Queer Formations of the Self in Woolf and Forster

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QUEER FORMATIONS OF THE SELF IN WOOLF AND FORSTER

by

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis considers the relationship between queerness and the Bildungsroman in three early twentieth-century novels by Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster: *Jacob’s Room* (1922), *Maurice* (1971), and *Orlando* (1928).¹ I draw from Mikhail Bakhtin’s essay, “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)” and Franco Moretti’s book, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, both of which conceptualize the Bildungsroman as portraying the teleological, parallel emergence of man and nation. The themes of sexual dissidence in Woolf and Forster’s works trouble the metonymic relationship of protagonist to national-historical time and challenge naturalized logics of historical and social continuity. While scholars like Jed Etsy have addressed the fraught position of the twentieth-century Bildungsroman with theorizations of the “modernist bildungsroman,” the “metabildungsroman,” or the “anti-bildungsroman,” I focus on the classical formulations of the genre: originating for Bakhtin with Goethe and the German Enlightenment, and for Moretti, both Goethe and his reception in nineteenth-century England.² In holding these texts against theories of the classical Bildungsroman, curious convergences and contradictions between the eras begin to surface, revealing the satirization of masculine heroism, the revolution of epistemological thought, and the locus of deep-rooted cultural myths. Altogether, these three studies are concerned with novelistic queerness as a constitutive paradigm for interpreting modernity, and how alternative formulations of gender and sexuality construct the relationship between the self and the nation.

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¹ *Maurice* was published posthumously in 1971, but E.M. Forster wrote it in 1913-1914.
My first chapter investigates the slantwise narration of Woolf’s novel *Jacob’s Room*. Borrowing from Sara Ahmed’s theorization of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “queer moment” in her book *Queer Phenomenology*, I examine how the novel operates through disorientations of form and time. My following chapter involves Eve Sedgwick’s theory of homosociality in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* with José Esteban Muñoz’s queer utopian hermeneutic from *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* to interrogate Edwardian schemas of gender and sexuality adapted from Plato’s dialogues in E.M. Forster’s *Maurice*. My final chapter on the 1928 novel *Orlando* invokes Judith Butler’s post-structuralist theories of gender from *Gender Trouble* to consider Woolf’s parodic disruption of the social order and the biography as form. I understand the novel as enacting a series of reiterative Bakhtinian emergences that expose the regulatory fictions of gender in successive epochs.

In the realm of fiction, where we can haunt the spaces we aren’t allowed, where divine transformations take place in an instant, where the greenwood hails normality’s outlaws, these texts originate and complicate the symbolic interplay between youth, modernity, and queerness and invite us to imagine deviant ways of becoming.
Jacobs’s Room: A Slantwise Elegy

Woolf’s 1922 novel, Jacobs’s Room, follows Jacob Flanders through his childhood, university days, grand tour, and work in London until his death in the First World War. For a titular character, however, Jacob appears markedly absent from the narration, which unfolds in fragmentary dialogue and fleeting impressions from friends, acquaintances, and even strangers in Jacob’s life. This polyphonic mode of narration creates an ever-changing portrait of a young man whose eminence is constantly taken for granted, but whose character eludes even those closest to him. Jacob’s proleptic death creates an ironic distance between Jacob and the other characters in the novel, including the narrator—they see his passivity as silent composure, his remoteness as hidden depth, endowing him with their own associations and aspirations. Woolf renders Jacob’s narrative through a series of “queer moments,” and these moments of disorientation trouble the phenomenological ground on which Jacob as a “straight” masculine hero protagonist stands. In addition, the elegiac mode of the novel presents an alternative teleological model of the Bildungsroman, in which the slantwise narration undermines Jacob’s significance and purpose, and his early death arrests the parallel emergence of self and nation.

Despite its depiction of Jacob’s passage from adolescence to adulthood, several elements of Woolf’s novel deviate from a traditional “coming-of-age novel”—most notably, of course, Jacob’s death, which is related indirectly on the final page. This realization comes abruptly, but Woolf constantly foreshadows and prefigures Jacob’s death. For instance, in the first scene of the novel, the young Jacob discovers a whole sheep’s skull on the beach, which he carries back in his arms to his mother (10).3 Also, because of its allusion to bloodshed on World War I battlefields, as immortalized in John McCrae’s poem “In Flanders Fields,” Alex Zwerdling writes, “as her

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3 Orlando also begins with a boy and a skull, but instead of cradling the skull in his arms as the doomed Jacob does, the eternal Orlando slices at it with a sword, as if to conquer death.
first readers in 1922 would certainly have known, Flanders was a synonym for death in battle” (64). In his essay “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism,” Mikhail Bakhtin offers a detailed classification of different Bildungsromane, tracing the influence of late eighteenth-century German thought and Goethe’s novels (which he argues epitomize the Bildungsroman) on the Victorian realists. According to Bakhtin, instead of presenting a static character, the “ready-made hero,” or depicting man’s emergence against a static backdrop of the outside world, the most “significant” and “realistic” type of Bildungsroman conveys man’s emergence congruently with “national-historical” time:

[Man] emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man. The organizing force held by the future is therefore extremely great here—and this is not, of course, the private biographical future, but the historical future. It is as though the very foundations of the world are changing, and man must change along with them […] The image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature […] and enters into a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence. (Bakhtin 23-24, emphasis his)

Bakhtin describes a harmonious and momentous confluence of national and human emergence that Jacob’s Room fundamentally thwarts. Jacob’s fate parallels his era in the sense that the First World War brought about a period of sharp disillusionment and anti-patriotic sentiment, but while the foundations of his world change, while the rest of England proceeds broken and embittered, he disappears. Instead of culminating with the birth of a “new, unprecedented type of
human being,” the novel ends with its hero’s dehumanization and death, which leads many scholars to classify the novel as an elegy.⁴ Indeed, *Jacob’s Room* corresponds to elegy, without corresponding to eulogy, because its subject is so evasive and his death so unceremonious. Zwerdling compares the novel to war literature of the time, which he argues tends to convey either “high idealism or heroic indignation or romantic intensity,” even as it reflects this general disillusionment, leading him to write that Woolf posits a “covert critique of the romantic posturing so common in the anthems for doomed youth” (73). The “historical future” exerts a great organizing force in the novel, but instead of emerging along with the world, the protagonist gets subsumed by it. Instead of adapting to and embodying the world’s shifting foundations, the young man ceases to exist, his potential actions forestalled. Woolf even seems to subvert this idea of a “new, spatial sphere of historical existence,” as Jacob’s image dissipates into space, leaving only an empty room (176).

While Bakhtin’s ideal “novel of human emergence” ultimately describes Goethe’s work, his emphasis on the reciprocity of self-formation and epoch-formation also speaks to the interrelation of adulthood and nationalist destiny in the Victorian Bildungsroman. Woolf’s novel works against the socially integrative model of the Victorian era, where the subject develops according to certain familial, professional, and moral matrices. Jacob Flanders exemplifies a type of man of his class, age, and era, but he remains dislocated from a certain national-historical consciousness that the narrator imbuces into the narrative. As Jacob and Timmy Durrant sail toward the Scilly Isles, the tragedy of the nation’s past clouds the narrator’s perspective of its landscape. While the boys are absorbed in interpersonal conflict, indifferent to the beauty of their

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⁴ Laura Marcus, Nancy Worman, Jeannette McVicker, Alex Zwerdling, et al. engage with this idea.
surroundings, the narrator describes how the mainland behind them appears extraordinarily full
of “piety” and “peace”:

But imperceptibly the cottage smoke droops, has the look of a mourning emblem, a flag
floating its caress over a grave […] Yes, the chimneys and the coast-guard stations and
the little bays with the waves breaking unseen by any one makes one remember the
overpowering sorrow. And what can this sorrow be?

It is brewed by the earth itself. It comes from the houses on the coast. We start
transparent, and then the cloud thickens. All history backs our pane of glass. To escape is
vain.

But whether this is the right interpretation of Jacob’s gloom as he sat naked, in the sun,
looking at Land’s End, it is impossible to say; for he never spoke a word. (49)

The narrator’s curious feeling of sorrow seems to extend beyond the tragedy of the war, to an
inescapable sense of fatality brought on by the innocuous sight of chimneys and cottages and
waves. The smoke first looks like a “mourning emblem,” perhaps like a burial flag over a
military grave, but this collective sadness “is brewed by the earth itself,” surpassing human
conflict and occurring naturally and unavoidably. The narrator pivots to Jacob’s “gloom,” which
the previous pages suggest stems from his quarrel with Timmy rather than the inevitability of
human mortality, demonstrating Jacob’s disjunction with his historical existence. Woolf
concludes this passage with a note of ambiguity, reminding the reader of the profound
unknowability of her protagonist.

Woolf portrays Jacob through a semi-linear sequence of disparate images and fragmented
scenes from a series of different perspectives. This technique of narration embodies her
conception of modernism and the modern novelist’s potential to express the reality of human
experience. In her 1919 essay “Modern Novels,” she writes that “the mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life, receives upon its surface a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” (33). According to Woolf, the chief task of the novelist is to convey this fundamental cognitive experience of these “myriad impressions,” this “incessant shower of innumerable atoms” that one receives, rather than imposing artificial order or contrived ideas of tragedy or comedy (33). For Woolf, this literary mission requires the abandonment of linear plots, predictable transitions, and clear-cut symbolism. She expands on this theme in her later essay “Character in Fiction,” where she excuses the aesthetics of the “Georgian age” of writers (the modernists) by explaining, “we must reconcile ourselves to a season of failures and fragments. We must reflect that where so much strength is spent on finding a way of telling the truth the truth itself is bound to reach us in rather an exhausted and chaotic condition” (435). Woolf’s conception of this “truth” lies in the disinterested expression of character, in her prismatic portrayals of figures like Mrs. Dalloway or Mrs. Ramsay – but where Woolf endows those characters with a rich interiority, she denies Jacob one at all.

In discussing To the Lighthouse, Eric Auerbach writes that “the essential characteristic” of Woolf’s modernist technique is her multiplicity of perspectives (536). He argues that “the design of a close approach to objective reality by means of numerous subjective impressions received by various individuals (and at various times)” is what differentiates her modernism from the “unipersonal subjectivism” of past authors (Auerbach 536). According to Auerbach, examples of these “past authors” include Goethe, Keller, Dickens, Meredith, Balzac, and Zola (535). Rather than suggesting “we are here after all confronted with an endeavor to investigate an objective reality, that is, specifically, the ‘real,’” as Auerbach views Woolf’s portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay, the multiplicity of contradictory perspectives around Jacob suggest an absence of objective reality, because there is
no central perspective to anchor the satellite impressions. Auerbach identifies two methods of representing consciousness in literary history – unipersonal subjectivism and multipersonal objectivism, but Woolf’s method in *Jacob’s Room* seems to be multipersonal subjectivism. In her book *Queer Phenomenology* where she reformulates the spatiality of sexual orientation, Sara Ahmed argues that the body is not a neutral, universal apparatus for perceiving objects in space. She sees Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the “queer moment,” a moment of disorientation where the world appears “slantwise,” as a transformative possibility to rethink the tenets of phenomenology (65). We can adopt Ahmed’s philosophy to view *Jacob’s Room* as a “slantwise” Bildungsroman, where moments in the central character’s life are always described from an angle, from some remove. Consider, for example, the following passage, where the narrator assembles these “numerous subjective impressions” and offers a succession of brief and distinct testimonies to Jacob’s character:

Mrs. Durrant said that Jacob Flanders was “distinguished-looking.” “Extremely awkward,” she said, “but so distinguished-looking.” […]

“I like Jacob Flanders,” wrote Clara Durrant in her diary. […]

Then Julia Eliot said “the silent young man,” and as she dined with Prime Ministers, no doubt she meant: “If he is going to get on in the world, he will have to find his tongue.”

Timothy Durrant never made any comment at all.

The housemaid found herself very liberally rewarded.

Mr. Sopwith’s opinion was as sentimental as Clara’s, though far more skilfully expressed.

Betty Flanders was romantic about Archer and tender about John; she was unreasonably irritated by Jacob’s clumsiness in the house.

Captain Barfoot liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why... (JR 71)
With this accelerated free indirect style, Woolf brings together different characters’ opinions of Jacob, varying according to their own dispositions, positionalities, or degrees of relation. In some ways, Woolf endows Jacob Flanders with characteristics of Bakhtin’s “ready-made hero,” but she also constantly plays with the idea of his eminent heroic status. Bakhtin describes the “ready-made hero” as an unchanging center with presupposed “static unity,” whose self is predetermined and who represents a “dogmatically accepted ideal” (21,13).6 Because it is fixed, or static, this ideal differs from the man transformed, the “unprecedented type of human being” in Bakhtin’s ultimate type of Bildungsroman. From the onset of the novel, Jacob possesses a “distinguished” and “unconscious” air about him. He is archetypal; he reflects the values of the social organizations and institutions that formed him, and in this way, he embodies a dogmatically accepted ideal. His allure is occasionally questioned, resented even, but never doubted by those around him. Yet, the narrator exaggerates this unquestioned adoration to the point of satire: for instance, even Jacob’s boredom is “august” (145). Moreover, Jacob certainly lacks “static unity” – Woolf emphasizes this fact with her verbatim repetition of these two sentences in the third and twelfth chapters: “It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done” (31, 154). Therefore, Woolf’s narrator accepts Jacob as an unstable enigma, whose rare instances of speech and action yield little more insight into his character than, for instance, his housemaid’s appraisal of his tipping style.

After this collection of differing descriptions, the narrator concludes that a “profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion” of another is impossible, and muses that the figures and identities one clings to in life amount to a mere “procession of shadows” (72). Then, the prose transitions into a conversation between Jacob and Richard Bonamy, where Jacob’s inner

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6 In Bakhtin’s typology, he refers to the Bildungsroman protagonist as the “hero” until his fifth and ultimate type of Bildungsroman in which the protagonist becomes “man.”
monologue is inserted within parenthesis, and Bonamy’s replies are omitted. Jacob’s thoughts are too cheerful and expository for the broody young man, (i.e. “I’m twenty-two. It’s nearly the end of October […] Everything is really very jolly—except getting up in the morning and wearing a tailcoat”), suggesting they are inferences from the older, female narrator who teases that his only care in the world would be his tailcoat. The narrator interjects:

But though all this may very well be true—so Jacob thought and spoke […] there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy—the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history. Then consider the effect of sex—how between man and woman it hangs wavy, tremulous, so that here’s a valley, there’s a peak, when in truth, perhaps, all’s as flat as my hand. […] But something is always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery, endowing Jacob Flanders with all sorts of qualities he had not at all—for though, certainly, he sat talking to Bonamy, half of what he said was too dull to repeat; much unintelligible (about unknown people and Parliament); what remains is mostly a matter of guess work. Yet over him we hang vibrating. (73)

In this passage that epitomizes the novel’s relationship to its main character, Woolf switches pronouns three times – from “my hand,” to “impelling one” and finally to “we hang.” This shifting perspective emphasizes the idea that something eludes the observer, something “remains over” about Jacob. In addition, it suggests this effort to characterize Jacob is a shared one, especially as the narrator seems to pool her inferences together with Bonamy’s memory of the time and place. In calling her assertions a matter of “guess work,” the narrator undermines her

7 “Granted ten years’ seniority and a difference of sex, fear of him comes first” (JR 94).
own narratorial authority. This passage links this condition of “not knowing” to the question of gender. First suggesting that “the effect of sex” might distort the female narrator’s portrayal of the young man, the narrator then intimates that this drama of sexual difference is a topographical illusion. The previous passage in which Jacob’s thoughts appeared as parentheticals, then, becomes an exaggerated demonstration of the exercise of the entire novel, because the narrator over-embellishes an inevitably inaccurate portrayal. Also, in likening the collective narration to a hawk moth hanging over Jacob Flanders, this passage speaks to the slantwise view of reality, because the moth can only catch glimpses of Jacob while hovering outside his window or flitting behind him through the streets of London. The narrator’s use of the present tense for “one” and “we” and the past tense for “Jacob,” combined with her use of his full name, suggest that Jacob’s death is part of this condition of unknowability, part of the intrigue of this “cavern of mystery.”

Because of his association with World War I, perhaps even more than he represents an individual, Jacob Flanders represents a generation of men, and this lack of specificity allows others to project onto his character. This projection is especially evident when Jacob’s female admirers constantly compare him to statues. Across from him at the dinner table, Florinda absent-mindedly compares Jacob to the “lovely things” in the British Museum (80). At the Guy Fawkes party, Jacob elects to stand against the wall instead of dancing, but the dancers find his stillness so beautiful that they adorn him with paper flowers and glass grapes until he looked like “the figurehead of a wrecked ship” (75). Sandra Wentworth Williams stands a certain way so as to visually align Jacob’s head with the head of a Hermes statue by Praxiteles, and she finds that “the comparison was all in his favour” (145). When Fanny Elmer waits for Jacob to return from Greece, her idea of him becomes “more statuesque, noble, and eyeless than ever” (170). Fanny “reinforce[s] her vision” of Jacob in ritual visits the British Museum where, “keeping her eyes
downcast until she was alongside of the battered Ulysses, she opened them and got a fresh shock of Jacob's presence, enough to last her half a day” (170). Those who desire him constantly defer his physical presence and life force, they ascribe his beauty to his remoteness and inanimacy. If Jacob does represent a “dogmatically accepted ideal,” that is, the young and attractive gentleman scholar, Woolf tinges this ideal with melancholy, casting him as a remnant from a ship that has wrecked, or a crumbling reproduction of an ancient hero preserved on a plinth. After *Tristan und Isolde* comes to an end, Clara Durrant “said farewell to Jacob Flanders, and tasted the sweetness of death in effigy” (68). Clara simulates the grand heartbreak of Wagner’s heroine as she parts from Jacob at the opera. In addition to creating yet another prefiguration of Jacob’s death, Clara portrays Jacob as a secondary representation of something else, as a surface for her projections rather than a fully dimensional person. With their continual romanticization of his figure, these characters reinforce Woolf’s image of the hawk moth hanging over Jacob and endowing him with contrived qualities.

In fact, Jacob as a character does little to earn this inexplicably distinguished essence he possesses. Instead, the characters around him create this essence, in effect foisting the stature of a hero onto an ordinary boy. After the uninspiring luncheon party with a Cambridge don, Jacob is horrified by the stuffiness and banality of the don’s domestic life, especially of his liberal politics and the “Shaw and Wells and the serious sixpenny weeklies!” in his house. The narrator writes, “The extent to which he was disturbed proves that he was already agog […] He was impressionable; but the word is contradicted by the composure with which he hollowed his hand to screen a match. He was a young man of substance” (36). Jacob is “insolent and inexperienced” as an undergraduate, but the sophisticated air with which he lights his cigarette rescues him from insignificance. “He was a young man of substance” – What is this substance? The reader learns
he has not managed to finish any one of Shakespeare’s plays through the end (47). When asked if he likes music, Jacob replies, “Yes, […] I know nothing about it” (89). Even after graduating with a degree in classics from Cambridge, Jacob “knew no more Greek than served him to stumble through a play” and “of ancient history he knew nothing” (76). Jacob lacks substance, he is immaterial, illusory – he barely coheres through this hodgepodge of outside perspectives that fail to see past his promissory appearance. Finally, in this contradiction that she draws between Jacob as “composed” and Jacob as “impressionable,” Woolf suggests that rather than being constituted Jacob by the impressions made upon himself, Jacob is constituted by the impressions he makes on others.

Indeed, the narrator often construes Jacob’s substance through external signifiers, like when she sketches the intellectual canon that Jacob immerses himself in through a description of his room at Cambridge University: “there were yellow flags in a jar on the mantelpiece; a photograph of his mother; cards from societies with little raised crescents, coats of arms, and initials; notes and pipes on the table lay paper ruled with a red margin – an essay, no doubt – ‘Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?’” (38-39). The narrator starts with declarative statements about his various objects, but ironically, with the interjection “an essay, no doubt,” she throws these facts into doubt, and this passage cataloging the contents of his room becomes an imaginative exercise. She goes on to note his book collection, which includes, “Lives of the Duke of Wellington, for example; Spinoza; the works of Dickens; the Faery Queen; a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages; all the Elizabethans,” (39). “Carlyle was a prize,” she adds (39). Natasha Periyan notes that Jacob’s title reformulates Thomas Carlyle’s assertion from his 1841 collection of lectures On Heroes that

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8 Mr. Ramsay asks himself a similar question, “Does the progress of civilization depend on great men?” (TTL 42).
“The History of the world is but the Biography of great men” (Periyan 138, Carlyle 28). Franco Moretti also reformulates this sentence when he concludes that the guiding belief of the classical Bildungsroman (and what lost it favor in the twentieth century) was that “the biography of a young individual was the most meaningful viewpoint for the understanding and the evaluation of history” (227). By portraying the English canon sitting ignored in an empty room, Woolf also seems to challenge the masculine, heroic ideology from the Victorian era that Carlyle signifies and the Bildungsroman enacts, because the hero of this biography is absent.

Jacob Flanders enters the University of Cambridge in October 1906 (29). In September 1906, the Stephen family traveled to Greece, and Virginia’s older brother Thoby died that November. Without placing undue importance on the confluence of these fictional and real-life events, one might note that “October 1906” is the first and only date to appear in the novel, which anchors the title character to the midpoint of the Edwardian period upon his arrival to university. The attitude of “waning British Hellenism” left over from the late Victorian period shapes Jacob’s decision to study classics at university and travel to Italy and Greece on his grand tour (McVicker 90). Woolf’s discussion of the Classics as a discipline often hinges on Latin and Greek’s centrality to the elitist “Oxbridge” curriculum only afforded to her male peers. In her 1940 essay, “The Leaning Tower,” Woolf describes nineteenth and twentieth-century attitudes through the formation and subsequent unsettling, or “leaning,” of the ivory tower. When Woolf describes the concentration of educated men, she writes that “England has crammed a small aristocratic class with Latin and Greek and logic and metaphysics and mathematics” (LT 276). Similarly, when she examines Louis MacNeice, an example of a “tower-conscious” writer who therefore grapples with the double-edged sword of the privileged education he acquired at

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9 Thomas Carlyle also produced an influential translation in 1824 of Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, which both Moretti and Bakhtin view as the Bildungsroman’s founding exemplar.
Merton College, Woolf writes that at Oxford, he learned “Latin and Greek; and philosophy, logic, and metaphysics” (269). “Latin and Greek” begin the list of disciplines that Woolf uses as shorthand for the Oxbridge curriculum, the “paid-for” culture criticized in *Three Guineas*, so for Woolf the classics are foundational subjects for the privileged student. Woolf, unlike Thoby and Jacob, was denied access to proper training in classical languages, and exhibits an ambivalence toward Ancient Greek in her work, revering the language for its beauty while also reckoning with the integration of ancient masculine heroism into British imperialist ideology.

Jacob Flanders typifies a generation of young men steeped in British Hellenistic fantasies of masculine heroism and imperial conquest. When Jacob and Timmy Durrant walk back from Guy Fawkes Night, Jacob initiates a heated discussion in which they quote Aeschylus and Sophocles back to each other. With a note of sardonicism, the narrator writes that while no Greek person could have understood them, or Greek professor refrained from correcting them, “What is Greek for if not to be shouted on Haverstock Hill in the dawn?” (76). Without meaningfully listening to each other, “it seemed to both that they had read every book in the world; known every sin, passion, and joy. Civilizations stood round them like flowers ready for picking. Ages lapped at their feet like waves fit for sailing” (76). These similes trivialize conquest and the passage of time, as if all the world’s knowledge from all ages is at their feet. The young men’s boyish triumph and entitlement reach a peak when, with a final hubristic flourish, Jacob asserts that they are “the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant” (76). Jacob and Timmy project a sophomoric and exceptionalist attitude, an attitude similar to Nancy Worman’s analysis of Woolf’s “fashioning of Greek tragic inflections of character” where “choral and poetic sensibilities tend to be feminized, marginal and only quasi-human, while men (especially

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10 “The paid–for culture–the culture which, in Miss Weeton’s definition, includes physics, divinity, astronomy, chemistry, botany, logic and mathematics, as well as Latin, Greek and French.” (*Three Guineas* 90)
young men) more often stand as if at the centre of the world, presumptuous and myopic, as well as doomed to be sacrificed to imperialist fantasies” (8). Woolf tinges the scene with sad irony, because the same imperial spirit that inspires his dawn conversation will ultimately lead to his death.

Woolf also reflects on the marginalization of women from dominant British education systems in *A Room of One’s Own*. In a hypothetical scene at the opening of the book, Woolf describes a beadle interrupting her thoughts to chastise her for straying from the gravel path onto the grass, where women were not permitted. She writes that “his face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help, he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me” (*AR* 6). In the first scene of Jacob at Cambridge, Jacob expresses striking similar sentiments to Woolf’s ironic “instinct” when he notices the colorful hats of women attending the Chapel service. He thinks to himself, “though a dog is all very well on a gravel path […] the way he wanders down an aisle, looking, lifting a paw, and approaching a pillar with a purpose that makes the blood run cold with horror […] a dog destroys the service completely. So do these women – though separately devout, distinguished, and vouched for by the theology, mathematics, Latin, and Greek of their husbands” (*JR* 33). Aside from comparing a woman’s presence on campus to a dog urinating, Jacob suggests that only the virtue of these classical academic disciplines upholds the sanctity of the university campus when that sanctity is threatened by silly hats and territorial dogs.

After the brief glimpse of Jacob’s inner monologue in the chapel scene, the narrator withdraws from Jacob’s perspective as his university days unfold, personifying the lack of women’s access to education. The narrator ironizes the mythical status of Cambridge, writing
that the sky above the roof of King’s College Chapel is “lighter, thinner, more sparkling” than the sky elsewhere, and that its light burns through both day and night (32). Foreshadowing the perspective of the woman on the grass from *A Room of One’s Own*, or even the “woman outsider” from *Three Guineas*, Woolf describes the young men in their rooms at night from an eerie distance, as if watching through the window from the courtyard. Sprawled over chairs or clustered around tables, the young scholars read, smoke, eat, and argue, but the narrator can only guess that each of these actions occurs behind the grey walls, as she would never be able to enter the space as a woman (42-43). At the end of the night, Jacob stays behind alone with Simeon, and they reach some unknown conclusion about Julian the Apostate:

True, the words were inaudible. It was the intimacy, a sort of spiritual suppleness, when mind prints upon mind indelibly. ‘Well, you seem to have studied the subject,’ said Jacob, rising and standing over Simeon's chair. He balanced himself; he swayed a little. He appeared extraordinarily happy, as if his pleasure would brim and spill down the sides if Simeon spoke.

Simeon said nothing. Jacob remained standing. But intimacy—the room was full of it, still, deep, like a pool. Without need of movement or speech it rose softly and washed over everything, mollifying, kindling, and coating the mind with the lustre of pearl, so that if you talk of a light, of Cambridge burning, it's not languages only. It's Julian the Apostate.11 (46)

Woolf describes the young men’s mutual intellectual stimulation with the language of sexual pleasure, but the eroticism in her portrayal mocks them. Firstly, Simeon fails to reappear in the

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11 Vara Neverow argues that considering the sexual undertones of the scene starting on page 43, the reference to Julian the Apostate (who failed to reinstate Neoplatonic Hellenism over Christianity during his reign) evokes the Greco-Roman values of the Cambridge Apostles (155).
novel, challenging the “indelibility” of this “mind printing upon mind.” Jacob stands above Simeon, “his pleasure” on the verge of “brimming” and “spilling” “down the sides” at the suggestion of Simeon’s next discursive contribution. They share a tacit understanding, an “intimacy” unable to be fully discerned by the feminine outsider. Then, when this “intimacy” pools and wells up, “washing over everything” and “coating the mind with the lustre of pearl,” Woolf seems to imply that for all its academic renown, its storied traditions and architectural majesty – this shining pinnacle of education is but a glorified circle-jerk.

Woolf’s portrayal of Edwardian Cambridge suggests an adaptation of ideas from Plato’s *Symposium*, which claims the highest forms of love are those outside the company of women, and that carnal desire, specifically heterosexual desire, distracts from more worthwhile virtues like love of wisdom. After Jacob writes a tirade against Professor Bulteel’s censored edition of Wycherley but then inwardly recoils at Florinda’s advances, the narrator reveals that “in spite of defending indecency, Jacob doubted whether he liked it in the raw. He had a violent reversion towards male society, cloistered rooms, and the works of the classics” (82). Jacob soothes himself with this idea of solemn, almost monkish male society. Markedly different from the effortlessly erotic encounter with Simeon, the half-vacant Florinda presents too strong and open a proposition. In contrast to the “lightening-quick, sneering, out-of-doors” manner that Aristophanes evokes for Woolf, Jacob summons a vision of classics existing in closed-off, dark spaces, safe from the low and fleshy desires of women (*ONKG* 40). His ideas echo Desmond MacCarthy’s description of late Edwardian Cambridge, which instilled a preference for “abstract speculation” and “aesthetic emotions” over public causes (*LT* 264). Therefore, in addition to portraying its barring women from classrooms and church services, in the passage between Simeon and Jacob, Woolf presents Cambridge as breeding an eroticism that excludes women.
Through her examination of nineteenth-century English literature in her book *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick identifies homosociality as a governing social mechanism in which the male-female bonds are structured by inherent male-male bonds. Sedgwick compares this modern structure to the political landscape of ancient Greece, which blurred the divisions between homosociality and homosexuality. She cites K. J. Dover, who describes male homosexuality in Ancient Greece as a “widespread licit, and very influential part of the culture” (Dover in Sedgwick 4). This homosexuality, as theorized in part by Plato’s *Symposium*, took the form of pedagogical pederasty that emphasized the shaping of the younger counterpart into an Athenian citizen. Sedgwick writes that the privileges of this citizenship “included the power to command the labor of slaves of both sexes, and of women of any class including their own” (4). She quotes Hannah Arendt on the impetus behind this system of class and gender subordination, “contempt for laboring originally arose out of a passionate striving for freedom from necessity and a no less passionate impatience with every effort that left no trace, no monument, no great work worthy to remembrance” (Arendt in Sedgwick 4). Cambridge University, Gray’s Inn, the army – Jacob’s educational and professional spheres of life are all homosocial settings, and yet the narration is structured by female perspectives, especially the narrator’s. The narrator seems relegated to the margins of these spaces, forced to describe “the other side – the men in clubs and Cabinets” from a wistful distance (*JR* 155).

However, this distance also allows Woolf to accentuate the absurdity of these masculine spaces, particularly through characters like Jacob’s chambermaid or the housekeeper Mrs. Papworth. The dynamic that Arendt identifies, that is, the idea that the underlying need for “freedom from necessity” and the desire to leave behind an enduring legacy behind drove gender and class subordination in the ancient context, also appears in *Jacob’s Room*. For instance, when
Jacob imagines himself as an adult delivering grand speeches in Parliament on high matters of political importance, the narrator writes, “For he had grown to be a man, and was about to be immersed in things – as indeed the chambermaid, emptying his basin upstairs, fingering keys, studs, pencils, and bottles of tabloids strewn on the dressing-table, was aware” (139). Woolf undermines her protagonist’s daydream, emasculating him by revealing how the chambermaid still has to pick up all his material belongings. This humorous contrast between Jacob’s fantasy of a life of importance in Parliament and the chambermaid emptying his basin suggests that this ideological division of labor endures well into modern life.

Another tangential character in the novel’s prism of female perspectives, Mrs. Papworth demonstrates a similar phenomenon, except this time she mocks the homoeroticism of these young male relationships. For example, as Jacob and Bonamy roughhouse in Bonamy’s room at Lincoln Inn, going at each other like “two bulls of Bashan driving each other up and down,” Mrs. Papworth washes the dishes in the kitchen. “‘Women’—she thought, and wondered what Sanders and her gentleman did in that line,” the narrator writes, as Mrs. Papworth has not bothered to fully remember Jacob’s name (102). The housekeeper summarizes their philosophical argument as “objective something,” “common ground” and “something else,” diminishing their grand intellectual gestures to meaningless “book-learned” words half-heard through the wall (102). This scene between Jacob and Bonamy, or the scene in Simeon’s room render homosexual desire as a natural continuation of young homosocial relationships – these moments are implicit and inconsequential, but most often, fodder for mockery. Both the chambermaid and Mrs. Papworth belittle Jacob’s significance, especially as he tries to assert himself, either politically or intellectually. In Bakhtin’s typology of the Bildungsroman, changes in the hero’s self acquire plot significance, whereas in Jacob’s Room, changes in the hero’s self, like his “growing into being a
man” or developing a political consciousness, become side sources of amusement for the narrator.

Throughout the novel, the narrator makes oblique references to Bonamy’s queerness. Richard Bonamy, “who couldn't love a woman and never read a foolish book” – the mention of his name makes the “character-mongering” gossips pause “to hint at his peculiar disposition—long rumoured among them” (140, 154). Bonamy, who was “fonder of Jacob than of any one in the world” seems closer to Jacob than others and offers several of the clearest insights into Jacob’s consciousness, and the novel closes with him and Mrs. Flanders in Jacob’s Room. Even so, like Jacob’s female admirers, Bonamy cannot help seeing him as, “fixed, monolithic—oh, very beautiful!—like a British Admiral, exclaimed Bonamy in a rage,” frustrated with Jacob’s stoicism, or perhaps with his own inability to repress his desire for Jacob (165). Bonamy’s styling of Jacob as “fixed, monolithic” reinforces the narrator’s earlier conclusion on the impossibility of judging character – that on this matter, “men and women are equally at fault” (71).

Despite covering significant ground in Greece, Jacob finds it difficult to write to Bonamy to recount his travels. “Poor old Bonamy! No; there was something queer about it. He could not write to Bonamy,” he decides, and resolves to go to Athens anyway, “looking very set, with this hook dragging in his side” (147). Later Jacob writes a telegram summoning Bonamy to Greece, but then throws it out. The prose alternates between Jacob’s thoughts and the narrator’s elaborations to portray Jacob’s inner conflict as he talks himself out of writing Bonamy:

“For one thing he wouldn't come,” he thought. “And then I daresay this sort of thing wears off.” “This sort of thing” being that uneasy, painful feeling, something like selfishness—one wishes almost that the thing would stop—it is getting more and more
beyond what is possible—"If it goes on much longer I shan't be able to cope with it—but if someone else were seeing it at the same time—Bonamy is stuffed in his room in Lincoln's Inn—oh, I say, damn it all, I say.” (149)

The narrator’s definition of “this sort of thing” provides little elucidation of Jacob’s vague and typically English phrasing. This “painful feeling,” somewhat akin to “selfishness” signals an uneasy desire – in moving “more and more beyond what is possible,” the feeling gestures simultaneously towards what is impossible to bear and what is impossible to imagine, where the “unimaginable” is queer desire. He then indicates that calling on “someone else” like Bonamy stuffed in his room to witness this feeling would resolve it. His inability to write Bonamy then, would signal something inexpressible about this desire. At the same time, Jacob could be referring to his general sense of disillusionment upon seeing “the real” Greece, which he finds both beautiful and ridiculous. In this case someone else “seeing it at the same time” could simply refer to the sight of Greece, but that explanation fails to fully account for this unspecified “hook” dragging at Jacob’s side and this feeling of selfish angst. Either way, to Jacob the view from the Parthenon at sunset becomes “oppressive” in solitude (149).

In the sixth chapter, Jacob imagines that walking along the peripatos, he would meet Socrates, who would “bestir himself and say ‘my fine fellows,’” and yet here Jacob declares that he “had little sense of personal association; he seldom thought of Plato or Socrates in the flesh” (76, 149). He tries to efface the uneasiness of his earlier statements by immersing himself in thoughts of architecture, statues, and “the problems of civilization,” searching for self-definition along abstract and aesthetic lines rather than emotional ones (149). Then, after “the hook gave a great tug in his side,” Jacob turns over with a “desperate sort of tumble, remembering Sandra Wentworth Williams with whom he was in love” (149-150). Of course, this memory of Sandra
comes only after his angst-filled self-reflection, and the prepositional phrase “with whom he was in love” (as opposed to “remembering he loved Sandra”) does little to convince the reader of his love. In her analysis of the spatiality of sexual orientation, Sara Ahmed argues that compulsory heterosexuality operates as a “straightening device which rereads signs of queer desire as deviations from the straight line” (23). This argument derives from Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the “queer moment,” in which the subject must use “anchoring points” to re-orient himself and dispel the queer effect in order to extend his body into phenomenal space (Merleau-Ponty 290). Therefore, this “hook” also operates as a straightening device that flips Jacob back upright with the compulsive thought of Sandra. In other words, by indulging these thoughts of Bonamy, Jacob’s sense of identity becomes unmoored, so he uses Sandra as an “anchoring point” to resolve himself.

After Bonamy discovers that Clara Durrant is also hopelessly in love with Jacob, he leaves their conversation and, “for a man of his temperament, got a very queer feeling, as he walked through the park, of carriages irresistibly driven; of flower beds uncompromisingly geometrical; of force rushing round geometrical patterns in the most senseless way in the world” (152). Bonamy’s “queer feeling” seems to anticipate what Merleau-Ponty describes as a “queer moment,” or a moment of disorientation where things appear “slantwise,” involving not only “the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us” (Merleau-Ponty, 296). Bonamy has a brief but overwhelming vision of the world order as a series of irrational, yet unstoppable patterns, a “force” both senseless and rigid. He continues, “‘Was Clara,’ he thought, pausing to watch the boys bathing in the Serpentine, ‘the silent woman?—would Jacob marry her?’” (152). Bonamy imagines Clara as the counterpart to Jacob, whom Julia Eliot deems the
“silent young man” (59). He has a startling vision of a union between two archetypes, and therefore it is the inevitability of heterosexual marriage that brings on Bonamy’s queer moment. In this brief episode, Bonamy gains a peripheral awareness of the senseless innerworkings of the social order.

In 1925, Woolf wrote that “in the vast catastrophe of the European war our emotions had to be broken up for us, and put at an angle from us, before we could allow ourselves to feel them in poetry or fiction” (ONKG 47-48). In Jacob’s Room, Woolf draws implicit connections between the mandates of patriarchy, which include compulsory heterosexuality and the subordination of women, and the waging of war. Woolf’s slantwise narration seems to stem from a combination of these two sources: both the disillusionment with prescriptive gender roles and sexualities and the reaction to the unconscionable tragedy of war. After a haunting description of the WWI battleships sinking in the North Sea, placed between snippets of gossip and moments from Mrs. Durrant’s evening party, Woolf writes, “we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force” (156). These military actions, “together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancellories, and houses of business, are the strokes which oar the world forward, they say,” she writes, distancing herself from this assertion by assigning it to “them” (156). The powers of modernity work ominously, incessantly, and impersonally without consideration or subtlety.

Bonamy briefly catches sight of this machinery, allowing him to embody in microcosm what the novel does at large – in narrating this archetypal masculine subject through oblique and feminine perspectives, Woolf’s novel resists this elusive force, this masculine machinery that compels the never-ending repetitive rushing into worn, straight grooves. Instead, her narrative constantly deviates from these lines, resulting in fragments and ambiguities that reflect the “exhausted and chaotic condition” of truth in the era of modernism (“Character in Fiction” 435).
In a letter written to Margaret Llewelyn Davies in January of 1916, Woolf admits that she becomes “steadily more feminist, owing to the Times, which I read at breakfast and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction keeps going a day longer— without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it— Do you see any sense in it?” (Letters 76).

Exactly how vigorous, or young, or womanly one person would have to be to single-handedly end a global conflict the scale of World War I remains untested, but nevertheless, Woolf’s letter expresses a central tension in Jacob’s Room. We might view her novel as an attempt, not to “see sense” in the war, but to denaturalize the masculine, imperialist ideologies that brought it about by rendering them from a slant. In depicting the Great War’s abrupt termination of the synchronous emergence of man and nation, Woolf’s novel also tempts us to extend this designation of “preposterous masculine fiction” to the Bildungsroman itself.
“The Flesh Educating the Spirit”: Forster’s Inverted Bildungsroman

I have almost completed a long novel, but it is unpublishable until my death and England’s.

– E.M. Forster, 1914

In an essay entitled “Forster’s Self-Erasure,” John Fletcher argues that E.M. Forster’s 1914 novel *Maurice* should be recognized as “the one explicitly homosexual Bildungsroman produced within the mainstream English literary tradition by a canonical author” (*Sexual Sameness* 64). Indeed, *Maurice* chronicles a hero’s passage through adolescence and his integration into a larger social context, but according to Bakhtinian and Morettian formulations of the Bildungsroman as a specific symbolic relationship between coming-of-age and national-historical time, *Maurice* presents a problem. The novel’s explicit homosexuality is more than just a modifier that fulfills some cultural-canonical milestone, because Maurice Hall’s homosexuality is his emergence. Moreover, Maurice’s homosexuality alienates him from the auspices of “normal” English life – his church, his family, his monarchy. In this way, *Maurice* constructs queer identity as existing necessarily outside the bounds of national identity, rendering the phrase “homosexual Bildungsroman” somewhat oxymoronic. Indeed, Forster disrupts a characteristic congruity of the genre by portraying an inverse relationship between the growth of the individual and the growth of the nation. In addition, by subverting the metaphysical dualism between mind and body, E.M. Forster’s novel *Maurice* revises the Platonic ideal of masculine homosexuality and imagines queerness as a horizon beyond the small houses and minds of the English middle-class.

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13 The novel’s discontinuous publication history (written in 1913-1914 and published posthumously in 1971), poses another problem for Fletcher’s “mainstream tradition.”
Forster troubles the natural status of heterosexuality in the very first scene of his novel. This scene, which alludes to the opening of Plato’s *Phaedrus* when Phaedrus walks Socrates beyond the city walls for a discourse on love, sets Maurice Hall apart from his peer group, both spatially and psychologically (Raschke 155). Like Jacob Flanders, young Maurice is fatherless, so his schoolmaster Mr. Ducie takes it upon himself to have a “good talk” before he goes off to attend Sunnington College (*Maurice* 10). As they walk beyond the school, he isolates Maurice from the procession of schoolboys and, like Socrates on the grass, lies down on the sand. The teacher uses his walking stick to draw diagrams in the sand to enhance his lecture, but he fails to impress the fourteen-year-old Maurice, who “watched dully: it bore no relation to his experiences […] it fell to pieces as soon as Mr. Ducie put it together, like an impossible sum” (13-14). To Maurice, the “man-woman” equation is automatically incalculable. Ducie’s explanations of human anatomy and intercourse become meaningless lines in the sand, but Maurice even seems to reject his teacher’s larger concept of the world, which is his over-arching schema of gender. Mr. Ducie thinks of his own fiancé and gets more impassioned, describing the “ideal man—chaste with asceticism” and the “Woman” who exists to be protected and loved by man (15). “It all hangs together— all—and God’s in his heaven, All’s right with the world. Male and female! Ah wonderful!” Ducie exclaims, only for Maurice to reply with, “I think I shall not marry” (15). Ducie paints the world as hanging in a perfect, sacred balance between the sexes, but Maurice’s reply suggests he sees bias and incongruity in Ducie’s position. With this comical re-enactment of the discourse between Phaedrus and Socrates, Forster begins to interrogate deeply entrenched ideas of gender and sexuality.

While Woolf portrays Jacob Flanders’ potential queerness as one of many evasive facets of his personality, and quite often a humorous one, in *Maurice*, no such sideways glances are to be
found. Forster approaches queerness with utmost sincerity, and Maurice’s sexuality becomes his formative characteristic. After the conversation with Mr. Ducie ends, the narrator writes that “suddenly for an instant of time, the boy despised him. ‘Liar,’” he thought. ‘Liar, coward, he’s told me nothing.’...Then darkness rolled up again, the darkness that is primeval but not eternal, and yields to its own painful dawn” (15). Perhaps the first part of this passage suggests nothing more than a typically boyish reaction to a dorky teacher overstepping his bounds, but the sentence that follows carries more weight. This “painful dawn” recalls the discomfort that Plato’s allegorical prisoner faces, when finally released from the cave, his unadjusted eyes burn at seeing the sun for the first time, and he longs to turn back into the darkness, to his false reality (Plato, Republic 515e). For this “instant of time,” in seeing Mr. Ducie’s heterosexual ideals as lies, Maurice glimpses a painful truth before darkness closes over him again and he serves his time at Sunnington in ordinary fashion, as a “mediocre member of a mediocre school” (21). Much later in the text, Maurice agonizes over his sexuality, frustrated at his inability to cure himself through psychiatric hypnosis, which he thinks will “draw the curtains tighter,” and he yearns for “darkness—not the darkness of a house which coops up a man among furniture, but the darkness where he can be free! Vain wish!” (191). In this passage, after he has gained an understanding of himself and the possibilities of “masculine love,” Maurice longs for comfortable ignorance, for a state in which the cruel reality of his desires have no control over him. Therefore, in this early moment in the novel, the young Maurice establishes that the more he comes to understand about his world the less he will belong to it, and that his enlightenment will be inextricably tied to his sexual orientation.

Forster’s 1926 essay “Notes on the English Character” illustrates that Maurice represents a specific type, that is, the middle-class public-school boy. While he presents as a type, though,
Maurice evolves out of his socialized identity over the course of the novel. This evolution differentiates him from the “ready-made hero,” or the predetermined, static protagonist that Bakhtin dismisses as a somewhat rudimentary Bildungsroman trope. Forster encapsulates this development in his “Terminal Note” to *Maurice*, written in 1960:

In Maurice I tried to create a character who was completely unlike myself or what I supposed myself to be: someone handsome, healthy, bodily attractive, mentally torpid, not a bad business man and rather a snob. Into this mixture I dropped an ingredient that puzzles him, wakes him up, torments him and finally saves him. His surroundings exasperate him by their very normality: mother, two sisters, a comfortable home, a respectable job gradually turn out to be Hell; he must either smash them or be smashed, there is no third course. (250-251)

Forster writes that this “ingredient” of homosexuality rescues Maurice from the subtle horrors of “normal” domestic and professional life, by allowing him to imagine a life beyond the preestablished progression of young men subject to his particular disposition and class. Forster expands on this idea of the “Hell” of normality in “Notes on the English Character,” which he begins by stating his opinion that “the character of the English is essentially middle class” (3). He locates the heart of the middle classes (and thus, by his logic, the heart of English character) in the public school system, whose emphasis on “good form and esprit de corps” produces men with “well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts” (4-5). With his presentation as “healthy, bodily attractive” but “mentally torpid,” Maurice seems to embody this public-school archetype, whose mentality is bred into him by public-schooling, rather than developing naturally as an innate characteristic. The Englishman has the potential to feel, but he is “afraid to feel,” because “he has been taught at his public school that feeling is bad form” (5).
Forster endows his fictional character with this same trait when he writes that “a slow nature such as Maurice’s appears insensitive, for it needs time even to feel” (M 60). Betraying a certain sentimentalism behind his liberal humanist perspective, Forster sees this stilted emotional nature and self-isolating instinct as a national failing, and attributes the problems of England’s global affairs to this fault.

Forster argues for a self-deceptive tendency in the English character when he ascribes the hypocrisy of British Empire and the “difficulties” of Englishmen abroad to a fundamental “muddle-headedness” (NEC 11). The educated gentleman unconsciously deceives himself, because “a public-school education does not make for mental clearness, and he possesses to a very high degree the power of confusing his own mind” (11). In Forster’s novel, the word “muddle” orbits Maurice: “Hall was a muddle-headed fellow,” Clive thinks (49); “Maurice could understand muddle, not change,” the narrator states (128); “You’ve to learn I’m always in a muddle” Maurice tells Alec (226). Early in the novel, when the realization of his sexual orientation comes to teenage Maurice, he thinks, “He had lied. He phrased it ‘been fed upon lies,’ but lies are the natural food of boyhood, and he had eaten greedily,” recalling his impression of his schoolteacher Mr. Ducie as a “liar” after their talk (62). Maurice then resolves to “live straight, not because it mattered to anyone now, but for the sake of the game. He would not deceive himself so much” (62). Maurice’s resolve to “live straight” relates to Sara Ahmed’s discussion of the word “queer” and the phenomenological associations of its etymology. She notes that “queer” comes from the Indo-European word “twist,” so queerness becomes a “twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line,’ a sexuality that is bent and crooked” (Ahmed 67). In addition, Maurice thinks paradoxically. “Lies are the natural food of boyhood,” is a general statement, and yet the truth he discovers, this unspeakable trait of his, is an individual, secret
burden. In this moment, however, he frees himself from self-deception, from the pattern so integral to his Englishness. In this way, as Forster’s “Terminal Note” hinted, Maurice’s queerness ultimately saves him, in that the deviation of his desires from the “straight line” initiate his breaking from the immobilizing dictates of English character.

In his essay, “Heroes and Homosexuals: Education and Empire in E. M. Forster,” Quentin Bailey interrogates dominant ideas of the English character, understanding the Edwardian educational systems’ cultivation of a particular myth of Anglo-Saxon manhood as a strategy of imperial administration. Bailey argues that the increased emphasis on patriotic discourse and Anglo-Saxon traditions in the early twentieth century arose from increasing threats to Britain’s domestic and imperial control, citing the Boer War in South Africa, the United States’ usurpation of the United Kingdom as the principal world economic power in 1895, the newly unified Germany, and the death of Queen Victoria as examples of this multi-faceted threat to the nation’s ideological supremacy (332). “It is not altogether surprising, therefore, in this period of anxiety, pessimism, and bipartisan agreement on imperial matters,” Bailey writes, “that the official organs of epistemic control (the state, the school, and the church) came increasingly to use a rhetoric of racial superiority to justify their position and try to control – through the development of a consensual view of history – divisive elements at home and abroad” (332).

According to Bailey, this desire to reach a shared consensus about the historical ideals of heroism and loyalty, in general what Forster deems “good form,” drove a systematic structuring of school curriculums (NEC 4). In his essay, Forster affirms the charge that England is the “perfide Albion, the island of hypocrites, the people who have built up an Empire with a Bible in one hand, a pistol in the other and financial concessions in both pockets,” but he tempers his anti-imperial impulses with sentimental pleas for the essential goodwill in every man (NEC 11).
According to Forster, the hypocrisy of England is entirely unconscious, so Bailey’s argument about the inherent racialization underpinning English character complicates Forster’s hypothesis. Nevertheless, Forster’s novel exhibits the mechanism Bailey identifies in which instabilities in English identity are shored up through the rhetoric of its educational institutions. In Maurice, one of the foremost instabilities is the notion of a natural and ubiquitous heterosexual orientation, which Forster complicates as the novel progresses. In the beginning of the novel, when Clive Durham suddenly confesses his love to Maurice, “Maurice was scandalized, horrified. He was shocked to the bottom of his suburban soul, and exclaimed, ‘Oh, rot!’ The words, the manner, were out of him before he could recall them. ‘Durham, you’re an Englishman. I’m another. Don’t talk nonsense’ (58-59). Trained in the Sunnington way, Maurice speaks from his “suburban soul,” and he dismisses Clive’s words instinctively – his initial line of reasoning, “we’re Englishmen,” revealing the fundamental link between normative heterosexuality and English identity. In Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Sedgwick discusses this link as constructed by literature. She argues that the crisis of male sexual definition comprises an essential organizing component of modern identity, writing that “many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured —indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century” (1). Therefore, Maurice’s brief crisis reflects this larger epistemological structure that undergirds modern culture.

Later in the book, when Maurice struggles with feelings of lust, he catches his own reflection behind the counter at a shop and thinks, “What a solid young citizen he looked—quiet, honourable, prosperous without vulgarity. On such does England rely. Was it conceivable that on Sunday last he had nearly assaulted a boy?” (154). He appears composed and honorable,
the epitome, even, of English character, but the vulgar reality of his behavior betrays him. In his mind, “solid” citizenship contrasts to homosexual desire. Franco Moretti provides a model of societal normality that speaks to both Bailey’s “period of anxiety” and Sedgwick’s “chronic, now endemic crisis” – these descriptions of an underlying unease that give rise to the construction of rigid, hegemonic sexualities. Borrowing from Foucault, Moretti writes about normality as an inherently contradictory process of negation – one that is the product of both “the crisis of a sociocultural order” and “the violent reorganization of power” (12). “[Normality’s] time is that of crisis and genesis,” Moretti continues, “its space, surrounded by peculiarly strong social institutions, is the purely negative area of the ‘un-enclosed’. Its desire is to be like everyone else and thus to go by unnoticed” (12). Early in the novel, before he understands his sexuality, Maurice epitomizes this normality. He succeeds at Sunnington College because he “traversed it without attracting attention,” and he moves through life opposing the “vulgarity,” the “rot,” the “nonsense” that otherness, specifically queerness, represents (21). Bearing in mind Forster’s comment in his “Terminal Note” about the exasperating “normality” of Maurice’s surroundings, Maurice’s Bakhtinian emergence becomes an emergence from normality into alterity.

Therefore, one of Maurice’s chief victories is his development of empathy. By achieving the capacity to “feel” and to see others as “feeling” individuals, Maurice sheds his public-school conditioning. Just after starting university, Maurice finds the soft and kind atmosphere surprising compared to the “rudeness” and “cruelty” necessary at school (30). “People turned out to be alive,” Maurice finds, when “hitherto he had supposed that they were what he pretended to be—flat pieces of cardboard stamped with a conventional design” (30). Free from the oppressive atmosphere of Sunnington College, Maurice develops a basic affinity to others around him, who transform from two-dimensional cut-outs to human beings. Forster ties this budding social
awareness to his protagonist’s sexuality. For example, when Maurice visits Penge, Mrs. Durham asks Maurice if he has read any of Clive’s poetry, and Maurice remembers a poem Clive wrote for him. He then thinks, “Section after section the armies of humanity were coming alive. Alive, but slightly absurd; they misunderstood him so utterly: they exposed their weakness when they thought themselves most acute” (96). His illicit affair with Clive fortifies him against the “armies of humanity,” almost like a secret weapon. Here, he finds humanity absurd and clueless, but this passage demonstrates how Maurice’s queerness shapes his understanding of humanity, making it central to his coming-of-age.

The novel presents another major revolution in Maurice’s understanding of the world through the ways that Maurice contends with Edwardian interpretations of Platonic sexuality. Clive and Maurice’s relationship cannot be understood outside the framework of Clive’s neo-Platonic masculinity, which shapes their perception of women and themselves. Platonic philosophy allows the boys to recast their internalized shame around homosexuality into internalized shame around physical intimacy, but this stratification ultimately exasperates Maurice. Maurice’s sexuality arises from his unconscious, surfacing in half-remembered dreams and puzzling social interactions, while Clive uses external schools of thought to understand himself, replacing his devout Christianity with a Neo-Platonism. Unlike Maurice, as a boy he had “no doubt” as to what this “other desire, obviously from Sodom” was, so he resigned himself to damnation, until he reads the Phaedrus and sees the potential “cultivate” his desire “in such ways as will not vex either God or Man” (70). He dedicates himself to the pursuit of Platonic ideals and models his interactions after Plato’s dialogues. For example, when he initiates a relationship with Maurice, Clive thinks, “The love that Socrates bore Phaedo now lay within his reach,” aligning himself with the educator’s position, although he insists that they “became
equal” as beloveds (98). He thinks this love “caught him out of triviality […] in order that two imperfect souls might touch perfection” (99). Thus, Clive relies on Platonism to salvage his homosexuality, lifting it from an underworld of shame and stigma and casting it into a heavenly realm of transcendence and truth. Just like Jacob’s reversion “towards male society, cloistered rooms, and the works of the classics,” Clive’s process confines homosexuality within intellectualism; he clings to his identity as a scholar (82).

Through the language of their relationship, Clive and Maurice reproduce an ontological distinction between the soul and the body that implicitly inscribes the soul as masculine and transcendent and the body as feminine and able to be transcended. In the dialogues, the body deceives the soul or mind, keeping man from accessing “pure knowledge” (Plato, *Phaedo* 66e). In her essay “Woman as Body,” Elizabeth Spelman argues that in much Platonic discourse, “spiritual love between men is preferable to physical love between men and women,” because the ideas generated by souls in unison are spiritual, immortal, and virtuous whereas the children generated by bodies in unison are “mortal, subject to change and decay” (112). Spelman writes that in the *Phaedrus, Symposium*, and *Timaeus*, the lives of women come to signify the proper soul/body relationship “gone haywire” (115). Notions of perfection and immortality exist outside the flesh, which is deemed feminine. Spelman writes that Plato’s misogyny “is part of his somatophobia: the body is seen as the source of all the undesirable traits a human being could have, and women's lives are spent manifesting those traits” (118). Clive echoes this philosophy when he declares their connection more “noble” to his sister Pippa and her fiancé’s, that they have a particular harmony of body and soul that I don’t think women have even guessed” (90). “Both were misogynists, Clive especially,” the narrator writes, explicitly naming this misogyny that grants them a secret and exclusive bond (100). Thus, Forster’s character Clive provides the
interior perspective of the masculinist elite spaces at Cambridge that Woolf’s narrator in *Jacob’s Room* mused over from the courtyards outside.

An essential part of this harmonious union of souls is its non-sexual nature. Spelman quotes *Laws VIII*, in which the Athenian says of the hypothetical man, “that body should sate itself with body he’ll think outrageous; his reverence and respect for self-control, courage, high principles and good judgement will make him want to live a life of purity, chaste lover with chaste beloved” (*Laws* 837c-d). Clive and Maurice wordlessly adopt this model, as Maurice reveals when he reflects, “it had been understood between them that their love, though including the body, should not gratify it” (151). This emphasis on chastity, however, also persisted in Forster’s spheres during the Edwardian era, as Julie Taddeo explains in her article “Plato’s Apostles: Edwardian Cambridge and the ‘New Style of Love.’” She writes, “‘passing the love of women,’ these romantic friendships also contributed to the formation of ‘manliness.’ Restraint defined normative masculinity, and in principle, sexual self-control was exercised by even the Higher Sodomites at Cambridge” (199). Clearly, the Apostles adopted the Platonic language of restraint and self-control to govern their intimacies, keeping them from crossing the invisible line of “real” indecency. And curiously, despite their disparaging of heterosexuality, the shadow of Mr. Ducie’s sand man, “chaste with asceticism,” seems to haunt the Higher Sodomites’ convictions – for their ideals of masculinity fail to surpass the epistemological ideal of “good form” for English character.

The beliefs and behaviors of the Cambridge Apostles, characterized in Clive, appear esoteric, even cultish at times, but Forster’s novel proves this notion partially erroneous. Taddeo writes that the Apostles Lytton Strachey (who inspired the character Risley) and John Maynard Keynes “regarded themselves as rebels whose devotion to Plato was part of a larger agenda –
that is, their ideological opposition to Victorianism” (197). This ideological opposition included a renunciation of the religion, politics, and moral codes of the Victorian era, but Taddeo hints that the Apostles’ “new monastic age” called for very selective upheavals of societal standards (196). She writes that while devotion to Higher Sodomy lent itself to experiments with sexuality, “it did not necessarily place them at odds with the dominant masculine culture outside the Society. At Cambridge the Brothers enjoyed the ‘ethereal atmosphere of free and audacious inquiry,’ but while they claimed to be ‘immoralists,’ they advocated a version of male love that further emphasized class privilege, gender difference, and male superiority” (198). This privileged version of male love grounds itself upon gender hierarchy. In Between Men, Sedgwick demonstrates how the nineteenth and twentieth-century societal structures of male-male homosocial bonds ultimately worked to subjugate women:

In any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power; a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence. For historical reasons, this special relationship may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two. (25)

With his Apostilitian sensibilities, Clive Durham embodies this “highly conflicted” combination of ideological homophobia and ideological homosexuality. In fact, while Maurice eventually overcomes internalized homophobia and escapes to the greenwood, the novel never escapes this logic of structural congruence – because to Maurice, women forever represent the anguish of middle-class frivolity and everyday domestic hell.\(^\text{14}\) So, if Forster’s idea of homosexuality in the

\(^{14}\) “Between those commonplace women and himself stretched a gulf that hallowed them. Their chatter, their squabble about precedence, their complaints of the chauffeur, seemed word of a greater wrong” (Maurice 206).
novel works to further delineate male supremacy, where exactly does Maurice’s queer horizon lie? As I will demonstrate, while Maurice’s corporeal model of consciousness presents a partial rejection of this ideological homosexuality, the novel’s queerness does not stem strictly from its textual themes, but rather from its reformulation of the tenets of the classical Bildungsroman.

This bracketing of homosexual desire also appears in Clive’s aesthetic philosophy. After Maurice tells Clive, “I think you’re beautiful, the only beautiful person I’ve ever seen,” Clive tells Maurice to “sit up straight” (again, the policing of behavior perceived as “queer” figures along rigid, spatial lines) and then launches into a monologue about “the precise influence of Desire upon our aesthetic judgements”:

Look at that picture, for instance. I love it because, like the painter himself, I love the subject. I don’t judge it with eyes of the normal man. There seem two roads for arriving at Beauty—one is in common, and all the world has reached Michelangelo by it, but the other is private to me and a few more. We come to him by both roads. On the other hand Greuze—his subject matter repels me. I can only get to him down one road. The rest of the world finds two. (93)

Clive describes aesthetic judgement as a choice between two roads: one is “common” and objective, the other “private” and subjective. Clive goes on to say that the latter road is “perhaps a mistake,” but Desire in aesthetic judgements is inevitable as long as the human figure is depicted. “Landscape is the only safe subject” he concludes, “—or perhaps something geometric, rhythmical, inhuman absolutely” (93). Clive turns first to nature as a “safe subject” for aesthetic pleasure, then to this inchoate “something,” alien and mechanical. He responds to Maurice’s compliment by intellectualizing their exchange, trying to move their conversation from the personal and physical to the universal and philosophical. In his contemplations on the perception
of art, Clive speaks similarly to Jacob Flanders, when he tries to convince himself that he “had little sense of personal association; he seldom thought of Plato or Socrates in the flesh,” but his “feeling for architecture was very strong” (JR 149). Both characters suppress their emotions and physical desires in pursuit of this objective sense of the world.

In this passage, Clive ventriloquizes another mode of thought influenced by Plato, in that his speech about the influence of “Desire” on “aesthetic judgements” references the Kantian notion of “disinterested” judgements of taste, in which the subject must remove himself from desirous or moral impulses in order to make a truly pleasurable and universally communicable aesthetic judgment (Kant 65). Kant’s language also permeated the Apostles’ interactions; Forster’s biographer P.N. Furbank notes “in its own jargon, borrowed from Kant and the German metaphysicians, ‘reality’ existed solely within the Society, the rest of mankind being merely ‘phenomena’ living in ‘the world of appearances’” (75-76). Clive and Maurice’s interaction contains subtle echoes of this formula. For instance, when Maurice first rejects Clive and they cease to speak to each other for two days, Maurice feels “fresh to real suffering as to reality of any kind. They had yet to meet” (61). Much later, they are disconnected over the phone, and Clive “felt relieved, for the approach of reality alarmed him” (124). In these instances, just as with the Apostles, “reality” comes to signify whenever they are in each other’s company, denoting elsewhere and otherwise as ‘unreality.’ Virginia Woolf plays with this concept when, in a letter written to Lytton Strachey in the spring of 1912, she explains why she has trouble writing to him, “It’s all Cambridge—that detestable place; and the ap–s–les are so unreal, and their loves are so unreal, and yet I suppose it’s all going on still— swarming in the sun—and perhaps not as bad as I imagine. But when I think of it, I vomit—that’s all—a green vomit, which gets into the ink and blisters the paper” (Letters 38). Poisoned by the thought of their pretensions, Woolf can’t
bring herself to fully write their name. From the outside, the Kantian schema is reversed – the Apostles and their loves become “unreal.”

Maurice ultimately rejects Clive’s philosophical tenets, dismissing him as over-intellectual and sickeningly dogmatic, and he presents an alternative conception of self and knowledge. Raschke writes that in *Maurice*, “a new conception of sexuality (explicitly homosexual, but implicitly heterosexual as well) depends on a rethinking of Western metaphysics. Forster’s style may not rival Joyce’s and Woolf’s, but his vision, which presages a poststructuralist linking of desire and metaphysical thought, does,” arguing that *Maurice*’s chief contributions to the modernist canon are visionary, not stylistic (152). Forster certainly interrogates the metaphysics that underlie this Platonic paradigm of homosexuality so pervasive in Forster’s circles, by inverting the hierarchy of mind over body in his novel. “I’m not here to get advice, nor to talk about thoughts and ideas either. I’m flesh and blood, if you’ll condescend to such low things,” Maurice says to Clive in their last conversation of the novel (243). Maurice identifies with the “flesh and blood” that confuses the mind and prevents immortality in the Platonic model. In many ways Clive, who has “the superiority of outlook, the clarity and the intelligence, the assured moral standards,” and Maurice the “handsome, healthy, bodily attractive, mentally torpid” signify this very dichotomy between mind and body, so when Clive undergoes his miraculous transition, the primacy of the mind is upended (251, 250).

Clive sits alone in the empty theatre of Dionysus, having come to Greece on a pseudo-pilgrimage to pay tribute to the ancient gods and culture that saved him from damnation, but once there “he saw only dying light and a dead land. He uttered no prayer, believed in no deity, and knew that the past was devoid of meaning like the present, and a refuge for cowards” (116). He disavows the ancient world, but this conclusion that he draws— that the past is as
meaningless as the present—rings ironic, because it’s this realization that leads him to fall perfectly in line with those who came before him, following tradition, while Maurice looks toward an unprecedented future. Like Jacob, he rapidly loses his fascination with Greece upon arrival, but here, Clive’s disillusionment links to his sexual orientation. “Against my will I have become normal. I cannot help it,” Clive writes to Maurice, and then the paragraph concludes, “the words had been written,” as if the letter communicates a plain inevitability (116). This “blind alteration of the life spirit” shocks Clive, as he fails to understand it himself: “It humiliated him, for he had understood his soul, or, as he said, himself, ever since he was fifteen. But the body is deeper than the soul and its secrets inscrutable” (118). Here, the narrator revises the notion of the body as a place of non-truth, a mere distraction from reality. Instead, the body possesses a deeper knowledge than the intellect, as evidenced by the inexplicable, subterranean origins of this dramatic shift in orientation.

In a brief and bizarre passage, Forster further conceptualizes this reversal of body over mind when the specter of Maurice’s late father appears in his son’s office. As Maurice struggles with the news of Clive’s engagement to Anne, the ghost feels envy towards his son, for “he sees the flesh educating the spirit, as his has never been educated, and developing the sluggish heart and the slack mind against their will” (152). Presumably, Mr. Hall died with a still “undeveloped” heart, so his son possesses this potential for enlightenment of the “slack mind” and opening of the “sluggish heart.” Maurice has outgrown Clive’s idea that “his spirit educated Maurice’s spirit” (98). Later in the novel, the narrator writes of Maurice, “his whole life he had known things but not known them—it was the great defect in his character,” but Forster seems to suggest that this inchoate and embodied knowledge is actually Maurice’s greatest strength (205). This “flesh educating the spirit” creates an alternative epistemological model and therefore a new
definition of the subject. Maurice appears constantly “muddled” or “bewildered,” but in certain ways, he has “known” himself from the first scene with Mr. Ducie.

In the “Terminal Note,” Forster describes how the “normality” of Maurice’s surroundings frustrate him (250). By the end of the novel, the atmosphere and concerns of his bourgeois family life exasperate Maurice, even terrify him. This realization comes after he first sleeps with Alec, (or “Scudder”):

He was headachy and faint when, clothed all in white, he at last descended to take his place in society.

Letters—a pile of them, and all subtly annoying. Ada, most civil. Kitty, saying his mother looked done up. Aunt Ida—a post-card [...] business fatuities, circulars about the College Mission, the Territorial training, the Golf Club, and the Property Defence Association.

[...] Each human being seemed new, and terrified him: he spoke to a race whose nature and numbers were unknown, and whose very food tasted poisonous. (199)

Dressed all in white, as if to symbolize his tabula rasa, Maurice Hall emerges from the bedroom a new being, an alien confronted with society for the first time. Maurice’s family become foreign to him – the situation threatens him, the food poisons him. The influx of administrative business and social correspondence, the trivial affairs of his female family members jar him into defamiliarization. This passage could be read as another queer moment, like Bonamy’s in the park, because it is moment of awareness of the once invisible mechanisms of heteronormative society. However, while Bonamy’s encounter with heteronormativity led him to reel at a larger world order, Maurice preoccupies himself with this feminine noise, blaming it for his division from humanity.
This passage demonstrates Maurice’s break from normality and emergence into alterity. For Moretti, the Bildungsroman symbolizes modern socialization’s “interiorization of contradiction,” and one of these contradictions is the novel’s complex relationship to normality (10). Moretti argues that the Bildungsroman’s “anti-heroic” and “prosaic” protagonists have trained readers to see normality from the inside, whereas modern theories of normality locate its meaning “outside itself” (11). “An internally articulated, interesting and lively normality – normality as the expulsion of all marked features, as a true semantic void. Theoretically, the two concepts are irreconcilable,” Moretti writes (11). Forster’s novel traverses this very contradiction, as Maurice presents as an entirely prosaic protagonist, essentially a “mediocre member of a mediocre school,” but as the novel progresses, he slowly disengages from normality, and the label and meaning of “normal” shifts from his character to Clive’s (21).

Before Maurice returns his affections, Clive laments that “Hall was the healthy normal Englishman” (73, emphasis mine). Then, later in the book when he is struck by heterosexuality, Clive declares he has become “normal” against his will (116). Moretti writes, “Only rarely does the novel explore the spatio-temporal confines of the given world: it usually stays ‘in the middle’, where it discovers, or perhaps creates, the typically modern feeling and enjoyment of ‘everyday life’ and ‘ordinary administration’” (12). Moretti’s discussion of this “middle” bears on Forster’s argument that the heart of England lies in its middle classes, and these middle-class structures and institutions are precisely what Maurice seeks to escape. By the end of the novel, what was once annoying about ‘everyday life’ and ‘ordinary administration’ becomes untenable to Maurice, who is now marked by his sexual behavior.

Forster’s most significant exploration of the “spatio-temporal confines” of Maurice’s world lie in the novel’s idyllic ending. When Maurice prepares to leave with Alec, he resolves,
“they must live outside class, without relations or money […] But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. Her air and sky were theirs, not the timorous millions’ who own stuffy little boxes, but never their own souls” (239). Maurice and Alec claim ownership of England and their own souls, triumphing over the bourgeois masses left to stew in self-ignorance. But their vision of England is idealistic and pastoral. Because they resolve to live outside societal and economic structures, *Maurice* modifies the category of Bakhtin’s ultimate Bildungsroman, in which the protagonist emerges along with his nation and thus the historical emergence of the nation is embodied through man (23-24). Maurice emerges as a new being, only to disappear forever into the greenwood. When the king and queen pass by in the street, Maurice “despised them at the moment he bared his head. It was as if the barrier that kept him from his fellows had taken another aspect. He was not afraid or ashamed any more. After all, the forests and the night were on his side, not theirs; they, not he, were inside a ring fence” (187). While he once viewed sexuality as a “barrier,” now it becomes his way into the expanse of forest and night. Here, Forster inverts the Bakhtinian relationship between man and nation, because while Maurice expands outwards, the state and its social world shrinks, circumscribed in a “ring fence” of its own making.

In addition, the novel presents a paradox of national-historical time, because of its posthumous publication. Forster overlays his narrative culmination with an idealistic futurity and nostalgia at the same time – the text looks forward and backward simultaneously. For example, in the “Terminal Note,” Forster writes that “a happy ending was imperative” and that he “was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood,” signaling
toward an imaginary and infinite future antithetical to his current reality (250). These sentiments correspond to his inscription that reads, “Dedicated to a Happier Year”. Yet, a few pages later, he writes that the novel “belongs to an England where it was still possible to get lost. It belongs to the last moment of the greenwood,” in response to points raised about the novel’s dated references (254). Therefore, Maurice and Alec’s potentiality exists in a sort of bygone utopia – their “happier year” has yet to come, but has already slipped by.

Despite these anachronistic complications that the “Terminal Note” highlights, the novel ultimately presents queerness as an imagined futurity, as an entity yet to be fully realized. Forster’s characters seem to echo Jacob Flanders’ musings over Richard Bonamy, when he thinks “it is getting more and more beyond what is possible” (Woolf, JR 149). This vision of queerness as a potentiality appears most clearly in the scene where Maurice drives his motorcycle, with Clive in the sidecar, out of Cambridge and into the countryside:

Maurice said, “Now we’ll go to Hell.” The machine was powerful, he reckless naturally. It leapt forward into the fens and the receding dome of the sky. They became a cloud of dust, a stench, and a roar to the world, but the air they breathed was pure, and all the noise they heard was the long drawn cheer of the wind. They cared for no one, they were outside humanity, and death, had it come, would only have continued their pursuit of a retreating horizon […] “Right turn,” again, then “left,” “right,” until all sense of direction was gone. (76)

Maurice loses himself so fully in this experience of velocity that he seems to unite with Clive and the motorcycle to transcend humanity and outlast death. For a moment, they touch

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15 Private homosexual acts were not decriminalized by Parliament until The Sexual Offences Act of 1967, which incidentally increased penalties for street offences.
16 “The book certainly dates and a friend has recently remarked that for readers today it can only have period interest” (Forster “Terminal Note” 254).
immortality, and outside the entirety of humanity, the narrator writes that death would have only furthered their journey towards this “retreating horizon.” Maurice jokes they are going to “Hell,” in part because they just skipped class and snubbed the dean, but in propelling themselves to hell, they also seem to use the machine to reclaim their supposed destiny. Maurice loses his sense of direction, and his perception of the world gives in to pure experience. This passage marks Maurice’s movement from metaphysical designations of reality to an embodied model consciousness that has shades of Ahmed’s phenomenology. Because the motorcycle generates this moment of unity, modernity and queerness become symbolically entangled.

The “retreating horizon” that Maurice speeds towards corresponds to José Muñoz’s notion of queerness as a horizon of existence. Muñoz begins his 2009 book *Cruising Utopia* thus:

> Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality [...] We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain. (1)

Muñoz argues that the view of queerness as a potentiality that exists beyond the limits of the present moment offers greater conceptual and theoretical leverage than contemporary pragmatic approaches. In defining queerness by its relation to the future, Muñoz recalls Moretti’s notion about youth as the emblem of modernity, “the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the *future* rather than in the past” (5). Therefore, the future is also the Bildungsroman’s. Forster’s text intertwines these concepts – queerness with both past and future, queerness with youth, queerness with modernity. When it occurs to Pippa that her brother might not be heterosexual, the narrator writes that “a breath of modernity had blown” into her mind, but elsewhere in the
text, particularly according to Clive, homosexuality only exists in its relation to antiquity (101). Forster shifts the idea of “masculine love” from a shallow re-enactment of the past to an “ideality” of the future.

With this “imperative” happy ending, Forster implies that he wanted to defy literary tropes of “killing off” queer-coded characters as symbolic moral retribution. However, as he hints in the “Terminal Note,” his protagonist is still “lost” at the end of his novel. As in Jacob’s Room, the protagonist disappears on the final page of the novel, leaving “no trace of his presence” except for the pile of primrose petals he had plucked during his last conversation with Clive. After Maurice dissipates into the night, the narrator projects forward in time, writing, “To the end of his life Clive was not sure of the exact moment of departure, and with the approach of old age he grew uncertain whether the moment had yet occurred” (246). As time moves on, Clive questions the very integrity of the event. Again, this time becoming mythical instead of alien, Maurice occupies a space outside humanity. Clive waits a moment longer in his garden and then returns to his house “to correct his proofs and to devise some method of concealing the truth from Anne” (246). Clive returns to his normality, still beholden to the lies, “the natural food of boyhood” and the stoicism that Maurice is able to transcend (62). Just before Maurice leaves, Clive asks what exactly he intends to do, and Maurice denies him an answer, stating “You belong to the past. I’ll tell you everything up to this moment – not a word beyond” (245). On this point, Forster grants the reader no more information than Maurice does Clive – we too, are left with a handful of primroses. The novel concludes with a state of unknowing, the mode that Woolf operates in for all of Jacob’s Room. As soon as Maurice resolves his public-school muddle-headedness, Forster relinquishes access to the protagonist’s interiority.
Because Maurice’s future is so opaque, Forster fails to provide a novelistic schema in which the queer individual can co-exist within the nation-state. Moretti argues that in providing a form for the contradictions of modern socialization, the Bildungsroman models how to “learn to live with [contradiction], and even transform it into a tool for survival” (10). With regards to the contradiction between homosexuality and England, Forster refuses to transform it or compromise, confirming that there is “no third course” for Maurice (251). The greenwood becomes an impossible fantasy, and the experience of queerness becomes one of deferral.
Gender Parody and Reiterative Emergence in *Orlando*

You have invented a new form of Narcissism, — I confess, — I am in love with Orlando — this is a complication I had not foreseen.

— Vita Sackville-West, 1928

Virginia Woolf’s 1928 novel *Orlando* follows an eccentric aristocrat as they live through four centuries of British history. A work of fiction professed to be a biography, *Orlando* laughs in the face of unequivocal truth and narrative certainty, expanding the confines of genre, gender, and time. Because Orlando morphs from century to century and consistently troubles the categories of gender and sexuality, one might view this character as a modernist invention that subverts the notion of a fixed and unified self. In the Bildungsroman, however, the hero was never stable – Bakhtin’s disqualification of the “ready-made hero” and Moretti’s emphasis on the symbolic dynamism of youth demonstrate that the genre is constituted by change. And yet, if we distill Moretti and Bakhtin’s far-reaching studies of the Bildungsroman into one shared through line, we are left with the following: “man comes of age.” While *Jacob’s Room* and *Maurice* challenged the form and themes of the Bildungsroman, *Orlando* challenges its very foundations by disrupting the structures of masculinity and time that facilitate man’s emergence. By continually reiterating the process of emergence, Woolf enacts Judith Butler’s theory of “subversive repetition,” mounting critiques the gendered myths of English identity through parody.

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18 Moretti discusses female novelists and protagonists in *The Way of the World* — but he depicts them as peripheral to the Bildungsroman. Of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* he writes, “Any Bildungsroman worthy of the name would have had Jane remain among the needles of Thornfield,” and while he calls George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* “the greatest English novel of her century” he refers to *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* as the “disaster” that marked the collapse of the Bildungsroman (188, 220, 227). These readings, combined with his defaulting to masculine pronouns for the novel’s protagonist/hero, imply that the Bildungsroman’s is a male subject.
My discussion of *Jacob’s Room* included a passage from Woolf’s 1919 essay “Modern Novels” where she wrote that the novelist’s chief task was to convey the “incessantly varying spirit” of life with “as little admixture of the alien and external as possible” (33). Close to a decade later, the fantastical elements of Woolf’s novel suggest a revision to this literary philosophy, or at least a detour toward a new form of expression. This “admixture of alien and external” with the novel’s real-life referent is what perhaps led Marjorie Garber to describe the novel as an “upper-class fairy tale *a clef*,” the “clef” in this instance being Vita Sackville-West (134). Yet to read the novel as purely a lark, or purely a “love letter” to Sackville-West, would be to miss Woolf’s incisive commentary on the natures of aristocratic inheritance, historiography, intellectual salons, hero-worship, sex work, and the literary marketplace, for example.

Considering the absence of death in *Orlando*, a prominent theme not just in *Jacob’s Room* but in all of Woolf’s novels, Gillian Beer calls the novel a “jest in the face of death” (60). “The truth is I expect I began it as a joke, & went on with it seriously,” Woolf wrote in her diary (Woolf in Knopp, *Sexual Sameness* 113). As with most satire, the novel mounts its most serious interventions through its comedic moments, not in spite of them.

*Orlando*’s interplay with the Bildungsroman genre cannot be considered separately from its interplay with the biographical genre, as Woolf’s novel proclaims itself “*Orlando: A Biography.*” In her essay, “The New Biography,” published one year before *Orlando*, Woolf argues that the biographer has more potential to stimulate the reader’s imagination by shaping the “creative fact” than the traditional novelist would have with textual inventions. She asserts

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19 Nigel Nicholson is often quoted for calling the novel “the longest and most charming love letter in literature” (Nicholson quoted in Bristow, 111).

20 In a diary entry, Woolf writes that her husband Leonard found it “about more interesting things’ “with more attachment to life” and “larger” than *To The Lighthouse*, published the year before - Though she addresses her own bias in the epigraph to this chapter, Vita Sackville-West also thought Orlando the better of the two novels, calling it “the loveliest, wisest, richest book that I have ever read,—excelling even your own Lighthouse.” (288)
that with this sentence – “the aim of biography is the truthful transmission of personality” – biographer Sir Sidney Lee perfectly reveals “the problem of biography” – that is, the inherent incompatibility between truth and personality (473). She assigns an image to each of these opposed ideas, describing “truth” as “granite-like solidity” and personality as “rainbow-like intangibility” that must be “welded” together into a seamless whole (473). She expresses a distrust in the truth that Sir Sidney references and which traditional biography demands, which she sees as “truth in its hardest, most obdurate form; it is truth as truth is to be found in the British Museum; it is truth out of which all vapour of falsehood has been pressed by the weight of research,” expressing the domineering force of the traditional arbiters of truth (473). She continues that while “truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible,” the biographer is still urged to combine these elements at this current time, for “it would seem that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act” (478). Published a year later than her essay, Orlando clearly puts forth a solution to Woolf’s proposed problem, by combining the “truth of fact” with the “truth of fiction.” In Orlando, the biographer stands powerless against inexplicable phenomena like seven-day slumbers, immortality, and transfigurations. The novel’s rainbow intangibles recast its granite solidities (the descriptions of Knole, pictures of Vita in costume, historical figures, and events) in the light of personality.

In the final chapter of The Way of the World, Moretti concludes that the Bildungsroman “in all its diverse manifestations, had always held fast to the notion that the biography of a young individual was the most meaningful viewpoint for the understanding and the evaluation of history” (227, emphasis his). In his typology of the Bildungsroman, Bakhtin classifies the “biographical novel” as one of the historical subcategories that led to the novel of emergence.
Therefore, through a Bakhtinian lens, *Orlando’s* relationship to nation-historical time as a biography also bears on its relationship to the Bildungsroman. Bakhtin writes that in a purely biographical novel, “hero’s life and fate change, they assume structure and evolve, but the hero himself remains essentially unchanged. Attention is concentrated either on deeds, feats, merits, and creative accomplishments” (17). For Bakhtin, these novels’ depictions of “biographical time” gesture towards the ultimate Bildungsroman’s “national-historical time” (18). He deems the biographical novel’s time “embryonically historical,” because he argues that biographical life implies a larger epoch, “which goes beyond the limits of a single life, whose duration is represented primarily by generations” (18). In *Knole and the Sackvilles*, Vita Sackville-West reflects after surveying her ancestral portraits in the Knole gallery that the allure of her family line lies in their being “so representative” because “from generation to generation they might stand, fully equipped, as portraits of English history” (Sackville-West in DiBattista, xlviii). Even without fictionalizing them, the Sackvilles fall into neat, emblematic archetypes of certain ages, allowing Woolf to literalize Bakhtin’s notion of generational time as her protagonist lives through several representative generations.

Woolf also illustrates that the “new biography” transforms the relationship between the biographer and his subject. Her version ignores “the deeds, feats, merits” that typify Bakhtin’s biography. No longer the “serious and sympathetic companion, toiling even slavishly in the footsteps of his hero” the new biographer acquires critical distance, and becomes an equal (475). “Raised upon a little eminence which his independence has made for him, he sees his subject spread about him. He chooses; he synthesizes; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become an artist” Woolf writes (475). While the old biographer follows at the heels of his subject like a literate spaniel, the second, new biographer releases his constraints. By maintaining his
freedom to involve his own judgments, he creates a work of art. Orlando’s narrator claims to be the first type of biographer whose aim is to “plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth” (49). In the first physical description of Orlando, his biographer writes, “Happy the mother who bears, happier still the biographer who records the life of such a one! Never need she vex herself, nor he invoke the help of novelist or poet. From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after,” subordinating the relative position of the biographer, while elevating their duty (12). By invoking the mother and the biographer in the same breath, the biographer/narrator suggests that the scrupulous recording of a life is of equal importance to the creation of life. However, Orlando’s biographer does not follow him from “deed to deed,” “glory to glory”. In fact, the biographer frequently pauses to admit that a good portion of the historical sources they are drawing from – the records, documents, and letters are either missing, half-destroyed, or illegible. In addition, Orlando possesses a Jacobesque tendency to slip just out of view. She also has a penchant for disguises, and a proclivity to fall into unbroken slumber for days at a time, or even to spend an entire calendar year just sitting immersed in uncommunicated thought – all of which complicate the biographer’s task. Woolf constantly undermines her narrator’s claim to objective truth, and their position as the unequivocal determinant of meaning.

Even compared to Jacob’s *Bildung interruptus* or Maurice’s nostalgic futurity, Orlando’s portrayal of historical time presents a complex relationship to Bakhtin’s model of the Bildungsroman. Again, in Bakhtin’s ideal novel of emergence:

[Man] emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through
him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being [...] The organizing force held by the future is therefore extremely great here—and this is not, of course, the private biographical future, but the historical future. It is as though the very foundations of the world are changing, and man must change along with them [...] The image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature [...] and enters into a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence. (23-24, emphasis his)

“Man” not only reflects historical changes, but these changes take effect in him and through him, and the process culminates with a unified emergence of the new man and the new historical existence. Orlando dramatizes this process, and then repeats it four times over the course of the novel. Woolf configures the changing foundations of her successive worlds through dramatic environmental incidents. The Great Frost of 1608 freezes over the Elizabethan era (25). “Urban glories” and a sense of “light, order, and serenity” dominate the eighteenth century, whereas an all-consuming damp saturates the nineteenth century, and then the magic of technological advances shrinks, dries, and brightens all things the twentieth century (122, 164, 166, 218). These epochal transitions channel themselves through the protagonist’s being and sensibilities, but also her body, as when her modest blushing in the Victorian era is attributed to “the spirit of the age blowing, now hot, now cold, upon her cheeks” (172). While she adapts readily to each new age, these emergences seem to be more cumulative than transformational, as she holds her past selves within her like plates “piled on a waiter’s hand” (225-226). Orlando takes each aspect of Bakhtin’s formulation to an extreme: the organizing force held by the historical future takes the form of a tyrannical “spirit of the age” that “batters down” and “defeats” those who resist it (178). The novel exaggerates Bakhtin’s idea of a “new unprecedented type of human being” when Orlando, having narrowly escaped death, arises from his seven-day slumber as a woman
surrounded by gods and divine trumpeters. The hero of Bildungsroman occupies this space “in between” epochs, and Orlando operates at the nexus of several interrelated binaries, emerging not only between epochs, but also between man and woman, truth and fact, past and present.

Woolf denaturalizes a linear conception of time through the novel, both its formal expansion of biographical time and its characterization of Orlando. At the end of the novel, when Orlando contends with the rapid pace of modernity and the magical confusions of the present day, the biographer writes that she “had gone a little too far from the present moment” (223). As she navigates the centuries of selves and experiences she has accumulated, Orlando gets embangled in a recursive metonymic logic in which “everything was partly something else” (237). Muñoz’s discussion of the “self-naturalizing temporality” of straight time offers a relevant paradigm for Orlando’s dissociative experience. In Muñoz’s context, “straight time” encompasses both the overarching capitalistic and reproductive logics of temporality and the idea that time passes in a linear and uniform fashion. “Queerness’s time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time,” he writes, continuing with “Straight time’s “presentness” needs to be phenomenologically questioned” (25). Where Maurice disavows the past, Orlando celebrates it, so perhaps Muñoz’s queer utopian hermeneutic offers more for interpreting Forster than Woolf. Still, Orlando’s synchrony with the past presents a queer temporality that breaks from the self-naturalization of linear time.

Whereas in Maurice, the sheer velocity of the motorcycling scene led to an experience of unity and self-determination, in Orlando, driving at speed in the twentieth century fractures one’s consciousness, causing a dissociative experience of self-splitting. “Indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping up small of body and mind, which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself that it is an open question in what sense
Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment,” the narrator shares (225). When Orlando drives, the phantasmagoric appearance of the landscape disrupts the state of her existence. Instead of outlasting death like Maurice, Orlando precedes death, dissembled into disparate scraps of both body and mind. In both novels, the superhuman motion of the vehicle symbolizes the disorientation of identity in modernity.

Moretti ties the Bildungsroman explicitly to an experience of modernity. Because it can embody the dynamism and instability of modernity, Moretti argues that youth “was chosen” to be the “essence” of modernity, the “specific material sign” of the new epoch:

If […] inner dissatisfaction and mobility make novelistic youth ‘symbolic’ of modernity, they also force it to share in the ‘formlessness’ of the new epoch, in its protean elusiveness. To become a ‘form’, youth must be endowed with a very different, almost opposite feature to those already mentioned: the very simple and slightly philistine notion that youth ‘does not last forever’. Youth is brief, or at any rate circumscribed, and this enables, or rather forces the a priori establishment of a formal constraint on the portrayal of modernity. Only by curbing its intrinsically boundless dynamism, only by agreeing to betray to a certain extent its very essence, only this, it seems, can modernity be represented. (5-6, emphasis his)

Moretti suggests that by bounding youth in this way, by making a “form” out of “formlessness,” the Bildungsroman displaces the anxieties and instabilities of modernity. Orlando defies this formula because its protagonist’s youth does essentially “last forever.” Even as she asymptotically approaches middle age in the final chapter, Orlando still leads with the “intrinsically boundless dynamism” of youth, striding forth into the twentieth century. She also still falls into the “raging torrent” of the past that lies beneath the “narrow plant of the present,”
immersed so fully in memories of her youth that she ceases to exist in the present, as with the
passage in the motorcar (219). Her gender transformation further complicates the idea that the
novel could circumscribe youth, because Orlando effectively “comes of age” twice. On the ship
back to England, Orlando starts to revel in the feminine power of “resisting and yielding,” before
the narrator interjects,“(it must be remembered that she was like a child entering into possession
of a pleasance or toy cupboard; her arguments would not commend themselves to mature
women, who have had the run of it all their lives)” (115). The narrator seems to negate Orlando’s
passage through adolescence, because her new situation brings her child-like innocence. On this
ship journey, Woolf accelerates a progression of feminine lived experience, and Orlando comes
to understand the “sacred responsibilities of womanhood” in a matter of pages (116).

As in scene on the ship, where Orlando realizes women are not “obedient, chaste,
scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature,” Orlando’s romantic escapades serve as
experimental evidence for Judith Butler’s argument that a coherent heterosexuality is an
impossible position (115). “Heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are
intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without
incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but
as an inevitable comedy,” Butler writes in Gender Trouble (166). Both Orlando’s adventures and
misadventures with love reveal these inevitable comedic slippages around the compulsory law of
heterosexuality. Orlando’s lovers frequently exhibit moments of androgyny, like Sasha’s figure,
“boy’s or woman’s” on the ice, or Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire, the man “as
strange and subtle as a woman” (27, 189). The novel offers another relevant instance when
Orlando returns to England a woman, and the Archduchess confesses that she was a man in
disguise:
“Gentle creature,” cried the Archduchess, falling on one knee and at the same time pressing a cordial to Orlando's lips, “forgive me for the deceit I have practised on you!”

Orlando sipped the wine and the Archduke knelt and kissed her hand.

In short, they acted the parts of man and woman for ten minutes with great vigour and then fell into natural discourse. (132)

The Archduchess had fallen in love with a portrait of Orlando as a man, and dressed as a woman to court him appropriately, so in the following passage he expresses his relief at Orlando’s transition. He calls her “the Pink, the Pearl, the Perfection of her sex,” despite having fallen in love with Orlando’s male form initially. His speech is interrupted by fits of asinine giggling, which the narrator describes as “tee-hees and haw-haws of the strangest kind” (132). Woolf contrasts these acted “parts of man and woman” to the characters’ “natural discourse,” as if gender requires these melodramatic counter displays of chivalry and chastity. The affair leads Orlando to think to herself, “If this is love, […] there is something highly ridiculous about it” (132). Passages like this one, in which the gender ambiguities are emphasized through notions of disguises and reveals and the characters toggle rapidly between binary caricatures of gender, suggest that Woolf is harkening back to the Shakespearean device of cross-dressing, rather than prophesizing twenty-first century ideas of post-structural, queer fluidity. Nevertheless, the playful, androgynous current that runs through Orlando’s romantic attachments works to resist the rigid entrenchment of gender categories.

In fact, Woolf seems to gesture towards gender as a play-act on the very first page of the novel. This opening scene also sets a precedent for the recurring instances where the narrator portrays Orlando’s gender as ambiguous against a fixity of their racial, national, and aristocratic identity. Woolf introduces her protagonist as a teenager in the sixteenth century thus: “He – for
there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it –
was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters,” this interjection
about the androgyny of Elizabethan-era clothing initiating a motif of Shakespearean cross-
dressing. (11). The narrator adds that this human head that hangs in the attic of Orlando’s sizable
country house was once “struck [...] from the shoulders of a vast Pagan who had started up under
the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa” by an ancestor of Orlando’s (11). Urmila Seshagiri
calls this passage an instance of “racial discontinuity,” in that “the act of separating the black
head from the black body ensures the unbroken sovereignty of white Englishness. Slicing at the
degraded, trivialized Moor’s head establishes that to be white is to be English and participate in
imperial enterprise” (178) In portraying Orlando’s re-enactment of this murder as a recreational
activity, as a young and clumsy boy imitating the activities of men, Woolf evokes the horrific
attitudes of sixteenth-century colonialism. Maria DiBattista reads this sentence differently:

In a single swoop of the pen, the tradition of chivalric romance, summoned by the very
name of Orlando and its illustrious literary pedigree – Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* and the
exiled prince from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* – is dealt a fatal blow. The curse of
Empire, the corrupting lust for assertive action, the simultaneously ennobling and
debasing cult of heroic manhood are caricatured in the fantasy combats of a young boy.

(DiBattista lviii)

DiBattista implies that this opening image of Orlando subverts imperialist ideologies rather than
reifying them. She argues that in referencing chivalric literary heroes through the figure of a
clumsy boy playing pretend, Woolf caricatures the twinned structures of colonial violence and
masculine valor. But to what extent does the parodic nature of the metaphor absolve its violence?
Especially if Woolf’s true aim is “to mount her own play-assault on the human head,” then would
not the real harm stem from her instrumentalization of colonial violence to make a generalized point about man’s reality?

This tension between gender and racial identity culminates in the novel’s third chapter when, upon Orlando’s request, King Charles II stations the young man as an ambassador extraordinary in Constantinople. The novel’s depiction of Constantinople draws on the Western Orientalist imagination, portraying the city with simultaneous fascination and condescension. The biographer describes Orlando’s daily routine, which aside from his diplomatic duties of exchanging endless bows, talking about the weather, and pretending to drink and smoke, includes leaning over the parapet each morning, “apparently entranced” by the Turkish city. Orlando portrays the city as deformed and impoverished, with “shawled women,” stray dogs, and “green turbaned pilgrims without eyes or noses” creating a discordant profusion of sounds and smells that rise to Orlando’s senses at the parapet (89). “Sour odours, made from bread fermenting and incense […] seemed the very breath of the strident and multicoloured and barbaric population,” the narrator concludes the paragraph (89). In positioning Orlando above the city’s inhabitants, the narrator emphasizes a dichotomy between the reserved, English Self and the primitive, visceral Other.

Urmila Seshagiri notes Woolf scholars tend to read Orlando principally as a lesbian love letter to Vita Sackville-West and overlook the influence that Sackville-West’s travel narrative Passenger to Teheran (edited and published by Woolf in 1926) had on the novel. “The underlying principle of Vita Sackville-West’s Passenger to Teheran is an epistemological confidence that foreign territories and peoples can be known by English readers,” Seshagiri writes (168, emphasis hers). In his seminal work Orientalism, Edward Said explains the origins of this “epistemological confidence,” establishing the ideological distinctions between the
“Orient” and the “Occident” that have shaped Western culture and academia (4). He also demonstrates how late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literature reproduced and disseminated the ideas that undergirded the Orientalist project. “The great contribution of imaginative and travel literature,” he writes, “strengthened the divisions established by Orientalists between the various geographical, temporal, and racial departments of the Orient” (99). Orlando relies on these divisions in representing Constantinople as magical and backward, an exotic escape for its protagonist when the irksome Archduchess makes his home “uninhabitable” (87).

However, just as Woolf teases Shakespeare in the Elizabethan era, lampoons Pope and Swift in the Restoration era, and caricaturest Victorian authorship through Eusebius Chubb, her third chapter provides a satirization of misrepresentation in travel literature, rather than an uncritical reproduction of it. Woolf provides evidence for this in her diary entry from her visit to Constantinople in 1906. Written decades earlier, Woolf’s diary has none of the Orientalist cliches and exotic tropes that overwhelm Orlando’s impression of Pera:

You felt yourself in a metropolis; a place where life was being lived successfully. And that did seem strange, &— if I have time to say so, a little uncomfortable. For you also realised that life was not lived after the European pattern, that it was not even a debased copy of Paris or Berlin or London, […] you knew yourself to be the spectator of a vigorous drama, acting itself out with no thought or need of certain great countries yonder to the west. And in all this opulence there was something ominous, & something ignominious – for an English lady at her bedroom window. (225)

Woolf looks down on the city from an open bedroom window, mirroring Orlando’s position on the parapet, but here, she expresses the discomfort of feeling decentered as a European. She sees
herself as peripheral to another world full of life, completely indifferent to her spectatorship. This earlier moment of cultural awareness suggests that Woolf’s unseemly tropes are not products of the Orientalist canon, but rather a co-option of it.

Woolf also satirizes the superficiality and profound ignorance of British diplomats in this chapter. First, when King Charles grants Orlando his dukedom, the British diplomatic corps decide to hold the lavish ceremony and celebration on the final night of the month of Ramadan. Therefore, when Orlando appears on a balcony above the public, the residents of Constantinople expect “some kind of miracle was to be performed,” and, in fact, “some say a shower of gold was prophesied to fall from the skies” (93). Instead, he receives the Order of the Bath. The biographer notes that most of the details of the evening are lost to time and relies on the account of a British naval officer, John Fenner Brigge, who witnessed the event. “When the rockets began to soar into the air, there was considerable uneasiness among us lest the native population…” the biographer quotes, informing the reader that the ellipses mark places where the manuscript was too burnt to be legible. The officer goes on to write “this demonstration of our skill in the art of pyrotechny was valuable, if only because it impressed upon them...the superiority of the British” (94). Since Brigge misreads the demeanor of the native population that will proceed to destroy the ceremony as a casualty of their successful uprising, Woolf throws this “superiority of the British” into question. Orlando and his fellow ambassadors appear entirely unaware of the tension mounting from the wealth disparity between the Sultan and the native population, as well as ignorant of the local cultural and religious values.

Woolf troubles the categories of gender and sexuality against those of English identity throughout the novel, but the narrative crux of Woolf’s experiment occurs when Orlando undergoes a sexual metamorphosis after the revolt. After Orlando falls into a seven-day slumber,
the gods “Truth,” “Candor,” and “Honesty,” as well as the ladies “Purity,” “Chastity,” and “Modesty” file into his room (99). The latter “Horrid Sisters” recall the “Weird Sisters” from Macbeth, except in this instance they are personified virtues trying to cover Orlando’s naked body, throwing white garments across the room to no avail (278, 214). In response, trumpeters blast the sound “TRUTH!” until Orlando wakes up, at which point the biographer admits, “We have no choice left but confess – he was a woman” (102). After the ceremonies conclude, the biographer goes to great lengths to underscore Orlando’s nonchalance at this change, writing that “the change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it” (103). Like Clive’s sexual revolution in Greece, the transformation happens inexplicable and suddenly, but unlike Clive, Orlando remains completely unphased. Orlando’s casual acceptance of her transition expresses the novel’s greatest deviation from social convention. Orlando exhibits none of the restless interiority that typifies Moretti’s Bildungsroman hero; instead, “Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity,” the biographer writes. Of course, Orlando’s identity does not remain unaltered by the change of sex, but in this passage, the narrator’s distinction between a changed future and unchanged identity contrasts to Moretti’s hero, whose identity always represents the future.

In placing Orlando’s transformation in the city of Constantinople, Woolf draws on the associations with its geographical location, heterogeneous population, and complex history of administration to create backdrop of mystical mutability. Having been part of the Roman, Byzantium, Latin, and Ottoman empires, the city had seen several different imperial regimes and thus contained several different religions and ethnicities by the end of the seventeenth century, when Orlando arrives. The populations that appear “multicoloured” to Orlando refer to the city’s
Greek, Turkish, and Armenian inhabitants as well as its Jewish, Muslim, and Christian populations. In describing the arbitrary spatial and cultural distinctions of “imaginative geography,” Said writes that “often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is ‘out there,’ beyond one's own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one's own” (54). Whereas in the novel’s first scene, the narrator drew a stark contrast between Europe and the “barbarian fields of Africa,” here she accepts the heterogeneity of foreign lands, relying now on an ambiguity of racial and sexual categories that Constantinople might represent to an English reader (11). In the novel’s imagination, Constantinople represents a portal from West to East, a portal from the rational and gender binary to the irrational and gender expansive.

Said describes how nineteenth and twentieth-century literature contributed to the mapping of deviant desires and sexual fantasies onto the “Orient,” resulting in the formation and commodification of “Oriental sexuality.” He argues that “the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest,” notably including women writers in his assessment (190). This “quest,” he continues, was for “a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden” (190). Considering the stringent Victorian attitudes on sexuality, perhaps finding “more libertine and less guilt-ridden” sexual behavior was very possible outside of England. Nonetheless, this generalization demonstrates less about concrete cultural differences and more about the Western projection of repressed desires onto vast swaths of cultures and populations. In a diary entry from March of 1927, Woolf conceives of a “whole fantasy” “escapade,” she calls “The Jessamy Brides,” the precursor for Orlando published the following year (131). “Sapphism is to be suggested. Satire is
to be the main note – satire and wildness. The ladies are to have Constantinople in view,” Woolf notes, revealing her association with the Turkish city and specifically Sapphic sexuality, as well as general “wildness” (*Diary* 131). Bazargan writes that in “drawing on the power of the cliché, the magic of the orient and all its one-thousand-and-one-nights aura, Woolf could make Orlando’s amazing transformation believable,” implying that Woolf indulges in exoticizing imagery merely to “sell the narrative” of the ambassador’s transfiguration (Bazargan 49).

Perhaps Woolf adopted popular Orientalist attitudes to avoid scrutiny for the queer themes of her novel, to “suggest” sapphism without naming it, but the freedom to co-opt these tropes – the colonial hero in the attic, the desert androgyne, the wise “old Gipsy” – is born of the same power that created them (107). 21

After Orlando becomes a woman, she dresses herself “in those Turkish coats and trousers which can be worn indifferently by either sex,” and flees the city on a donkey with Rustum el Sadi (103-104). 22 Orlando frees herself from the constraints of English patriarchy by masquerading as the Other – she cloaks herself in Turkish clothing to attain androgyny and to escape a violent revolt against the Sultan. Joseph Boone describes similar in writing about a trope set in motion by British archaeologist T.E. Lawrence. Boone writes, “seeking to blend into their surroundings by taking on the apparel of the Bedouin, such figures attempt not merely to possess but, more important, to become the desired other. Putting on ‘Arab drag’ provides the desert androgyne with a disguise that allows for the play of sexual and gender ambiguity” (96). Boone discusses T.E. Lawrence’s autobiographical account of his engagement with the Bedouin

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21 Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* was convicted and banned for obscenity in the same year *Orlando* was published.

22 Bazargan notes that Rustum’s name is a dual literary reference – “Rustum” alludes to the epic hero of the Iranian *Shahnameh*, and “Sadi” alluding to the canonical thirteenth-century Iranian poet (47). This detail supports the idea that Woolf’s third chapter is also contending with a literary epoch, rather than just exoticizing Orlando’s transition.
forces during the Arab Revolt of 1914-1918. Lawrence’s book, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, was published in 1926, just before Woolf wrote *Orlando*. Though the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman empire happened centuries after *Orlando*’s fictional revolt against the Sultan, Orlando’s use of Turkish clothing might be read as a permutation of “Arab drag.” In other words, Boone’s theory that masquerading as the foreign “Other” often coincides with gender ambiguity speaks to Orlando’s escape from Constantinople, as well as her quasi-nomadic episode when she journeys through the mountains of Turkey with Rustum el Sadi and his people (107).

When this episode ends, Orlando’s re-integration into British society forces her to consider the constraints of femininity. “Up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. Perhaps the Turkish trousers, which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts,” the biographer writes (113). The biographer implies that because Orlando was unconscious of her sex prior to boarding the ship, sexual politics – *sex itself*, even – are an invention of English society, at least at the beginning of the eighteenth century. On the deck of the ship, Orlando realizes the falsity of the chastity, obedience, and ornamentation she assumed occurred naturally in women and the hypocrisy of men who boast pretend to be all-powerful but balk at the sight of an exposed ankle. “She seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman […] as she pitted one sex against the other, and found each alternately full of the most deplorable infirmities, and was not sure to which she belonged – it was no great wonder that she was about to cry out that she would return to Turkey and become a gipsy again when the anchor fell with a great splash into the sea,” the biographer writes (117). Here Orlando supplies the Turkish countryside as a refuge from the rigid gender norms of her home country, characterizing patriarchy as inherently and exclusively English.
In fact, together Orlando and the biographer constantly revise their definitions of sex and gender, as if both falling victim to the changing centuries. She belongs to neither sex in the passage quoted above, and then to every sex in the following passage: “Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above” (139). This “intermixing” and “vacillation” of sex corresponds to Woolf’s idea of the “androgynous mind” of the artist that she formulates in “A Room of One’s Own,” but despite this passage’s connection to Woolf’s other texts, Orlando continues to evolve its conception of gender (AR 98-99). Under the reign of Queen Anne, Orlando begins to embody “feminine” qualities, becoming more “modest” of her intellect and more “vain” of her person, effecting a version of the masculine mind/feminine body dualism pertinent to my second chapter (138). During the Victorian era, Orlando yields to the spirit of the age’s inescapable pressure to marry and reproduce; unmarried, she loses the ability to write, and even briefly the will to live.23 These epochal configurations of gender bear a generative parallel to Butler’s notion of gender as “a constituted social temporality” – the idea that gender is an identity “tenuously constituted in time” that institutes itself through the repetition of certain acts (179). Woolf’s novel recursively dramatizes this constituted social temporality, accelerating the rate at which gender operates in the fictional realm.

Although she tries, Orlando never seems to be able to perfectly fulfill any definition of manhood or womanhood, occupying always an “ambiguous position” and carrying with her the

23 “My hands shall wear no wedding ring […] I have sought happiness through many ages and not found it; fame and missed it; love and not known it; life – and behold, death is better” (Orlando 182).
association of the “irregular life she had lived before” (172). Butler speaks to the foundation of this inherent ambiguity in the following passage:

There is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects. The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: “man” and “woman.” […] gender is an “act,” as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of “the natural” that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status. (Butler 200)

Butler presents gender as a tenuous construction, an illusory effect of coherence, depth, and substance that once challenged, reveals its own contingency. They also locate the agency to change or lose these gender norms within the system of signification. With its elaborate plots of gendered emergences, Orlando traffics in this system of signification, offering these hyperbolic exhibitions of “the natural” and the “true.” Each successive gender-act – Elizabethan masculinity, the imperial adventurer, Restoration parlor femininity, the Victorian marriage plot – reveals the mimetic structure of gender through Woolf’s parodic practice. Butler writes that the loss of gender norms would deprive “the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: ‘man’ and ‘woman.’” Woolf executes a kind of this deprivation, not through the “loss” of gender norms but through the subversive repetition of them embodied by her protagonist. Imbued with queer temporality, Orlando troubles the representational foundations of all gendered subjects. Because of its reiterative structure and parodic biographer/narrator, Orlando also deprives Bildungsroman of its central protagonist – the
heterosexual, masculine subject. Of course, *Jacob's Room* and *Maurice* also trouble this subject position. However, In *Jacob's Room* and especially *Maurice*, the young men manage sexuality deviance through a strict adherence to masculine gender identity – whereas *Orlando* collapses gender and sexuality under the same mechanism.
CONCLUSION

Woolf and Forster construct queerness not as a static identity marker, but as a dynamic and insurgent orientation towards the world. In portraying expansive and recursive queer temporalities, alternative phenomenological modes of consciousness, and the decomposition of gender itself, these authors prompt us to forgo linear histories of queer representation in the novel. If the genre of the Bildungsroman offers an opportunity to interrogate national identity through the representative biography of the individual, then by undoing the principles of the Bildungsroman, these works also challenge the enduring principles of masculine, imperialist ideologies that dominated definitions of the self in early twentieth-century England. Finally, in locating the impetus behind salient devices of literary modernism – autonomy, irresolution, abstraction, and rupture – in experiences of gender and sexual dissidence, these novels present the queer formation of the self as a vital and inexorable form for the modern novel.
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