarly audience:

The players begin to clap with their hands. The drummer cries, “Gimbay!” (a corruption of the African word *gumbay*, a large drum) and begins the song. He does not always select the song. The players more often call out what they want played. One player is inside the ring. He or she does his preliminary flourish, which comes on the first line of the song, does his dance on the second line, and chooses his successor on the third line and takes his place in the circle. (294)

Over the next two years she would bring her description to life by consulting three reels of film footage she had recorded during her trip and hiring a troupe of sixteen Bahamian dancers and singers who would sometimes practice in her tiny Manhattan apartment. Her sharp critical eye was active in her casting decisions for her concerts: she chose dark-skinned performers, challenging the prejudices of white audiences who expected to encounter light-skinned black actors at Harlem nightclubs like the Cotton Club.111 *The Great Day* would expand to a series of skits that depicted various activities in the typical day of black folk in the Bahamas; unlike her earlier revues that closed after a week, it was successful enough to be performed under various titles for the next two years.

Yet while white critics praised the “authenticity” of her work, they often continued to rely on stereotypical language to describe the black performers. Anthea Kraut quotes one critic writing for the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* who gleefully describes actors who “danced and yelled in primitive fashion, such as is read about in books but rarely seen in life, while a tom-tom

111 As Ann Douglas documents, Harlem “served up African-American music and dancing to white patrons eager to enjoy a little regression back to jungle life and to participate, if only as voyeurs, in what was palpably the most exciting entertainment scene America had ever boasted” (74).
throbbed with a jungle rhythm” (149). Hurston’s uneven success in transforming white audiences’ views must be attributed largely to white expectations of black performance and habitual responses to its critical context. Yet we might also point to Hurston’s tendency to resurrect stereotypical dramatic elements in order to parody them or demonstrate their rural origins. Her first play, *Color Struck* (1926), for instance, features a cakewalk dance competition that had become a common feature expected in the finale of many minstrel shows. While Hurston was familiar with its origins in black folk culture prior to its appropriation by minstrelsy, it isn’t clear that the same could be said for her audiences. In her revue *Cold Keener* (1930), she sought to subtly parody Marcus Garvey’s back-to-Africa movement by including the problematic character Emperor Jones from O’Neill’s earlier play who sails to Africa to expel European colonizers. As with any understated satire aimed at a broad audience, these instances risked misinterpretation by those with limited knowledge of black political or cultural history.

Hurston’s efforts to present “genuine” or “real” representations of black folk were most successfully executed in the way her productions linked folk life to material conditions, thus countering the stereotype of an impulsive black emotional life disconnected from deeper cultural forces. Hurston’s drama insisted that folk music, verbal games, and ceremonies are creative responses to the specific political and economic exigencies of black folk life, which were often omitted from academic folklore studies, which tended to isolate and sentimentalize black folk music. Although the script for *The Great Day* has not survived, we do have the script for *Cold Keener*. In both shows, Hurston embedded the rhythms of the workday within cultural production. In the *Cold Keener* skit “Railroad Camp,” for example, ten men sing while hammering railroad spikes with sledgehammers. In the script, the singing is intimately linked with the material conditions as the crew sings:

Dat ol’ (*wham*) black gal (*wham*)
She keep on grumblin’ (*wham*)

New pair shoes (*wham*), new pair shoes (*wham*)

I’m goin’ (*wham*) buy her (*wham*)

Shoes and stockings (*wham*), slippers too (*wham*) slippers too (*wham*).

I’m goin’ (*wham*) buy her

Draws and dresses (*wham*) shimmy too (*wham*) shimmy too (*wham*). (116)

References to items of clothing and their purchase anchor labour in the anxieties of consumer culture that would have been familiar to New York audiences. The reiterated “wham” emphasizes embodiment of the specific work that punctuates and structures the cultural expression. Hurston drew on both her professional anthropological training and her literary skills to depict a complex cultural whole that avoided perpetuating romanticized conceptions of the folk.

The theories and the professional authority of cultural anthropology deeply influenced the production of Hurston’s concerts and revues. While promotional material for *The Great Day* emphasized the unmediated nature of the productions, claiming, “the dances have not been influenced by Harlem or Broadway,” they were heavily influenced by another urban cultural force, professional anthropological discourse (qtd. in Kraut 43). Anthea Kraut has uncovered evidence that Hurston’s promotional material often touted her membership in professional anthropological societies as well as her professional training (27). In some cases, her broad ethnographic survey of cultural traditions hurt the success of her performances because they disrupted the plot-driven narrative that theatergoers expected. John Lowe notes that, “as a dramatist, Hurston’s bias toward overall cultural representation often hindered the assembly of a lean dramatic story—that is, a focus on individuals” (24). Further, we know that the program for the 1932 Broadway premier of *The Great Day* included a note written by Alain Locke that
served much the same purpose as Franz Boas’s foreword to *Mules and Men* three years later. Although there is some debate over whether Hurston was coerced by Locke and her patron to include the note, in it Locke distinguishes Hurston’s work from stereotypical representations of black folk and reaffirms her own claims of the transparency and objectivity of her ethnographic research (Boyd 233-34). He describes her work as “a rare sample of the pure and unvarnished materials from which the stage and concert tradition has been derived” (qtd. in Cole and Mitchell 365). But if Hurston’s dramatic work is “pure” in the narrow sense that it refuses to adopt the earlier clichés of musical theater, it adopts the social scientific assumption that by collecting written, audio, or video records of a foreign society’s rituals, one is then authorized to represent that culture on a stage thousands of miles away.

Was Hurston’s attempt to bring folklore scholarship to popular audiences successful? Her correspondence attests to a difficult situation in which she believed her academic articles on black folk traditions were speaking to a painfully small audience during a seminal moment in African-American art and politics. In addition, her popular concerts blurred in white audiences’ minds with the spectacle culture of Harlem that whites viewed as a vacation from their everyday lives. Nonetheless, Hurston’s contribution to academic and public debates, the innovations in her ethnographies, and the multiple outlets that she sought for her work demonstrate that she was interested in the broader civic project of contributing to American cultural life that had so far overlooked the riches of black folklore as she knew them. In her late essay “What White Publishers Won’t Print” (1950), she considered the wider social value of teaching black folklore. Writing to a largely black readership she complains, “I have been amazed by the Anglo-Saxon’s lack of curiosity about the internal lives and emotions of the Negros, and for that matter, any non-Anglo-Saxon peoples within our borders, above the class of unskilled labor” (950). In her second ethnography, *Tell My Horse*, which I turn to below, she inverts her earlier argument that
the social sciences must introduce its insights to popular audiences, as she argues that professionals ought to adopt the epistemological uncertainty professed in earlier popular accounts of other cultures.

The Limits of Professional Inquiry and the Amateur “Peep”

In perhaps the most famous scene in *Mules and Men*, the character “Zora” flees from a violent bar fight in a Florida sawmill camp whose clientele is an unsavory mix of outlaws and prostitutes. Zora’s fieldwork ends abruptly when Lucy, a local woman, attacks her with a knife, thinking she is going to steal her man; Zora’s friend Big Sweet intercedes at the last moment, allowing her to escape. In an example of what Hurston described to Boas apologetically as “the between-story conversation” that helped “the man in the street” transition between ethnographic descriptions (qtd. in Kaplan 308), she emphasizes the chaos of the situation and her helplessness as a participant observer: “Curses, oaths, cries and the whole place was in motion. Blood was on the floor. I fell out of the door over a man lying on the steps, who either fell himself trying to run or got knocked down. I don’t know. I was in the car in a second and in high just too quick” (*Mules and Men* 174-75). Earlier in the text, she constructs a similar sense of confusion by highlighting her epistemological uncertainty. She describes the confusion at her initiation ceremony to become a Hoodoo doctor: after being forced to fast for twenty-four hours and only consume wine, her frenzied mentors yell and Zora remembers “indescribable noises, sights, feelings. Death was at hand! Seemed unavoidable! I don’t know. Many times I have thought and felt, but I always have to say the same thing. I don’t know. I don’t know” (208). These moments of dramatized epistemological breakdown appear to expose the limitations of the professional scholar as they show Zora unable to make sense of cultural practices in the field. However, the intermittent scenes of chaos that Zora encounters are circumscribed by Hurston’s
professional voice, which confidently navigates and translates cultural practices in the introduction to the text and then again at the opening of each chapter.

In Hurston’s second ethnography, *Tell My Horse*, the sense of chaos and unknowingness so carefully compartmentalized in *Mules and Men* subsumes all claims to professional authority or professional certainty. Researched and written between 1936 and 1937 after her traumatic fall-out with the Rosenwald Foundation and Columbia University, *Tell My Horse* offers a bizarre and contradictory mix of travelogue, ethnography, and defense of the US occupation of Haiti, causing it to be, until recently, largely dismissed. Critics have long been troubled by her apparent endorsement of American imperial policies and her seemingly naïve confidence in the professionals she encountered. Unlike her previous fieldwork achievements in her native Florida, Hurston struggled to connect with the Haitian folk and produced a text that relies largely upon the accounts of Haitian professional and political elites (some of them white Americans who remained after the occupation). I argue that while Hurston may have failed to offer professional ethnographic analysis of Haiti and Jamaica in *Tell My Horse*, she was aware of her failure and used it to consider its ramifications for professional scholarship.

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112 Mary Renda explores Hurston’s reaction to the US occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934 and offers a sympathetic explanation of Hurston’s pro-imperial stance: “the tricksterlike lay of voices in [her] anecdotes suggests the possibility that Hurston’s apparent support for paternalist justifications of the occupation masked a deeper critique” (293).

113 Early reviewers of *Tell My Horse* were similarly confused by the book’s generic heterogeneity. Elmer Davis’s 1938 review describes it as “a curious mixture of remembrances, travelogue, sensationalism, and anthropology” (25). The confusion was likely multiplied by the many racist studies of Haiti that were being published in the United States during the period just after the occupation. As Wendy Dutton notes, simultaneous to *Tell My Horse*, “books like *Cannibal Cousins* and *Black Baghdad* were being published, reinforcing the perception of Haitian peasants as primitive, or, more precisely, savage, largely through distortions of Voodoo” (139-40).

114 Gwendolyn Mikell, for instance, argues that the instability of the text is caused by racial and educational tensions between Hurston and the Caribbean people: “One senses within Hurston’s work an inherent conflict which derives from the fact of her blackness: an identification with the people she studies, and a willingness to participate in their reality, as well as an intellectual separation from them but a reluctant pronunciation of judgment and characterization” (222).
Her failure to pierce the surface of the Haitian secret rituals she encountered is compounded by another failure in narrative strategy that is more problematic. While I argue she was conscious of her failed research trip and cleverly came to see it as an opportunity to theorize about the limits of professional inquiry, she ultimately produced a muddled text because she decided to cast herself in the role of an imperious, intrusive researcher in an effort to dramatize the professional arrogance she hoped to critique. *Tell My Horse*, then, is a double-voiced text that performs Hurston’s own insider / outsider positionality, both mimicking the practices and viewpoints she hoped to critique and performing the alternative role she hoped would ameliorate the problems of the first. Hurston not only demonstrates the limits of professional inquiry through her own failed trip; she suggests that professionals can benefit from adopting approaches of earlier cultural explorers. At a moment when professional anthropologists were increasingly confident of their own status and increasingly dismissive of earlier approaches to analyzing cultural others, she suggests that the glimpsing, partial vision of the amateur traveller who takes pleasure in the mystery and secrecy of other cultures (a sensibility more at home in literary rather than scientific discourse), might be incorporated into the approaches of professionals. She actively forges a solidarity with amateur travellers as she transparently documents the many moments in her own professional scholarship when she was left without conclusive knowledge of other cultures. If *Tell My Horse* is a failure when judged by the deep insights it provides about Haitian culture or by its narrative strategy, it is an important success in the insights it makes at a crucial moment in the development of professional life in America about the nature of responsible professional scholarship.

*Tell My Horse* announces its genre-blurring intentions by opening with a touristic account of Jamaica. Clearly at odds with the generic expectations of professional ethnography, Hurston describes Jamaica’s “mountains of majesty and its quick, green valleys” and suggests “perhaps
we ought to peep in on it a while” (277). Although the uncommitted and cursory nature of the encounter is in stark contrast to the professional’s “spy-glass,” it is to be admired for the way it respects the cultural secrets of Jamaican culture through its gentle “peep.” The double-voiced composition of *Tell My Horse* simultaneously admits the inadequacy of the “peep” while suggesting that even the most trenchant and rigorous professional analysis may not be able to gain access to the mysteries of other cultures. The sudden juxtaposition of the literary descriptions of the amateur traveler and the voice of the studied and formal professional ethnographer challenges both the subjective aesthetic judgments of the amateur (“the very best place to be in all the world is St Mary’s parish, Jamaica” (284)) and the professional’s drive for exhaustive certainty, which Hurston increasingly worried had the result of invading and exploiting the secrets of other cultures.

A jarring shift occurs as Hurston moves us away from Jamaica and casts herself as an intrusive professional in an early chapter titled “Hunting the Wild Hog,” describing her visit to the Maroon colony in Jamaica. The persona she presents initially in the chapter suggests the confidence of the professional ethnographer: she describes politely declining her host’s offer to stage a dance for her, explaining to her readers, “I was too old a hand at collecting to fall for staged-dance affairs. If I do not see a dance or a ceremony in its natural setting and sequence, I do not bother” (*Tell My Horse* 294). As the chapter progresses, however, her descriptions of her own activities so blatantly violate Maroon culture that the narrative transforms into a critique of the overbearing and invasive tendencies of professional scholarship. Upon noticing that none of the Maroons use stoves, she violates participant-observer practices by declaring, “We would build one!” Later, she reports that “Many of the Maroons came down to look at the miracle” (295). Hurston’s meddling in a foreign culture continues when she instigates the eponymous hunt of the chapter and ignores the locals who insist it is too dangerous to undertake. She
explains, “I kept on talking and begging and coaxing until a hunting party was organized” (302). The image of Hurston manipulating the locals into activities they believed to be hazardous is incongruous with other texts in which she displays a thorough familiarity with proper fieldwork techniques. As this instance demonstrates, Hurston’s rhetorical strategy of briefly assuming the mantle of the over-confident professional fails to be an effective critique because such scenes are placed too far away from moments meant to serve as their counterpoint, where Hurston dwells upon her own limited access and insight during her trip to the Caribbean.

We need to turn to a much later moment in the text to find her acknowledging her limited access to truth. Chapter Thirteen opens by asking: “What is the whole truth and nothing else but the truth about Zombies? I do not know [. . .]” (456). If her lexicon mimics the confidence of the scientific and legal professions in arriving at the truth, her tone, as she describes zombies, suggests more urgently that professionalism fails to accurately document cultural phenomena unless it acknowledges its limited penetration into the phenomena it describes. Although Hurston piques her readers’ expectations by claiming that there are indeed zombies in Haiti (“People have been called back from the dead”) and that she was the first person to photograph a zombie, her discussion is less about zombies than the various challenges of professional fieldwork and the subsequent difficulties of representing one’s findings to readers (457).

Hurston learns that one becomes a zombie when a houngan, or voodoo doctor, turns himself into a bocor, or dealer in zombies, and “rides after dark to the house of the victim. There he places his lips to the crack of the door and sucks out the soul of the victim and rides off in all speed. Soon the victim falls ill, usually beginning with a headache, and in a few hours is dead” (458). The midnight following the funeral, the bocor arrives at the cemetery and “enters the tomb [and] calls the name of the victim.” Taken to a voodoo temple, the victim becomes a zombie after being given a drop of liquid “the formula for which is most secret” (459). Thus Hurston’s
description of zombies dramatizes both the zombie abduction and the process by which her own investigation is stymied when she attempts to investigate the phenomenon herself.

As the text progresses, it becomes clearer that Hurston’s intention is not a detailed analysis of cultural practices, but an extended exploration into the limits of her own professional research practices. Her account of voodoo in *Tell My Horse*, for instance, is tentative and halting as she continually stops to profess her own ignorance of the rituals and practices she describes. She warns us, “I would not pretend to call the name of every mystere in Haiti. *No one* knows the name of every *loa* [spirit] because every major section of Haiti has its own local variation” (377). As she does throughout the text, she substitutes exhaustive analysis we expect of ethnography with thoughtful expressions of the complexity and mystery of other cultures. She concludes the chapter reminding us: “this work does not pretend to give a full account of either voodoo or voodoo gods. It would require several volumes to attempt to cover completely the gods and Voodoo practices of one vicinity alone” (*Tell My Horse* 397). Such a statement strikes a very different tone from her extensive account of hoodoo (as voodoo is termed in the US) in an article she published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in a 1931 article titled “Hoodoo in America,” which extends over a hundred pages and is free from the epistemological impasses that disrupt her similar descriptions in *Tell My Horse*. Although part of her hesitance to describe voodoo in *Tell My Horse* may be that she was an outsider in Haitian culture in a way that she was not in the US, it doesn’t completely explain her apparent need in this text to expose the performed authority and confidence of the scholarly voice that she had briefly assumed herself. James Clifford’s claim that accounts of cultures reflect back upon their authors because they are “inescapably allegorical” both in their content and in their formal construction is confirmed when we compare her two accounts (“Ethnographic” 99). The extensive analysis and confident tone of “Hoodoo in America” corresponds to Hurston’s early confidence in professional inquiry,
while *Tell My Horse*, published seven years later, continually presents moments when professional insight is questioned or stymied, reflecting her troubled relationship with professional anthropology by the late 1930s.

Hurston’s split insider/outside position as a professional is most potently figured in a passage describing her invitation to a mental hospital in the town of Gonaives that claimed to have a zombie as a patient. Hurston attempts to take several photographs of the zombie, a woman named Felicia Felix-Mentor, as “the two doctors made kindly noises and tried to reassure” the woman (469). She describes in a disturbingly clinical tone how Felix-Mentor resisted, “cringing against the wall with the cloth hiding her face and head” until the doctors “forcibly uncovered her and held her so that I could take her face.” While critics have pointed to the representation of this moment as evidence of Hurston’s critique of anthropological violence against other cultures, she, in fact, is given no pause by the non-consensual nature of the encounter, in which we ourselves become implicated as we turn the page and find her haunting photograph reproduced. Rather than dwell upon the indignities of Felix-Mentor’s incarceration, Hurston moves us swiftly to a consideration of the possible scientific explanations for Felix-Mentor’s mental state, which she discusses with the doctors after retiring to “a more cheerful part of the hospital.” But no sooner does Hurston cast herself as a member of the professional authority, unabashedly profiting from its violence, than she undercuts such authority by narrating an unguarded conversation she had with the doctors. Relaxing on the hospital veranda, the doctors muse that the patient’s zombie-like state was possibly the effect of “some drug known to few. Some secret probably brought from Africa and handed down from generation to generation. [. . .] The two doctors expressed their desire to gain this secret, but they realize the impossibility of doing so. These secret societies are secret. They will die before they will tell” (469-70). The contrast between the doctors’ apparent omnipotence within the walls of the institution and their
private confessions regarding the futility of their work confirms Hurston’s own suspicions about the hypocrisy of professional rhetoric and the performative nature of professional knowledge claims. Her multi-allegianced discourse is captured in the dizzying dynamic of *Tell My Horse* where she relies on professional knowledge even as she questions professional authority and is drawn to what she suggests are the more ethical practices of amateur travellers.

Hurston demonstrates her skepticism of professional knowledge gathering by permitting us to question her findings; she frequently acknowledges her reliance on the imperfect information of Haitian professionals. While Kevin Meehan points to the informants’ proclivity for “criticizing her judgments and refusing [. . .] to cooperate with her fieldwork inquiries” (256), in fact, it is Hurston herself who destabilizes the authority of her own text by admitting to its limited success. It is true that Hurston repeatedly circumvents resistance from the Haitian folk by simply consulting with Haiti’s intelligentsia, including the editor of its national newspaper, *Le Matin*, who accompanies her for part of her trip. What saves Hurston from charges that her text affirms the position of the elite, however, is not the informants but her own transparent documentation of her problematic fieldwork; she submits the text to us as an admittedly flawed and partial account of cultural practices. Although we can never know for certain, Hurston’s familiarity with professional practices, her interest in experimenting with genre, and her tendency to challenge disciplinary boundaries suggest to me that she intentionally produced an ethnography that stages the deep uncertainty she felt about Haitian cultural practices as well as cultural anthropology.

If *Tell My Horse* fails as a scientific account of Haitian culture, I would suggest it succeeds by turning instead to the theoretical implications of its own failure; the text is an important intervention into modernist debates about the ethical representation of cultural practices and the limits of professional inquiry. Although Hurston knew the value of and
methodology for detailed scientific accounts of cultures, in *Tell My Horse* she sought to articulate the sense of impermeable mystery she experienced upon encountering other cultures. As she explained in her application letter for the renewal of her Guggenheim fellowship that funded her study in Haiti: the “task is huge, so huge and complicated that it flings out into space more fragments than would form the whole of any other area except Africa. [. . .] An ordinary volume of 100,000 words could only cover the subject by being very selective and brief. So you can see why a letter is difficult for me. It is like explaining the planetary theory on a postage stamp” (qtd. in Hemenway 246). Her passionate defense of scientific research mixed with a literary sensibility respecting the vast complexity of the task at hand, is registered in *Tell My Horse* as well where the grandeur of Haitian culture demands a professional humility. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of *Tell My Horse* is the way it convinces us to reduce our amazement at the power of the professional as it works to expand our sense of wonder toward the vastness and complexity of folk traditions.

*Tell My Horse* suggests that the spirit of the amateur’s partial “peep” might be blended with the professional’s “spy-glass of Anthropology” in order to produce less invasive accounts of other cultures. Although not often read as a plea for professional ethics, *Tell My Horse* does indeed balance the ambitions of the cultural anthropologist to know the other, and the legitimate desire of other cultures to preserve the “privacy” and “mystery” of their rituals that they consider proprietary. As Hurston suggests when she describes the dangerous secret society in Haiti called Sect Rouge, many folk traditions are designed to repel outsiders. She explains, “the Sect Rouge takes care that its members do not talk. It is a thing most secret and it stays that way” (493). Haitian intellectuals are warned they might “disappear permanently” if they probe too deeply into the practices of the Sect Rouge. Indeed, this theme is reflected in Hurston’s hasty departure from Haiti: she left earlier than planned after experiencing what she described in a telegram as “a
violent gastric disturbance” that she became convinced was retribution by a *bocor* protecting the mysteries of voodoo from her trespassing professional gaze (qtd. in Boyd 247).

As all of Hurston’s writing suggests, she had complex and sometimes contradictory ideas about the limits of professional knowledge, scholars’ obligations to society at large, and possible solutions to ensure rigorous scholarship would not ineffectually “lie upon the shelves of scientific societies” (qtd. in Hemenway 207). The binary at work in Hazel Carby’s claim that Hurston participated in a profession she “despised” because it reframed folk material in “elitist terms” does not do justice to the complex position that Hurston held in the professions and offered as a potential model (76).115 Far from despising professionalism, Hurston participated in professional society while imagining how it could better serve scholars and the general public. She held a life-long respect for professional insight even if, as *Tell My Horse* indicates, she was wise to the gap between its claims for itself and its actual capacities. Although she grew increasingly skeptical of the power of the professional’s “spy-glass,” she thought that if the ideals of Boasian cultural anthropology—presenting holistic accounts of other cultures based on fieldwork—could inform the depictions of black culture in popular culture at the time, the nuance and richness of such presentations might replace racist representations. Her unique insider / outsider perspective on academia yielded texts and productions that were a reflection of the professional fluidity of the period, as well as radical experimental works that insisted upon the continued communication between professionals and popular readers and audiences. Although she would never again achieve the level of artistic or scientific success that she did in the 1930s, throughout her life she drew on her anthropological training for her literary

115 Christopher Douglas is right to note that while “Carby sees Hurston as only a consumer, not a critic, of anthropological ideas” in fact, “Hurston is interrogating, not just adopting, the anthropological conventions with which she worked” (47, 48).
representations of black culture. Far from condemning her professional scholarship, her art combined with her scholarship to offer a new model in which literary writing could be more accurate, and scientific writing more humane.
Chapter 4

“It’s a job I like, and I’m going to do it”: Pleasurable Work in Dashiell Hammett’s Bureaucratic America

At the conclusion of Dashiell Hammett’s early short story, “The Gutting of Couffignal” (1925), his recurring detective character the Continental Op explains to the duplicitous and beautiful Princess Zhukovski that he cannot accept a bribe in exchange for her freedom. In a scene Hammett repeats several times in his stories with varying success, his detective must apprehend the femme fatale while explaining that his love for his work trumps morality, money, or sex:

We’ll disregard whatever honesty I happen to have, sense of loyalty to employers, and so on. You might doubt them, so we’ll throw them out. Now I’m a detective because I happen to like the work. [. . .] I pass up about twenty-five or thirty thousand of honest gain because I like being a detective, like the work. And liking work makes you want to do it as well as you can. Otherwise there’d be no sense to it [. . .] I don’t know anything else, don’t enjoy anything else, don’t want to know or enjoy anything else. You can’t weigh that against any sum of money. (Big Knockover 33)

While the Continental Op considers himself a professional (even his name reflects his identity as a Continental Detective Agency operative), he values his work by the amateur standard of pleasure. Hammett’s stories frequently present pleasure as the rationale for hard work; moral codes prove too fragile to be sustained and no salary can warrant the dangerous work of fighting
crime in the modern metropolis. Why, then, have critics overlooked the invocations of pleasure that abound in Hammett’s work? In an early and influential critical article on Hammett’s oeuvre, David Bazelon struggles to identify the motivations of Hammett’s detectives. He argues that lacking the “firm social and moral basis” by which gentleman-amateur detectives justified their work (469), they work simply out a loyalty to the “job itself,” thus bleakly confirming “the ascendency of the job in the lives of Americans” (468). In fact, it is understandable that critics have rarely interrogated Hammett’s stories for accounts of pleasurable labour considering that the success of hard-boiled detective fiction depended upon distinguishing its representation of criminal investigations from those featured in mystery fiction. By eschewing the working habits of gentleman-amateur detectives like Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot, who viewed detective work as a pleasurable diversion rather than a career, hard-boiled writers cleared a discursive and creative space for their own detective stories.

Indeed, Hammett established himself as a writer by convincing readers that nearly every aspect of his experimental detective stories—the clipped dialogue, working-class characters, and seedy locales—was distinct from mystery fiction, which he critiqued as intolerably artificial and anachronistic. Somewhat reminiscent of T. S. Eliot’s efforts to write criticism that might create an amenable atmosphere for his unorthodox poetry, Hammett penned dozens of reviews panning conventional mystery novels for their poor construction and absurd plots while suggesting the possibility of a more sophisticated and realistic form of detective fiction. In an oft-quoted introduction to The Maltese Falcon (1930), he reinforced the distinction between the two

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116 Steven Marcus maintains that Hammett’s work explores “the ethical irrationality of existence, the ethical unintelligibility of the world” (xvii.).

117 In one particularly acerbic review in the Saturday Review of Literature from 1927, Hammett describes Philo Vance, the most popular fictional detective of the 1920s and 1930s as “always, and usually ridiculously, to be wrong. His exposition of the technique employed by a gentleman shooting another gentleman who sits six feet in front of him deserves a place in a How to be a detective by mail course” (qtd. in Layman, Discovering 96).
subgenres explaining: “[the] private detective does not [. . .] want to be an erudite solver of riddles in the Sherlock Holmes manner; he wants to be a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation, able to get the best of anybody he comes in contact with, whether criminal, innocent by-stander or client” (qtd. in Layman, Discovering 105). Hammett and other young writers publishing in the pulp magazine Black Mask in the late 1920s felt they needed to compete with mystery fiction because, although the latter dates to at least Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), the height of its popularity came during the modernist period. Although most of the major authors of 1920s and 1930s mystery fiction are forgotten today, Dean DeFino suggests their popularity at the time derived from plots that offered “a logical discourse from seeming chaos” in the “age of Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, the Scopes trial, and the Big Bang theory” (74, 75).

Criminal acts, these stories assured modernist readers, were singular, aberrant, and too localized to permanently disrupt the social order. Thus mystery fiction promised to its readers the same pleasure that was enjoyed by the gentleman-amateur detectives it depicted: by committing a few hours of leisurely ratiocination, readers could experience the pleasure of narrative closure and redemption reinforcing the fundamental order and stability of society.

Although the contrast between mystery and detective fiction in the modernist cultural marketplace is well known, I will argue that this binary was complicated by Hammett’s ambition to translate one particular aspect of mystery fiction into his own work: the gentleman-amateur detective’s commitment to pleasurable work. Despite the way that paratextual drawings of gangsters, guns, and *femme fatales* advertising Hammett’s short stories suggested an escapist
vision of rugged masculine individuality, his most accomplished fiction innovatively yokes together scenes of brutal violence with subtle inquiries into the potential pleasures of routinized, bureaucratic work. Unlike his protégé, Raymond Chandler, who cast his detectives as latter-day medieval knights insulated from the effects of modern society, Hammett’s tough-guy detectives couldn’t escape the “iron cage” of routinized bureaucratic administration, or the seismic social effects of bureaucratization that forced a reevaluation of masculinity, work, and crime.

Hammett did not need to explain to his readers the link between masculinity and career independence. The long anti-bureaucratic tradition in American history that proclaimed manhood to be linked to economic independence was so deeply entrenched in the American psyche that white-collar corporations engaged in concerted campaigns to convince male workers that non-manual labor was a masculine pursuit. This was crucial because, as Clark Davis explains, “the number of white-collar employees surged [in the interwar period]. By 1930, more than fourteen million Americans, greater than 30 percent of the civilian labor force, claimed employee status in office, sales, or professional jobs.” Erin Smith, who brings a readership studies approach to hard-boiled fiction, argues that the working-class immigrant men who represented the majority of the genre’s readership, were presented with a blueprint for modern American male life that was not focused around the community and the family, but was, like the hard-boiled detectives, “completely defined by their work.” She argues “hard-boiled crime stories were conduct manuals of a sort, offering step-by-step guidelines to manly demeanor on the job and off. They were also cautionary tales about the de-skilling (read unmanning) of production work.” Indeed, Jopi Nyman concludes, “there is no place for the individualist or for the bourgeois dream of the autonomy of the individual in the modern, often urban world portrayed in hard-boiled fiction.”

In this chapter, my use of the term “bureaucracy” derives from Weberian political sociology that identifies bureaucratic structures emerging across Western society as an example of the rationalization brought about by institutional rules and regulations seeking efficiencies and standardization. Weber was extremely critical of the effect of bureaucracy on individuals believing they risked becoming “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart.” As David Beetham summarizes, “the Weberian perspective represents that of the liberal, non-bureaucratic élites, who see their social independence threatened by the expansion of bureaucracy.” However, it is also important to remember, as James Bartell writes, “the truth is, Western civilization has become so complex, so highly organized, so multileveled that essentially all of us function as bureaucrats in important aspects of our lives. [. . .] We have only begun to understand that what was once a small but powerful aspect of government has become a pervasive force that includes and to a considerable degree defines us all.”

A term originating with Talcott Parsons’s 1958 translation of Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic and the Theory of Capitalism. See Baehr who offers an overview of the debate around Parsons’s mistranslation of Weber’s original phrase that is closer to a “shell as hard as steel.” Regardless of the accuracy of Parsons’s term, “iron cage” has acquired cultural capital of its own.

My argument that Hammett’s detectives are inextricably caught within the operations of bureaucratic structures challenges Sean McCann’s claim that Hammett was one of many pulp writers who appealed to male readers by offering “a world distant from cultural centers figured as ‘feminine,’ genteel, and repressive [. . .] a rough terrain most significant for its call to manly independence.”
But while Hammett was inspired by the gentleman-amateur detective’s pleasure, he also recognized it to be anachronistic and incapable of being translated across centuries and classes; modern working pleasure for the lower-middle class characters in his fiction would have to originate from a different source than it had for nineteenth-century elites. Rather than the gentlemanly pleasure derived from idly puzzling out mysteries and returning the world to order, the improvisational thinking Hammett’s detectives employed in order to circumvent the impositions and strictures of their modern professional work resulted in what we might usefully term “wry pleasure.” By “wry,” I neither mean to suggest “cynical”—as it has often been applied to describe the world-weary hard-boiled attitude—nor do I mean to suggest an “ironic” distance from the exigencies of modern life. Instead, I have in mind its older sense suggesting something at a slant, twisted, or oblique. This is the type of pleasure that results from the improvisational and aberrant thinking undertaken by private detectives committed not to returning society to order, but to earning a living and perhaps bringing some clarity to a slanted and twisted modern world at odds with the bureaucratic fantasies of normative order. Refusing his readers the pleasure of an ordered world as mystery fiction had done, or the pleasure of identifying with an uncorrupt savior-figure as Chandler in The Big Sleep (1939) would do, Hammett offered a more nuanced pleasure by representing workers who discover intermittent, wry pleasures in the cracks of the surrounding bureaucracy. If Hammett’s detectives gauged

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122 Hammett came from a struggling lower-middle class family and was forced to leave high school after one semester in order to help support his family. His bouts of tuberculosis made him a part-time worker in a series of jobs that “barely paid the rent” (Selected Letters 5). His financial situation changed in 1930 with the publication of The Maltese Falcon as well as a movie adaptation of his first book. According to his biographer, during the early 1930s “Hammett claimed to be making $800 a week—twice as much each month as the average American worker made in a year” (7).

123 More recently, Michel de Certeau in a well-known argument identified similar attempts among modern workers to seek out subversive pleasures in the workplace. However, his study lacks the complexity of Hammett’s assessment that acknowledges the validity of authoritative regulation in everyday life even as it imagines tactics that might offer the professional some space for improvisation.
the value of their dangerous work by the wry pleasure it offered them, Hammett too gauged the literariness of his own writing by this standard: as he insisted to his editors, if a story didn’t emerge from an act of improvisational resistance to normative standards, he didn’t want to publish it since he received no pleasure from it. Further, wry pleasure suggests the attitude Hammett hoped his readers would adopt when encountering his innovative plots that neither followed the linear thinking of mystery-fiction nor provided readers with conclusions that miraculously straightened the crooked aspects of society.

If this chapter shares with the previous chapter an interest in popular modernist culture (exemplified by Zora Neale Hurston’s Broadway productions), it also overlaps with the concerns foregrounded in the first two chapters, which focused primarily upon literary modernism. By challenging the formulaic logic of mystery fiction, Hammett’s work accords with the social vision of literary modernism that saw fragmentation and unknowability as the primary conditions of modernity. His fiction courts the chaotic voices and sensations of the modern city in a way that reminds one of Virginia Woolf’s “incessant shower of innumerable atoms” or D. H. Lawrence’s appeal to subterranean primal passions that exist in a “trembling balance” with the self. Further, Hammett’s narratives share with literary modernism an attempt to experiment with form by incorporating non-literary discourse (in his case, bureaucratic reports, telegrams, and gangster argot) into his writing.

Hammett’s interest in interspersing representations of

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124 Mark McGurl makes a similar claim although without the contrast to the regulative logic of bureaucracy when he argues that “in the context of a certain strain of elite modernism [. . .] something like the chaos of Hammett’s first two novels, so bothersome to his editors and critics, could be revalued as a sign of modernism’s critique of romantic unities and traditional forms” (174).

125 Reader expectations then and now tend to obscure Hammett’s interest in documenting bureaucratic process. In a review in The Bookman the year Red Harvest was published, for instance, Herbert Asbury recommended the novel to his readers for its “realistic, straightforward story [. . .] it is concerned solely with fast and furious action and it introduces a detective who achieves his purposes without recourse to higher mathematics, necromancy or fanciful reasoning. It reads like the latest news from Chicago” (qtd. in Metress 1).
regulated work with pleasure results in moments of ambiguity, uncertainty, and flux similar to those in major works of literary modernism.

I begin by examining Hammett’s uneasy fit within the constraints of both the pulp fiction industry and the expectations of literary modernism. I suggest that propelling his improvisational efforts to blend pulp fiction and literary fiction was his belief that work of all kinds ought to be pleasurable; this principle informed his own literary labours as well as the labours of the characters he created. In the second section, I examine his first novel Red Harvest, which initially issues a conservative warning about the necessity of authority in the modern city where unregulated amateur pleasures might result in violent impulses, but concludes by critiquing attempts to professionally manage complex social problems and suggests a literary sensibility might better account for the incongruities of modern life. In the third section, I turn to The Maltese Falcon and suggest that Hammett reevaluates his skepticism of pleasurable labour voiced only a year earlier in Red Harvest. I argue that the novel advocates the wry pleasures of living in a state of radical unknowability and unresolvability and provides its protagonist, detective Sam Spade, as an example. In this section, I focus on how we read Hammett’s narrative structure that deviates from the forward-driving and conclusive narratives of earlier mystery fiction and instead enacts the epistemological crisis of those attempting to “read” or manage the mercurial modernist city.

“work that is done for the worker’s enjoyment”: Hammett’s Professional Pleasure Seeking

Early in his writing career, Hammett introduced himself to his readers in a brief autobiography: “I was born in Maryland, between the Potomac and Patuxent rivers, on May 27, 1894, and was raised in Baltimore. After a fraction of a year in high school—Baltimore Polytechnic Institute—I became an unsatisfactory and unsatisfied employee of various railroads,
stock-brokers, machine manufacturers, canners, and the like. Usually I was fired” (qtd. in Layman, Shadow 3). Here we see one of many instances when Hammett publically reflects back upon his working life and, in a prideful tone, explains that he judges work by the amount of pleasure it provides him. Paradoxically, however, while he viewed pleasure as the measure of good work, he tended to be drawn to jobs whose standardized procedures and expectations limited his autonomy. In a pattern I term “resistant participation,” he molded his private and public identity through the act of balking at the expectations of his employers and later, heroically describing to the public his extrication from the unacceptable constraints on his working pleasure. Understanding his tendency for resistant participation clarifies his rebellion against the constraints of both the pulp fiction industry and the expectations of literary culture, both of which strongly influenced the dynamics of his fiction. The search for pleasurable labour determined how Hammett navigated the disparate institutions and genres of modernism; never quite fitting (or willing to fit) into any one, he found a wry pleasure in writing as a resistant participant until his own success undermined his ability to assume an outsider stance and, I argue, was partly responsible for his decision to abandon novel writing.

In 1922, incapacitated by chronic tuberculosis and responsible for a wife and child, Hammett joined the ranks of penurious hack writers paid piece rates (usually a few cents a word) to quickly churn out formulaic short stories published in inexpensive magazines popularly known as “pulps.” The nickname derived from the cheap wood pulp paper they were printed upon and distinguished them from the high-end “glossies” or “slicks” printed on better paper and marketed to a wealthier clientele. The standardized stories demanded by the pulp fiction industry left writers with no control over the final form their stories would take: editors had carte blanche to alter plot, style, and even the name of the author. Erin Smith’s interviews with pulp fiction writers reveal many of them shared the publishers’ mindset: “pulp writers had little to say
about the aesthetics of their fiction, but they recounted with pride their long hours, speed, and productivity” (21). While literary authors were understood to produce unique works of creative expression, pulp writers were encouraged to think of their cultural production no differently than any other commodity. Hammett’s tendency for resistant participation made him less amenable to such restrictions upon his creativity and autonomy.

Although Hammett’s initial decision to send his stories to the pulp magazine *Black Mask* was prompted by financial necessity, once the stories were accepted there, he quickly encountered complex cultural crosscurrents that enabled him to experiment with his authorial persona and begin articulating his philosophy of pleasurable work. Although hard-boiled fiction was primarily marketed to working-class readers, its actual readership was more varied. As Erin Smith explains, “*Black Mask* itself was more than a little ambivalent about cultural capital. The letters [to the editor] printed in the early years were anxious assertions of the magazine’s appeal to an elite audience. Most of them came from doctors, lawyers, journalists, bankers, businessmen, professors, and the like” (130). The self-proclaimed broad appeal of *Black Mask* forced Hammett to hone his writing skills and think carefully about the socio-economic diversity of his audience: while he appealed to educated middle-class readers early in his career, as his fiction gained respect, these readers abandoned him because they no longer felt the transgressive thrill of reading fiction they perceived to be below their class. T. S. Matthews, the upper-class editor of *The New Republic* and later *Time* magazine complained, “Now that Dashiell Hammett is beginning to be taken seriously by the highbrows, my first enthusiasm for him is beginning to cool a little” (qtd. in Smith 36). The cultural anxieties of both readers and the pulp industry offers evidence, I would suggest, that Hammett had the freedom to tentatively construct his professional style and public persona much earlier in his writing life than has generally been thought. While critics have depicted the atmosphere of *Black Mask* as highly standardized and
oppressive, Hammett’s resistant participation allowed him to test the boundaries of pulp and literary fiction well before cutting ties with the pulp industry and publishing his first novel.

The question of when Hammett could be said to have become a “professional” writer urges us to consider the broader tensions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century around differing claims to the term emerging from vastly different cultural arenas. The emergence of mass-market publishers, the development of cheaper methods for producing books, and the expansion of the reading public, meant that novel writing had become a viable career. The result, as Christopher Wilson explains, was that the “literary endeavor could be cut loose from its Romantic, aristocratic, or part-time moorings and be reestablished in the cult of professional expertise” (Labor 3). Several variations of the professional writer emerged. For Henry James, turning novel writing into a vocation meant developing a theory of the novel that could raise it to the level of “the successful profession of music, poetry, painting, [and] architecture” that would garner for it the respectability of the “fine arts” (47). A slightly different idea of a literary profession emphasized a conceptual transition from literature as the work of a solitary amateur genius to the material product achieved through “ritualized routines, careful soundings of the market, and hard work” (Labor 3). Finally, we find a conceptually distinct but terminologically equivalent usage of “professional” emerging at the same time among writers in the pulp fiction industry who self-identified as “professional” because they depended upon writing for their livelihood, they were obliged to meet deadlines, and they followed the vicissitudes of the market. The shifting institutional structures of the modernist period meant that writers of hard-boiled detective fiction who initially saw themselves as “professional” in the latter sense of

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126 McCann quotes one editor of pulp fiction who explains that he had to depend upon “his professional writers—those who have already been tested in the fire of fiction popularity and have not been found wanting. They know what the public wants even better than he does” (“Roughneck” 25).
the term, gradually began to make claims on the Jamesian definition during the 1920s and 1930s. As novelists like Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain began transforming the mass-cultural genre of detective fiction by blending its tropes with elements from romance, gothic, and social realist traditions, they began to conceive of their own identities differently as well. No longer satisfied with writing potboilers, they took pride in the novels they produced and considered them not only an income, but also an art. As Hammett’s career attests, the strict institutional and cultural divides that have sometimes been imagined to exist between the various forms of “professional” writing were not as evident at the time.

Hammett’s early work exhibits the cross-cultural blending that Lawrence Rainey attributes to modernism in general when he argues that “modernism marks neither a straightforward resistance nor an outright capitulation to commodification but a momentary equivocation that incorporates elements of both in a brief, necessarily unstable synthesis” (3). The complex relationship between literary modernism and the marketplace is demonstrated by the fact that Hammett’s first stories, flawed by their blatant literary pretensions, were published not in *Black Mask* but in *The Smart Set*, H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan’s struggling pet project marketed to the social elite, which *Black Mask* was founded to support. Although it is unclear why Hammett stopped writing for *The Smart Set*, it is likely that he was simply paid too

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127 Although writers of detective fiction began seeking literary professional status in the 1920s and 1930s, writers had been struggling to negotiate the mass and literary marketplaces since the early 1870s. In Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891), for instance, the contrast between the failures of the sensitive literary writer Edwin Reardon and the successes of the hack writer Jasper Milvain indicate the influence of expanding literacy and the resulting mass production of books. As Patrick Brantlinger observes, *New Grub Street* warns that “increasing literacy—and the overproduction and Darwinian competition among novels, journals, and newspapers—spells the death of genuine culture” (185). While I am not suggesting Hammett faced precisely the same circumstances as Gissing’s author-characters in late-Victorian England, his self-conscious efforts to situate himself within his field mirror that of Jasper Milvain who dislikes the term “profession” (Gissing 9) and instead explains, “literature now is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks first and foremost of the markets; when one kind of goods begins to go off slackly, he is ready with something new and appetizing” (7).
little and his work received too lukewarm a reception. However, Hammett’s tendency for resistant participation led him to reimagine his move from *The Smart Set* to *Black Mask* not as a failure, but as a heroic sacrifice by which he went down into the dreary operations of the pulp fiction industry in order to correct from the inside the standardized bureaucratic thinking that prized profits over experimental literary stories.

Hammett’s retelling might have some truth behind it. In contrast to his fellow pulp writer Earl Stanley Gardner who is on record telling one editor, “Let me know what you want and I’ll try to manufacture something right to order” (qtd. in Smith 21), Hammett developed during his tenure at *Black Mask* a conviction that good writing is pleasurable writing. Although opting to write for a magazine that conceived of its contributing authors as indistinguishable, replaceable labour, Hammett’s resistant participation led him to craft a persona at *Black Mask* predicated upon the wry pleasure he derived from writing for them. Perhaps it was only by working in what most have described as a stultifying environment that Hammett was able to articulate such an impassioned argument for aligning pleasure with labour as he did in a letter to the editor of *Black Mask* in August 1924:

> The trouble is that this sleuth of mine [the Op] has degenerated into a meal-ticket. I liked him at first and used to enjoy putting him through his tricks; but recently I’ve fallen into the habit of bringing him out and running him around whenever the landlord, or the butcher, or the grocer shows signs of nervousness. There are men who can write like that, but I am not one of them. If I stick to the stuff that I want to write—the stuff I enjoy writing—I can make a go of it, but when I try to grind out a yarn because I think there is a market for it, I flop. [. . .] I have a liking for honest work, and honest work as I see it is work that is done for the worker’s enjoyment as much as for the profit it will bring him. And henceforth that’s my work. (*Selected* 26-27)
Cleverly, the rhetoric of this letter rebrands pleasurable work by connecting it to salt-of-the-earth “honest work” rather than decadent, gentlemanly leisure. More fascinating, however, is the context of this letter: it was printed in *Black Mask* below a statement by the editors claiming they received it after rejecting two of Hammett’s stories. Framed this way, Hammett’s private letter to his employer becomes a public lesson for readers and writers in what the editors claim is “the difference between a good author and a poor one” (qtd. in Layman, *Shadow* 58). They continue: “young authors, and also old authors who have fallen into the rut—can learn more about successful writing from the hundred or so words following, than they could possibly learn from several volumes of so-called short story instruction.” By authorizing Hammett’s wry pleasure, gleaned from his epistolary act of defiance, the editors at *Black Mask* diverted attention away from their own attempts to pressure authors to produce. Complicating this exchange was the fact that at the time, Hammett couldn’t actually afford to work according to his amateur ideal; the record shows he continued to submit his stories on a regular schedule and simply changed their titles or published them under a penname if they were poorly crafted. Although critics have concluded the exchange was likely staged, it benefitted both the editors and Hammett who all sought to bridge the apparent divide between literary and pulp writing for both financial and aesthetic reasons. Even if the editors solicited the letter from Hammett or wrote it themselves, he genuinely held the philosophy it professes even though he was unable to act upon it until later in his career.

Hammett’s search for working pleasure and his confidence in the fluid boundaries between pulp and literary fiction led him, in 1928, to submit an unsolicited manuscript to the esteemed literary publisher Knopf for what would become his first published novel, *Red Harvest*. When he signed with Knopf, he gained the freedom to innovate and write at a leisurely pace; he later disdainfully described his writing prior to Knopf as “blackmasking.” Although he never
graduated from high school, he voraciously read Conrad, Dostoevsky, Anatole France, and other serious writers and was ready to consider how fast-paced plots and short-tempered detectives might be more ambitiously portrayed. Yet his tendency for resistant participation led him to question the expectations at Knopf, which had just taken a risk by welcoming him into their fold. Challenging Alfred Knopf’s wife Blanche, who was the editor of their recently launched Borzoi Mysteries imprint, Hammett insisted she disassociate *Red Harvest* from the mystery fiction genre and instead emphasize the distinctive professional nature of detection it professes. Writing to his copyeditors whom he believed were altering his text too radically, he insisted “against the word ‘case’ [being] used where my sleuth would use ‘job’ and, more officially, ‘matter’ or ‘operation’” (*Selected* 46). Knopf marketers struggled to promote Hammett’s fiction that incorporated some familiar elements of mass-market fiction, while presenting qualities they would have recognized in the works of literary authors on their list such as Thomas Mann and Willa Cather. In a 1928 letter to Blanche Knopf, Hammett explains, “I’m one of the few—if there are any more—people moderately literate who take the detective story seriously. I don’t mean that I necessarily take my own or anybody else’s seriously—but the detective story as a form. Someday somebody’s going to make ‘literature’ of it” (*Selected* 47). The editors recognized Hammett’s dual appeal to the popular audience and the new literary intelligentsia emerging in America. In an internal memo, one editor warned colleagues: “it is a great mistake to think of Hammett as a mere popular fiction writer. We can sell him as that but let’s not kid ourselves” (qtd. in McGurl 164). As I demonstrate in the next section, we can see the challenge that Knopf editors faced with *Red Harvest*, a text that caters to the presumed tastes of the popular audience with its tough talk and gun battles, as it simultaneously demonstrates a literary interest in the efficacy of the spoken and written word.
“What’s the use of getting poetic about it?”: Linguistic Control and Violent Pleasure

Hammett’s experience in the pulp fiction industry taught him that authorities maintain power by imposing linguistic constraints upon their subordinates. Although he extricated himself from the word-count restrictions and formulaic plotlines at *Black Mask*, he nevertheless concluded that professional writing (in the Jamesian sense) required he impose his own constraints upon his prose in order to achieve a literary style. Briefly writing advertising copy for a jeweler in San Francisco just prior to his literary success, Hammett honed his skills as a writer and became convinced of a connection between professionalism and a meticulous economy of language. As Hammett explains in an article titled “The Advertisement IS Literature” (1926):

> The disproportionately florid, the gaudy, have worse reputations in literature than ever they have had in advertising. [. . .] The needlessly involved sentence, the clouded image, are not literary. They are anti-literary. Simplicity and clarity are not to be got from the man in the street. They are the most elusive and difficult of literary accomplishments, and a high degree of skill is necessary to any writer who would win them. (qtd. in Johnson 54)

Hammett contrasts disciplined literary writing to “the language of the street” that was “excessively complicated and repetitious” if one actually tried to write it down. In *Red Harvest*, Hammett becomes more nuanced in his thinking about economical prose. He realized that while literary minimalism maintained a complexity of language even if it looked simplistic, the bureaucratic efficiency so pervasive in modern life produced a reductive prose that was unable to adequately describe the complexities of modern life.

Although we may assume bureaucracy to have a bloating effect upon language (“bureaucratese” suggests superfluous jargon), James Beniger argues in his history of the modern
information society that *effective* bureaucracies constrict the possible range of linguistic meaning (often by limiting words to their denotations) so as to increase the efficiency and predictability of information flow and storage. Bureaucracy was one result of what he terms “the control revolution,” which rationalized information processes in much of the West at the turn of the twentieth century. Drawing upon Weber’s work, Beniger explains that “rationalization” sought to increase efficiencies by regulating “interpersonal relationships in terms of a formal set of impersonal and objective criteria” (15). The complexities of human motives and sentiments are able to be “governed more readily [when] the amount of information about them that needs to be processed” can be reduced. Crucial to my argument that follows is the paradox that while rationalization enables effective distribution and archiving of information, it accomplishes this through the “destruction or ignoring of information in order to facilitate its processing.” The users of standardized reports, legal contracts, and other forms of bureaucratic rationalized prose relinquish (sometimes consensually) their range of expression, and by extension, their individuality, in exchange for increased efficiency in their communication and control over those they manage.

In *Red Harvest*, we find Hammett refining and testing his sense of what defines amateur and professional work within the context of a modern bureaucracy. Although, as we have seen, he approved of the wry amateur pleasures to be found within the cracks of bureaucracy, this was counterbalanced by a lifelong impulse toward law and order that manifests itself most prominently in *Red Harvest*. In the lawless setting of the novel, the thin line between civilization and barbarism requires the discipline of the professional and the surveillance of bureaucracy. Initially at least, amateurism is dismissed as a perverse form of linguistic pleasure that has a bizarre correspondence to the darker pleasures of killing. Amateurs are condemned for threatening the social order with their lack of control, symbolized by their loquaciousness, while
professionals are praised for discipline, symbolized by their laconism. However, these propositions are ultimately reversed by the events of the novel that critique bureaucratic discourse for the untenable constraints it places upon professionals. Further, the unbridled amateur pleasures condemned initially are reconfigured into different type of amateur pleasure—a wry pleasure—that operates safely from within the structure of bureaucracy but is not paralyzed by it. If the brutal violence in the first half of the novel would convince even the most libertarian reader of the need for bureaucratic oversight to manage humanity’s inherently pleasurable/violent impulses, the later chapters expose the bureaucratic promise of social order to be illusory and incongruous with a social reality that can only be documented by adopting a literary discourse.

When the Continental Op first describes Personville, Montana, we cannot help but notice the connection he draws between the gangsters’ usurpation of the city and their control over its language. In short order, we learn that the unsavory citizens of Personville have taken to pronouncing “shirt” as “shoit,” and have started referring to their own town as “Poisonville” (5). The connection between power and the management of language is made explicit when the narrator is reminded of the breakdown of normative language usage on display in “the meaningless sort of humor that used to make richardsnary the thieves’ word for dictionary” (picking up on the phonetic resemblance of “dict” and “Dick”). The focus on the Personville argot in the first paragraph of the novel not only insists we remain attentive to the complexities of language even when voiced by thugs; it suggests a correlation between controlling language and controlling political power and firepower.128 Indeed, the first suggestion that the Op’s

128 The connection made between the gangster’s corrosive effect upon public order and their corrosive effect upon the English language speaks to the nativist paranoia of the period that predicted the contagion of other races and ethnicities on American culture. Further, the language used to describe the gangsters (one is a “little slick dark
professional authority will be challenged arises when we learn that his tight linguistic control is mirrored by the professional criminals dominating the town. In a city where losing control of one’s spoken or written language proves much more dangerous than any weapon, the nickname of the most powerful gangster in the city, Max “Whisper” Thaler, serves as a potent warning to others of his enviable linguistic economy. Described as having “something wrong with his throat. Can’t talk” (11), his disability proves a strength in Personville. In contrast, police chief Noonan who “babbled on” (41) and believes that “talking [with the gangsters] might do some good” (45), is a hapless pawn in the gangsters’ power games and provides little support to the Op.

When the Op first arrives in Personville, he is confident in his ability to rein in the criminal elements that surround him by simply invoking the Agency’s bureaucratic rules and regulations. The Op demonstrates his professional qualifications by strictly following procedure and refusing to speak at length to his client. When hired by the mining company owner Elihu Willsson to expel the thugs from the city, the Op promptly sends the $10,000 retainer to Agency headquarters and extinguishes any possibility of extortion or fraud by reminding Willsson, “When I say me, I mean the Continental” (39). However, Willsson taunts the Op, challenging his professionalism and his masculinity: “It’s a man’s job. Are you a man?” Mistrustful of the Op’s preference for language over firepower he continues, “Have you got the guts to match your gall? Or is it just the language you’ve got?” (38). But the Op knows the importance of controlling his language and responds: “What’s the use of getting poetic about it? [. . .] If you’ve
got a fairly honest piece of work to be done in my line, and you want to pay a decent price, maybe I’ll take it on.” The “poetic” emotional excesses of braggadocio are distasteful to the Op and suggest a risk to his own professional status. The Op brings Willsson’s rambling and threatening comments under control by channeling them into the rationalized discourse of a formal contract and a letter addressed to the Agency formalizing their arrangement.

It is fitting that in a novel so preoccupied with the use of language, it is Elihu Willsson’s son, Donald, a man who is keenly aware of the power of language as the editor of the only newspaper in the city, who first requests the services of the Continental Detective Agency. Unlike his corrupt father, who simply wants to regain is position of power in the city, Donald has “start[ed] a reform campaign in the papers [in an effort to] clear the burg of vice and corruption” (11). But while Elihu ruled merely by controlling industry in the city, Donald posed a more significant threat to the thugs by controlling language in the city; reinforcing the depth of linguistic power in Personville, Donald is murdered the very night the Op arrives and they never meet. Although the search for Donald’s killer occupies only a small portion of the Op’s subsequent attention, his murder is certainly the most regrettable of the many that follow because he represents the potential for justice resulting from free civic discourse, absent in Personville where speaking one’s mind is deadly.

We first come to understand that linguistic usage is the sole distinction in this novel between amateurs and professionals when the Op apprehends the young bank teller, Robert Albury, for Donald Willsson’s murder. The Op rebukes Albury not for his act of murder, but for his loquacity at the earlier interrogation. Although the Op initially claimed the case would be solved when “a gun expert put[s] his microscopes and micrometers on the bullets” (53), he later reveals to Albury that linguistic, not forensic evidence enabled him to solve the case. He explains: “you talked too much, son. You were too damned anxious to make your life an open
book for me. That’s the way you amateur criminals have. You’re always got to overdo the frank and open business” (my italics). The Op’s condemnation of Albury’s amateurism appears to be at odds with what we already know of the Op’s attraction to pleasurable work. Indeed, early in the novel the Op confirms that pleasure is the rationale for his work: “Poisonville is ripe for the harvest. It’s a job I like, and I’m going to do it” (60). But far away from Agency headquarters, the Op has little tolerance for Albury’s foolish behaviour; he feels himself becoming unmoored from his professional code and worries the pleasure he takes in apprehending criminals by any means necessary is mutating (almost without the reader noticing) into the macabre pleasure of killing for its own sake. Unlike the pleasures of the gentleman-amateur that are anchored in moral and civic commitments to fighting evil, the Op’s pursuit of pleasure outside the framework of bureaucracy suggests pleasure is a necessary but not sufficient principle upon which to conceptualize modern work.\footnote{Gregory suggests that the professional system itself is responsible for the Op’s violence that allows him to “subordinate moral responsibility to an allegiance to an abstract, self-devised system [. . .] by obeying rules and regulations, he is freed from moral responsibilities” (54). Although such a reading aligns with Hammett’s later leftist politics, the text of \textit{Red Harvest} simply doesn’t support it. The Op’s callousness arises, in fact, when he distances himself from professional protocol.}

Indeed, the most frightening aspect of Personville is not the daily gun battles, which leave close to thirty dead over the course of the novel, but the contagious pleasure of violent acts, which no professional code or bureaucratic procedure can seem to control.\footnote{Swirski and Wong compare the obscene number of murders in \textit{Red Harvest} with real murder statistics from the period: “in a typical year, Chicago alone would suffer scores of murders, almost all of them unsolved. Poisonville’s mayor and the gangster bosses getting together for a pow-wow with Police Chief Noonan are as true to life as any Norman Rockwell painting” (312). The accusations of dishonesty and corruption that mystery fiction saw in the emerging professional police forces comes to full fruition in \textit{Red Harvest}, where we never meet an honest official.} The longer the Op spends in the city, the more it is clear he has contracted the disease that afflicts so many others in Personville. As the Op becomes increasingly anxious that he is enjoying the violence (or “going blood simple” as he says (138)), he confesses to Dinah Brand, the town prostitute: “this is the
first time I’ve ever got the fever. [. . .] Play with murder long enough and it gets you one of two ways. It makes you sick, or you get to like it” (135). The Op makes a particularly bad choice in seeking out Brand’s company and accepting her gin, seltzer, and laudanum, which inevitably leads to his confessing his violent impulses to her. He was already warned by Albury, who was eventually driven to kill out of jealousy for Brand’s attention, that she makes a living by seducing professional men and convincing them to reveal secrets she can sell to the highest bidder or use as blackmail. As Albury foretold, “the first thing you know you’ll be telling her your life’s history, and all your troubles and hopes. [. . .] And then you’re caught, absolutely caught” (26). The Op falls into the same trap as he begins to speak unguardedly to Brand; reflecting back on his confession, he remembers, “I was wondering why I was saying it, but somehow enjoying it” (140). Upon regaining consciousness, the Op seems to have met the same fate as the talkative Albury as he finds his hand clutched around an ice pick stabbed through Brand’s chest. This scene announces several major themes of the novel: when the Op’s professional discipline collapses momentarily, he dangerously indulges in a perverse form of amateur pleasure that blends speaking candidly and acting violently.

It is at this moment that the novel cleverly switches perspective and gradually stages a challenge to the bureaucratic demands made upon the Op. The Op finds himself suddenly unable to draw upon the resources of the Agency because if he were to follow their standardized procedures and report his apparent murderous act, he would be apprehended. Instead, he buys himself time to investigate the crime on his own by carefully cleaning up Brand’s house and escaping unseen. His confused and desperate actions no longer fit within the rationalized, formulaic concision demanded by the reports he must submit to his boss. Christopher Wilson’s analysis of early twentieth-century policing suggests the Op’s experience was not unfamiliar to low-ranking investigators like himself who were far away from the centres of bureaucratic order
and struggled to make sense of the “unstable micropolitics of authority in the modern industrial city” (Cop 62). If we have already condemned the Op for losing control of his investigation by abandoning the bureaucratic process he was initially committed to following, the final chapters of the novel force us to reevaluate his predicament and shift the blame to the draconian systemic procedures themselves. The systemic failures are writ large in the telegram he receives from the Agency demanding that he: “SEND BY FIRST MAIL FULL EXPLANATION OF PRESENT OPERATION AND CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH YOU ACCEPTED IT WITH DAILY REPORTS TO DATE” (125). The demand is impossible for the Op to fulfill because rationalized accounts, by their very nature, must simplify the complexity of events and so can never provide “full explanation[s].” Further, its stark, matter-of-fact, economical prose seems even more unreasonable because it occurs at a moment in the text when we as readers are struggling to make sense of the irrational violence and complex double-dealings presented to us. Although brief, the telegram gets to the heart of the novel’s increasing inability to defend bureaucracy or to suggest an alternative to the cover-up that the Op must undertake toward the end of the novel. By demanding “full” knowledge even as it employs an economical bureaucratic prose that impedes linguistic expression, the telegram inadvertently exposes the contradiction of bureaucracy as it seeks to achieve both omniscience and efficiency.

The telegram leaves the Op in a double bind by which, in order to be a professional, he must speak and not speak; he must fully report his activities while covering them up. The result is the reemergence of the wry amateur pleasure Hammett developed in his Black Mask days but has so far been absent in Red Harvest. The Op realizes he must bring an innovative approach to his reports: rather than treat them as bureaucratic discourse that analeptically reports earlier events, he treats them as literary discourse that proleptically constructs imaginary events. He redefines events in the world not as stable facts but as narrative that can be reimagined and told
from various perspectives (some that might help to exculpate him). The Op explains to the backup agents that arrive late in the novel that he needs time to get “results to hide the details under” (104). He emphasizes, “evidence won’t do. What we’ve got to have is dynamite.” Although the most useful “dynamite” would be a confession from Brand’s true killer, which he eventually gets by chance, he seems here to be suggesting he would also be satisfied with a dynamite narrative that could persuade his boss that his actions were professional and legal. In order to have time to construct an acceptable report, the Op browbeats the other operatives into staying silent, warning them: “I don’t want you birds to send any writing back to San Francisco without letting me see it first,” thereby shifting regulatory power away from the centralized bureaucracy and to himself (103). By reconceiving of himself as a literary author managing and crafting the expectations of his readership, the Op exposes the fictional nature of all language that, as an imperfect medium, can never offer the “full explanation” official discourses demand.

The conclusion of Red Harvest reverses its initial approval of bureaucratic process and its earlier condemnation of amateur pleasure by suggesting that the laconic prose of technocratic professionalism contributes to violence, while the wry amateur pleasure of literary labour may help repair the damaging effects of bureaucracy. The bloodbath of physical violence dominating the novel concludes with the Op telling us he spent much of his final week in a nearby town in his hotel room “trying to fix up” the story we have just read “so [it] would not read as if I had broken as many Agency rules, state laws and human bones as I had” (186). By casting the Op as a literary writer at the conclusion of Red Harvest, Hammett blends the discipline of the professional with the improvisation of the amateur and we find the wry pleasure that the Op receives from bending the rules from within the Agency. Because there is no hope for justice or peace in Personville, where seemingly all the residents are criminals, the Op comes to imagine his work there to be a sort of storytelling with little ultimately to be gained or lost. As the Op
ironically explains: “It’s right enough for the Agency to have rules and regulations, but when you’re out on a job you’ve got to do it the best way you can. [. . .] A report is no place for the dirty details” (103). Instead, the “dirty details” belong in the less restricted space of literature, which demands discipline, as Hammett argued in “The Advertisement IS Literature,” but also permits wry pleasures by advocating improvisational freedom and incongruous content. Yet the crisis of bureaucratic confidence that precedes such a realization in Red Harvest suggests achieving wry pleasure through literary style might not be as easy as Steven Marcus imagines in an influential analysis heavily influenced by post-structuralist sensibilities: “the work of the detective is itself a fiction-making activity, a discovery or creation by fabrication of something new in the world, or hidden, latent, potential, or as yet undeveloped within it” (xxiv). This is certainly true of Hammett’s detectives, but never without the sober suggestion that what lies “hidden, latent, potential” within us should perhaps be regulated by some form of law and order.

Far from Marcus’s expression of endless linguistic play, Red Harvest depicts a fundamental crisis of modern professional life. Much of the novel suggests that to act independently outside oppressive bureaucratic procedure doesn’t make one more rational and perceptive as it does for the autonomous gentlemen-amateurs of mystery fiction, but rather, it makes one no better than the criminals themselves. The gentleman-amateur’s pleasure morphs into dangerous anti-social pleasures in the contagious environs of Personville. Although the Op’s confessions throughout the novel suggest he is repentant of his murderous acts, he departs Personville with a calmly cynical acceptance of the commercial nature of his work that requires its effect be temporary so that professionals like him can be hired again in the future to return the city to “order.” In the case of Personville, the result of the Op’s “work” returns the city to the corrupt Elihu Willsson “all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again” (176). Therefore, it
would seem, it is not society but professionals themselves who benefit from professional services that will presumably be required again when the criminal elements return to town.

But even if Red Harvest is skeptical of the claims of bureaucratic management, it concludes by suggesting lower-middle class workers like the Op might achieve a wry pleasure in the margins of bureaucracy by attempting a positive amateurism that improvises to produce creative work through the freedom of writing in non-rationalized forms. If language makes one vulnerable to violence and loss of control in Personville, it also enables the Op to write his way out of the city and cure himself of its contagion. The Op becomes a stand-in for Hammett himself at the conclusion of the novel as they both use creative writing in an attempt to address the unmanageable chaos of modern urban life and the increasing dominance of modern bureaucratic systems. Much like the Op, Hammett professed to take a mischievous pride in the “literary quality” of his own embellished reports to his supervisors when he was a Pinkerton detective, although presumably not in order to cover up misdeeds (qtd. in Layman, Shadow 13). The search for expressive outlets beyond anonymous, standardized bureaucratic discourse led both Hammett and the founder of Pinkerton’s, Allan Pinkerton himself, to turn to literature in order to re-narrate their own investigations in urban America that were too chaotic to be satisfactorily expressed through the procrustean constraints of official agency reports. In the next section, I turn to Hammett’s most famous work, The Maltese Falcon, and explore Hammett’s hope that his readers could find wry pleasure in accepting the unmanageable chaos he offered them and which was made manifest in the act of reading hard-boiled detective fiction itself.

131 See Raczkowski for an in-depth examination of Allan Pinkerton’s fiction.
“You’re altogether unpredictable”: Learning the Wry Pleasures of Uncertain Reading

In an influential article on mass culture, Fredric Jameson singles out detective fiction for its formulaic, easily consumed narrative, which masks the ideological contradictions of capitalist society and provides readers the pleasure of “consumption-satisfaction” (132). With detective fiction, he explains, the reading process itself follows a consumerist model: “you read ‘for the ending’—the bulk of the pages becoming sheer devalued means to an end—in this case, the ‘solution.’” Because his aim lies elsewhere, Jameson doesn’t distinguish between the narratives of mystery fiction, which resolve with an explanation of “whodunit,” and those of hard-boiled detective fiction, which tend to do the very opposite: they meander, turn back upon themselves, are inconclusive, and withhold from readers the pleasure of redemption or closure. If mystery fiction offers a form of delayed gratification to readers who seek pleasure in the predictable, Hammett’s narratives, I argue, reinvest the “bulk of the pages” with meaning independent of their denouement and construct a new form of reading pleasure predicated upon unknowability and inconclusiveness. Hammett asked his readers to find an unorthodox wry pleasure in his recalcitrant and unpredictable narratives rather than in the commercial pleasure resulting from efficiently consuming narratives as mass-cultural commodities. He saw that the key to writing more realistic representations of modern cultural life was to break from the repetitious and standardized forms of mass culture, and instead, inscribe in his narratives the epistemological crisis posed by social and institutional complexities of the modernist metropolis.  

As I argue below, Hammett’s narrative structure in *The Maltese Falcon* not only offers readers perpetual indeterminacy and ambiguity rather than resolution; it also encourages them to find wry pleasure

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132 Hammett’s text shares with any number of key modernist documents an interest in the indeterminable nature of life in the modern city. See Georg Simmel’s “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903) and Walter Benjamin’s “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939).
in exploring fictional worlds that leave many questions unanswered and society no better off than before.

It is instructive to see how Hammett’s inconclusive narrative contrasts with that of a mystery novel. In Agatha Christie’s nearly contemporaneous *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), for instance, although the novel is not set in an English country house like so much classical detective fiction, the same effect is achieved by setting the story on the eponymous train that is snowbound in Yugoslavia on the second night of its journey between Istanbul and Calais. The isolated train offers a distorted representation of modern life (much like the country house) in which only the elite is present and all actions are effectively ceased, thus allowing for the readers’ attention to focus fully upon the single brilliant mind of the amateur detective. While Christie brings time to a halt by sequestering the passengers aboard the stopped locomotive, the progression of the plot is entirely dependent on Poirot’s ratiocination. As the story begins, an elderly passenger is found to have been stabbed and the amateur gentleman detective, Hercule Poirot, is asked by his friend, M. Bouc, a company director of the Orient Express who happens to be aboard, to investigate the crime. Bouc goads the hesitant Poirot, “have I not heard you say often that to solve a case a man has only to lie back in his chair and think?” (56). Ultimately, Poirot agrees to employ his “little grey cells of the mind” not out of a sense of justice, and certainly not out of professional obligation, but because he realizes that “many hours of boredom lie ahead whilst we are stuck here.” Common to mystery fiction—even that published well into the 1930s—is the trope that modern life is particularly boring because its chaos is not intellectually stimulating. As Poirot methodically lays out two possible solutions, and with the suspects before him, thinks his way to the solution that the murder was the work of twelve aristocratic passengers who each took turns stabbing the murdered man, a notorious gangster and kidnapper. The complexity of the crime is striking against the novel’s absurdly simplistic social
structure in which all actions can be stopped, a single gentleman can examine a hermetic
environment omnisciently, and, when the case is solved, all the participants unanimously agree at
the conclusion of the novel that justice has been served and misdirect the police by concocting a
mysterious intruder.\footnote{133}

Distinguishing his detective stories from mystery fiction, Hammett, like Joyce and
Woolf, attempted to create characters who were only partially able to understand and describe
the motives and actions of others around them in the modern urban landscape. Hammett’s
decision to foreground in his writing the bewildering and unmanageable topography of the
modern metropolis was at odds with the confident rhetoric of progressive politicians and public
officials responding to the new challenges of enforcing Prohibition and monitoring increasingly
congested urban spaces.\footnote{134} J. Edgar Hoover and other law enforcement officials responded by
embracing new surveillance and record-keeping tools and executing a massive bureaucratic
expansion in federal criminal investigation during the 1920s and 1930s.\footnote{135} In the words of
Martha Benda, bureaucrats were imagined to have the ability to impose “order, rationality, and
efficiency out of the disorder, the irrationality, and the wastefulness of the times” (ix). Texts
such as Frederick Winslow Taylor’s \textit{The Principles of Scientific Management} (1911) and Henry
Gantt’s \textit{Organizing for Work} (1919) shared with hard-boiled detective fiction an interest in
commenting upon the changing nature of modern work, but were much more sanguine about the

\footnote{133} As Charles Rzepka elaborates, “While detectives like Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot and Dorothy Sayers’s
Lord Peter Wimsey could not put history back together again, they did offer its middle- and upper-class readers the
flattering illusion that, on a small scale at least, the task was not impossible, and that people like them were capable
of doing it” (154).
\footnote{134} See McCann for an analysis comparing Progressive politics to hard-boiled detective fiction.
\footnote{135} See Potter for an analysis of the cultural effects of J. Edgar Hoover’s expansion of the F.B.I.’s mandate during
the 1930s.
ability for bureaucratic efficiency and time management practices to harness the chaotic effects of modern technology and modern urbanization.

Hammett’s commitment to creating authority figures with more humble and limited powers of detection than promised by the proponents of modern bureaucracy grew from his own experience as an operative for Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency off and on between 1915 and 1921 in Baltimore, Spokane, and San Francisco. While on the one hand, this early formative experience left him with a respect for the ideal of law and order, on the other, it made him deeply skeptical of the confident rhetoric of large bureaucracies. By the time he worked for Pinkerton’s, it was the nation’s largest detective agency; its motto “We never sleep” below its trademark unblinking disembodied eye, boasted of its inimitable surveillance expertise. But while it had enjoyed a near monopoly in public law enforcement during the mid nineteenth century, by the turn of the century, municipal and state police were quickly undertaking such duties. During the Red Scare, when Hammett was an operative, Pinkerton’s shifted its operations to union busting. According to Hammett’s long-time partner Lillian Hellman, his unreserved admiration for Pinkerton’s ended when he was offered $5000 by the Anaconda Mining Company to assassinate I.W.W. labor leader, Frank Little, who would later be assassinated by another operative. Hellman writes in her memoir Scoundrel Time (1976), “I think I can date Hammett’s belief that he was living in a corrupt society from Little’s murder” (48). In an irony that goes unacknowledged by Hellman, the very agency whose actions led Hammett to acknowledge the corruption of modern bureaucracies also reinforced his conviction that only large organizations like Pinkerton’s had the resources to potentially control modern crime. The narrative structure he would develop in all his novels suggests that even hardened agents and sophisticated bureaucracies could only incompletely comprehend the overwhelming complexity and instability
of the modern city; they would never be able to achieve the definitive closure that Pinkerton’s claimed they could for their clients and that mystery fiction did for its readers.

Of all Hammett’s novels, *The Maltese Falcon* challenges the fantasy of an omniscient investigative authority most explicitly; nearly all the elements of the first chapter are red herrings that, unlike mystery fiction, are replaced by ever more layers of obfuscation. The novel opens at the detective agency of *Spade and Archer* where a Miss Wonderly from New York enters seeking help to find her sister, Corinne, who has disappeared with a man named Floyd Thursby. In the following chapter, what we had believed to be constitutive facts of the novel are dissolved: Archer is murdered and the police summon Spade to the crime scene not as a private eye, but as a potential suspect. The naïve Miss Wonderly turns out to be the conniving *femme fatale* Brigid O’Shaughnessy, who has not come from New York but Hong Kong; she does not have a sister, and Floyd Thursby is a fellow criminal she is hoping to trick the detectives into killing so she can keep the Maltese falcon for herself. While we learn very little about the case at hand (it is not until the midpoint of the novel when the value of the falcon statuette is explained to Spade), we learn a great deal about the type of narrative world we have entered; we find there are seemingly no stable coordinates available to anchor the information network that bureaucracies depends upon or that readers of detective fiction had come to expect. The mercurial nature of knowledge in Spade’s world and the many duplicitous performances he must parse, mean that he cannot sit behind his desk like the gentleman-amateur, but instead, must continually return to the same sources that are in flux. Unlike the structure of mystery fiction in which the detective commences his investigation after the crime has been committed, the struggle for both the hard-boiled detective and the reader of hard-boiled detective fiction is that the crime under investigation is still occurring and cannot be considered in its totality. Indeed, the lesson of *The Maltese Falcon* is that the modern detective (and by extension, any citizen who hopes to
intelligently navigate modern urban space) need not be an analytical genius or physically tough, but must have the agility to adapt to contingencies. Hammett signals the instability of modernity by demonstrating Spade’s dual struggle to resist the allure of O’Shaughnessy as well as the seductive fiction that life can be regulated or anticipated.

In one of Hammett’s experimental, genre-crossing scenes, we encounter a divergence from the fast-pace action of the novel as Spade relates a story to O’Shaughnessy that confuses her, but offers readers crucial advice about how to find wry pleasure in a novel (and a world) that is unpredictable and inconclusive. He describes how he was once hired to investigate the disappearance of a man named Flitcraft who had lived an average suburban life as a real-estate agent in Tacoma with his wife and child. When Spade finally caught up with him, Flitcraft explained that five years prior, a steel beam suddenly fell from a construction site and nearly killed him. Spade tells O’Shaughnessy that Flitcraft “felt like somebody had taken the lid off life and let him look at the works” (444). Flitcraft realized that while he thought he was in sync with the expectations and rhythms of professional society, “he had got out of step, and not into step, with life.” Flitcraft’s middle-class professional life “was a clean orderly sane responsible affair. Now a falling beam had shown him that life was fundamentally none of these things.” In telling the story, Spade ventriloquizes Hammett’s core criticism of modern bureaucratic work: it requires that we accept the fantasy that order and predictability can be imposed upon a world that is, in reality, “a series of falling beams” (Nolan 92).

But what is most crucial about this story, and what critics often overlook, is the wry pleasure Spade derives from Flitcraft’s response to his near-death experience. Spade explains to O’Shaughnessy that what he “always liked” about the story was that Flitcraft eventually recreated the middle-class life he abandoned by marrying a new wife in Spokane and settling “back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma” (445). Thus Spade takes
wry pleasure in Flitcraft’s return to the comfort of professional fictions of certainty. Crucially, the story appeals to Spade not simply because it propounds a deterministic view of life, but also because it distinguishes the mentality of an effective hard-boiled detective like himself from that of a white-collar worker like Flitcraft. Spade’s talent is grounded in his rare capacity to live a life of radical uncertainty in the world of falling beams without settling for the fictional comforts of middle-class bureaucratic narratives that promised order, security, and predictability. The Flitcraft story obviously has implications beyond the narrative of *The Maltese Falcon*: it demonstrates the radical revision that Hammett made to the detective genre that we see emerging at the conclusion of *Red Harvest*. His novels increasingly suggest that society cannot be put back to order because bureaucratic ambitions are built upon self-delusions regarding the very possibility of order or absolute meaning.\(^{136}\)

The Flitcraft story not only offers clues as to how we ought to approach the unstable world of the novel; it also enables us to understand the attraction between O’Shaughnessy and Spade. Although O’Shaughnessy appears not to comprehend the Flitcraft story, this may well be a ruse; their sexual attraction to each other is both physical and competitive as they attempt to convince each other of their sincerity. Although O’Shaughnessy presents herself as a helpless naïf and makes a point of telling Spade, “You’re altogether unpredictable” (462), they are *both* highly skilled at the improvisational storytelling necessary to thrive in a society that is unstable. As the most protean and duplicitous character in the novel, O’Shaughnessy warns and tempts Spade, telling him “I’m not at all the person I pretend to be” (437). Storytelling, not violence or rational thinking, is crucial for survival in the fictional world of *The Maltese Falcon*. Her skill at

\(^{136}\) In *Dashiell Hammett: A Daughter Remembers*, Jo Hammett explains how her father thought of the Flitcraft story “as if it were a gift he had received that was just right. As a boy he had wanted to find the Ultimate Truth—how the world operated. And here it was. There was no system except blind chance. Beams falling” (101).
reinventing herself and contradicting her earlier claims ultimately makes it impossible for Spade to ever truly understand her; instead, he knows the most he can do is derive wry pleasure from the uncertainty she creates. She frustrates the bureaucratic demand that each of us be prepared to give a stable account of ourselves—our names, but also our pasts—by changing her name and her reason for seeking Spade’s assistance. Her obfuscation begins when she introduces herself to Spade as Miss Wonderly and then briefly, as Miss LeBlanc. As the names suggest, her character is associated with the blanks or white spaces (certainly not the whiteness of innocence) that leave Spade and the law enforcement officers he consults to wonder about her identity. Because the narrative point of view never allows us into her mind, every time O’Shaughnessy appears to remove the final veil obfuscating the truth, we can never be sure her apparent sincerity is not simply another layer of deception and manipulation.

Unlike the plot of mystery fiction where rational intellect is everything, in *The Maltese Falcon*, the most valued skill is improvisational storytelling. The criminals evade capture by telling stories to Spade, and Spade avoids delays in his own investigation by telling stories to the police. Concerned about the growing suspicion on the part of the police, Spade assures O’Shaughnessy (who is of course lying to him), that “we ought to be able to fake a story that will rock them to sleep, if necessary” (418). Indeed, Spade’s talent in his line of work is his capacity to derive wry pleasure from the productive chaos of improvisational storytelling: “My way of learning is to heave a wild and unpredictable monkey-wrench into the machinery. It’s all right with me, if you’re sure none of the flying pieces will hurt you” (465). In the amoral world of the novel, Spade is able to stay above the fray and not get too seriously injured because he too participates in manipulative legerdemain. Early in the novel we are warned not to assume we can know Spade the way we might Sherlock Holmes: while “the upper part of his face frowned. The lower part smiled” (417). As readers we are asked to find pleasure not in identifying with a
representative of the rational, stable, and moral values perceived to be under threat in the modernist urban space, but in Spade who embodies shape-shifting, unpredictable behaviour.

It is fitting that the prize O’Shaughnessy and the other criminals are after, the Maltese falcon, is as mercurial and mysterious as them. We first learn of it from O’Shaughnessy’s colleague, Joel Cairo, who turns over Spade’s office searching for it. Cairo describes it as an “ornament that has been—shall we say?—mislaid” (426). His accomplice Gutman similarly prevaricates but proposes an ironic toast to “plain speaking and clear understanding” (481). If the Flitcraft story called into question the possibility of managing the vicissitudes of life, the lengthy provenance of the statuette first given by the citizens of Malta to the King of Spain in the sixteenth century, asserts that ownership and authenticity (equally fundamental to modern capitalist society as managing risk) are similarly myths that cannot hold up under scrutiny. As Gutman suggests in response to Spade’s inquiry about the current ownership of the falcon: “‘Well, sir, you might say it belonged to the King of Spain, but I don’t see how you can honestly grant anybody else clear title to it—except by right of possession [. . .] An article of that value that has passed from hand to hand by such means is clearly the property of whoever can get hold of it’” (502). Thus the concept of ownership is revealed to be adventitious and mercurial; the temporary ownership principle is demonstrated most graphically when the mortally wounded captain of the ship transporting the Maltese falcon to San Francisco suddenly appears in Spade’s office and drops dead clutching a parcel that proves to be the statuette. Finally, the provenance also fails to authorize the statuette’s authenticity, as Spade and the criminals discover when they scrape off the black paint hoping to expose the bejeweled surface only to discover the bird is made of lead. The two main objects of desire in the novel, O’Shaughnessy and the statuette, are not what they seem, and the consumerist pleasure of possessing them (reminiscent of Jameson’s sense of how readers consume mystery fiction) proves elusive.
The result of the mystery surrounding O’Shaughnessy and the statuette is a third elusive pleasure, namely, a conclusive end to the novel. Although O’Shaughnessy goes to jail for the murder of Miles Archer, Spade promises her that if she is not hanged, he will wait for her to get out of prison. But this qualification is qualified again by Spade’s comment that “maybe you love me and maybe I love you” (582, my italics). His conception of life as a series of falling beams not only keeps him out of danger; it also prevents him from committing himself romantically to O’Shaughnessy. He is paralyzed with doubt: “I don’t know what that amounts to. Does anybody ever? But suppose I do? What of it? Maybe next month I won’t” (582). In contrast, he is certain about his professional obligations: “when a man’s partner is killed he’s supposed to do something about it. [...] When one in your organization gets killed it’s bad business to let the killer get away with it” (581-82). Like all of Spade’s professional activities, they are undercut by his improvisational actions that subvert procedure and result in a wry pleasure that accepts an unknowable world. If the work of mystery writers rendered pleasurable work painfully inaccessible to most readers by reserving it for the privileged gentleman amateur, The Maltese Falcon translates gentlemanly pleasure into the work of the modern lower-middle classes, but offers it only as a wry pleasure in laughing at the futility of professional labour.

Although I have been implying that hard-boiled narratives, through their inconclusiveness and characters of limited omniscience, are more complex and better reflect the challenges of modernity than stories that rely upon the fanciful solitary genius of the gentleman-amateur detective, I do not mean to ignore the elements of complexity and modernity that made mystery fiction as wildly successful and engaging as it was during the modernist period and remains today. In Signs Taken for Wonders (1983), for instance, Franco Moretti describes the complex “modern” networks that Sherlock Holmes had to negotiate within Victorian London: “All Holmes’s investigations are accompanied and supported by the new and perfect mechanisms of
transportation and communication. Carriages, trains, letters, telegrams, in Conan Doyle’s world, are all crucial” (143). If bureaucratic organizational systems in their most general sense long predate modernist society, how, then, are the networks represented in Hammett’s fiction distinct? The crucial distinction, I would contend, lies in the effect these networks of technology and communication have upon detectives’ abilities to make sense of the world. As Moretti concludes, for Holmes the networks “always live up to their expectations. [...] Society expands and becomes more complicated; but it creates a framework of control, a network of relationships, that holds it more firmly together than ever before.” However, for Hammett’s detectives, bureaucratic networks of communication only introduce more intricacies that the detective must labour to untangle. In The Maltese Falcon, the most obvious breakdown of the bureaucratic network occurs when the police begin investigating Spade. Lieutenant Dundy and Detective-sergeant Polhaus learn that Spade had been sleeping with Miles Archer’s wife and thus, had a motive to murder him. Spade’s unorthodox methods of detection are met not with amazed appreciation as Sherlock Holmes enjoys, but with a threat from the police: “you’ve got away with this and you’ve got away with that, but you can’t keep it up forever” (450). Spade, too, is less than eager to work with the law enforcement officials he ultimately depends upon; he reminds the District Attorney and his assistant: “I’ve had trouble with both of you before” (521). Thus Moretti’s “networks of relationships,” which successfully impose order on Victorian London, fail to do so in Hammett’s cities that are too mercurial to be adequately managed.\footnote{As Jon Thompson explains, “for Hammett, unlike Poe, the possibility of mastering the city by means of a superior intelligence no longer exists; the city has now become dominant, and threatens to crush the detective” (137).}

The question of why the particular qualities of hard-boiled detective fiction emerged when they did has elicited a variety of hypotheses. Richard Slotkin has made a compelling
argument that hard-boiled detective fiction is an extension of the rugged individualism expressed in the American frontier thesis and cowboy fiction. Focusing on issues of gender, Christopher Breu argues that hard-boiled fiction emerged as a reactionary attempt to reinforce American cultural fantasies about masculinity. Perhaps my own argument is most in accordance with Carl Malmgren’s suggestion that Hammett’s fiction is less concerned with the threat to individualism or masculinity than it is with the threat to knowledge itself; he offers an incisive description of the city of Personville as a “zone of cognitive indeterminacy” (77). I have worked in this chapter to extend Malmgren’s description of Personville to Hammett’s conception of modernity more broadly. I have suggested that Hammett’s resistant participation, by which he is both attracted to and repelled by the promise of professional order, led him to write fiction that often made a case in support of both bureaucratic order and a subversive innovative impulse. By examining Hammett’s own attempts to negotiate the complicated field of modernist literary production, as well as the stark contrasts in Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon, we see he was preoccupied by, but was often ambivalent about, the possibility of importing the gentleman-amateur’s pleasure into the work of the lower-middle classes.

Hammett’s ambition to offer readers “a more complete and true picture of a detective at work than has been given anywhere else” required that he expose the epistemological limitations faced not only by the solitary gentleman-amateur detective of mystery fiction, but also by the professional private eye who had extensive surveillance and powerful weaponry available to him (Selected 50). Paradoxically, such realism resulted in a less clear and less conclusive narrative than that of mystery fiction from which he sought to distance his own work.138 While Hammett

138 The question of how literary narrative could most accurately represent the complexity of modern life is the topic of a famous modernist correspondence between several influential German Marxist theorists. In their debate about aesthetics and politics, Georg Lukács takes the well-known position that modernist prose was “devoid of reality and
admired the gentleman-amateur’s conception of working pleasure, he recognized the source of pleasure must change in the context of the modern world. Borrowing from his own resistant participation in a series of jobs, he created detective characters who innovated in the crevices of standardized, modern bureaucratic life and managed to derive a slanted, off-centre pleasure from it. *As Red Harvest* demonstrates, however, pleasure alone is not adequate; for Hammett, modern pleasure must operate within the disciplining boundaries of bureaucratic structure and order. Although quick to condemn oppressive bureaucratic standardization as his exit from *Black Mask* demonstrated, he came to see that his ambition to write literary detective novels depended upon his ability to blend disciplined linguistic economy with a willingness to innovate and improvise. Unlike his lesser-known contemporaries trying their hand at hard-boiled detective stories, Hammett recognized that accurately representing modern criminal investigation required not only being able to write scenes of unprecedented bloodshed and mayhem; it also meant being able to articulate how crime fighting as well as individual identity had been deeply altered by the effects of a growing bureaucracy in America.

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life” because it refused to represent the panoramic view of society that nineteenth-century writers like Tolstoy and Balzac did (Adorno 57). Ernst Bloch, however, defends modernist narratives as realistic depictions of modern life by suggesting that perhaps, “authentic reality is also discontinuity” (22). As Bloch argues, modern experience is fragmentary and unknowable and modernist art offers an authentic reflection of that world. Bloch defends what he describes as “art which strives to exploit the real fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices.”
Conclusion

From Fears of “Professionalization” to Fears of “Deprofessionalization”

In 1903, William James complained in the pages of the Harvard Monthly about the effects of professionalization upon the university. Describing the travail of a young scholar who was offered a teaching position in Harvard’s English department only to have the offer rescinded when it was realized he didn’t hold a Ph.D., James parodies the new obsession with credentials that called attention to the young man’s “miserably naked name” (240). James’s critique of the ubiquitous professionalization undertaken during the modernist period echoes many of the critiques by the writers I have examined in this project. Like James, they all were attempting to articulate the effects of living in the specialized and bureaucratically managed institutional modern world. I have argued that scholars have overlooked the extensive discussions of amateurism in literary modernism and thus have failed to consider earnest attempts to imagine correctives to the “tyrannical Machine” of large professional institutions, which threatened both habits of mind essential for humanist thinking and the potential for democratic exchange (287).

In our own time, when the term “amateur” has been almost thoroughly demoted to an insult and the term “professional” has become an overused byword for success or excellence whether deserved or not, modernist ruminations on these concepts urge us to be more self-reflective about these categories. As I have argued in this project, modernist discussions of professionalism might offer us new ways to talk about and imagine professional life today because, at the time, professions had not yet codified their self-defining narratives and amateurism was still a valuable cultural category. Modernist writers imagined means by which amateur pleasure, amateur catholicity of interests, and amateur freedom could be incorporated into professional life. Across the four chapters I have emphasized the many meanings that
amateurism acquired during the modernist period and have suggested that modernist thinkers valued amateurism not as an alternative to professionalism, but as a means of altering the definition of the professions by challenging and constructing the boundaries of their own disciplines or careers. In the first chapter I demonstrated how Ford Madox Ford sought to expand the narrow focus of the modern specialist by modeling the broad coverage of the amateur mind in the pages of his *English Review*. For Virginia Woolf, it was the rambling habits of mind of the amateur that tended to create new combinations and new ways of understanding the world that both reinvigorated the literary tradition and frustrated the monological discourse of dictators. My study of Zora Neale Hurston’s career revealed a slightly different understanding of amateurism as a means of making professional scholarly research accessible to popular audiences. In the final chapter, I considered how Dashiell Hammett hoped to translate gentlemanly pleasure and freedom to the lower-middle classes who increasingly were labouring within the stultifying frameworks of bureaucracy. The detective characters he created lived and worked in the cracks of bureaucracy and found a wry pleasure in a freedom to improvise around doctrinaire regulations.

In this dissertation I have examined a range of approaches by which the modernists imagined they might improve professional society. None had simple solutions and none was ready to condemn professional ideology entirely. If the various texts I explore are not as condemnatory of professional authority as some recent critics might wish them to be, their efforts to imagine new ways for professionals to contribute meaningfully to the public sphere make them even more important in our own time, when we depend upon professional expertise while remaining wary of its attendant power. The texts I examine merit our attention because they challenge facile attempts to construct fixed boundaries between professional and lay
audiences and refuse us the comfort of being entirely resistant to, or easily ensconced within, professional society.

The question I pose at the heart of this project is why, in the twentieth (and now the twenty-first) century, do so many people find the concept of amateurism so important and so necessary to invoke, even if disdainfully? With few exceptions, scholars have been understandably less eager to explore the amateur than to construct retrospective studies of their own professional disciplines that legitimate their own careers by narrating the evolutionary triumph of their field up to the present day. Bruce Kimball concludes his impressive study of the professions in the United States, for instance, by chastising contemporary scholars for “telling the story of past professions in terms of the present experience of their own professions” (325). Although our own institutional and professional prejudices (and ambitions) have understandably made us presentist in our reactions to amateurism, I argue that we too often have let this attitude influence our critical sensibilities regarding modernist conceptions of the professions.139 As I have shown, modernists were much more tolerant of less-than-professional behaviour and, in fact, believed that amateurism (a concept they didn’t invent but did much to expand) was a modern response to the challenges of modernity.

Although professional culture has changed significantly since the modernists struggled to understand the effects of specialization and bureaucracy, one constant feature of the current debates has been an anxiety about the future of the professions that translates into definitional boundary work either seeking to expand or contract the term. In 1985, Burton Bledstein, in the tradition of A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson’s 1933 study on the professions, suggested

139 Jennifer Ruth raises this point in her study of the professional novelist in the Victorian period when she asks “can it be only coincidence that demystifying the professional became an irresistible thesis at the same time a shrinking academic market puts critics under unprecedented pressures to professionalize?” (9-10).
that the increasingly ubiquitous application of the label “professional” eviscerates the meaning of
the word and, by extension, threatens to deteriorate related ideals such as credentialization or the
service ethic. He writes: “because so many Americans have cared to call their occupational
activity professional, few have succeeded in bringing to the concept a consistent and coherent
interpretation. When nearly everyone ‘cares’ from gamblers and killers to jet fighters and
physicians, the question ‘who’s a professional?’ loses its seriousness of meaning” (“Discussing
Terms” 1). As my dissertation has demonstrated, the question, in fact, acquires its seriousness
due to the amorphous and contingent nature of the “professional,” which repeatedly takes on the
traits of its apparent opposite term, the “amateur.” I have argued that modernist literature offers
a particularly clear depiction of the historical fluidity and intermixing of the two terms; the
modernist period, as many have pointed out, was one in which the contingent, the ambiguous,
the mercurial features of what it meant to be a professional were more tolerated than they are
today.

I see this project as having implications for modernist studies in the way it urges us to be
more nuanced and searching in our treatment of the terms “professional” and “amateur” just as
we have become so toward similar critical terms like “highbrow” and “culture.” As I argued in
the introductory chapter, there is strong evidence to suggest that sweeping assertions identifying
the modernist period with professionalization in technology and the university overlook the
intellectual labour undertaken by modernist writers to articulate amateur habits of mind that
could be incorporated into the developing professional systems. I argued that many of our
conceptions of the amateur in the popular cultural imaginary—the private eye, the common
reader, the public intellectual, the Renaissance man—were constructed during the modernist
period because they articulated particular ways of conceptualizing one’s relationship to work that
appeared to be under threat by a ubiquitous professionalization. Further, I see this project as
contributing to current debates on the modernist public sphere. I have argued that modernist discussions of professional society were often concerned with civic participation and democratic debate, specifically in their recognition of the conflict between the narrowly specializing and increasingly isolated professional and the increasing complexity of everyday life that left the layman searching for answers. Far from encouraging the narrow elitism of the specialist, the modernist writers I studied (as well as many important critical voices of the period) sought to build links between academic and institutional expertise and the broader public.

I also see this study intersecting with debates addressing the current and future state of higher education. An analysis of modernist amateurism has much to tell us in the context of current inquiries into the future of the academy as we struggle to bridge popular and professional voices in an emerging digital world that spurns strict disciplinary delineations and encourages cross-cultural collaboration. I believe we can gain from the modernists’ understanding of the professions as an unfinished project that can and should be altered. Virginia Woolf’s paradoxical claim that women should join the professions and simultaneously radically redefine them, or Dashiell Hammett’s mixture of loyalty to and defiance of professional authorities both real and fictional, demonstrate a contingent and experimental relationship to professional life that should cause us to be skeptical of recent apocalyptic claims regarding the future of professional life in the humanities. Most important, perhaps, studying modernist responses to the shifting professions can make us more attuned to the rhetoric of professionals as they discuss the professions. John Guillory, for example, traces the way that the increasingly tight humanities job market has led to a hyper-professionalization within English departments, which have responded by encouraging the “preprofessionalization” of their graduate students in order to make them supposedly more competitive. As Jennifer Ruth rightly notes, these shifts in the discipline are actually the result of its “deprofessionalization” as departments are forced to rely increasingly
upon contingent labour while seeming to have more difficulty articulating how they fulfill a professional service ethic. The terminological acrobatics that turn back upon themselves and implicitly imagine an earlier, more perfect professionalism either before “theory” or before “the corporatization of the university” often offer trenchant analysis of the problems facing the humanities but are limited in their solution since they adopt a binary language that persists in imagining strict delineations between professionals and amateurs. As this project has demonstrated, professions have long been seen as problematically too narrow or too broad in their membership, and at least since the early twentieth century, their effects upon the public sphere and upon individual workers’ lives have been vigorously debated. Unlike our own moment, in which the context of professional activity is the language of accountability and economic growth, modernist discussions of professional society drew an intuitive connection between the professions, civic life, and pleasurable work. Today’s debates might benefit not only from understanding the tradition of debate about the status of the professions—it is hardly limited to the neo-liberalism of the past thirty years—but also by considering the positive elements of amateurism that seek to bridge the activities of the academy with the political and social concerns of the broader community. After all, it has been professionals themselves who have most fully imagined the thought processes of the amateur.
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