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CHARMED MODERNISMS: FANTASIES OF SOCIALITY
AND DIFFERENCE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITISH
AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

BY
KARA WATTS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION
OF
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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine what mobilized the simultaneous discourses of charm and anti-charm rhetoric in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and American modernist literature. Charm moves through texts as a trojan horse of sorts, ostensibly supporting normative ideologies of the social order while its use actually imagines sociopolitical transformation. I look to Oscar Wilde's works to assess how charm possesses an aesthetic magic that bonds persons across normative time and social stratification. Charm becomes an experimental force of social form in the early decades of the twentieth-century. In the works of Gertrude Stein and Sylvia Townsend Warner, charm's play with concealment and revelation renders new understandings of the female body in modernist culture, and presents radical feminist revolutionary potential. By the 1930s, however, charm's rebellious force of form becomes subsumed by global capitalism, and re-latches to normativity; namely, to white masculinity, which repossesses and subsumes the rebellious powers of charm to become a powerful capitalist slickness in works by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edith Wharton. Charm's presence in the era, I argue, not only formulates a compelling narrative of modernism that deserves critical attention, but also exists as a force that wounds accepted paradigms of contemporary modernist studies. As modernist studies attempts to move toward questions of theoretical approach as well as scale (historical, geographic, and even planetary), charm serves as example of what new approaches to modernism based in mechanisms of feminization, marginalization, and difference can do.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The little charms, the little charms, the little charms, the little charms,
the little charms, the little charms, the little charms, the little charms...

THE LITTLE CHARMS PRICK.

The partridge's eye is red.

Little things, little things, little things, little things, little things, little things,
little things, little things, little things, little things, little things, little things...¹

– Salvador Dalí, “Poem of Little Things” [*Poema de les cosetes*] (1928)

It is only a question of finding the right words and putting them in the right order. But we cannot do it
because they do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind. And how do they live in the mind?

Variously and strangely, much as human beings live, by ranging hither and thither, by falling in love,
and mating together.²

– Virginia Woolf, “Craftsmanship” (1937)

During the modernist era—which, according to many, existed in the rough
timeframe from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century—the antiquated platitude
charm enjoyed odd ubiquity in Britain and America, peaking in usage in the middle of
modernism in 1925.³ Charm is a bizarre affective-aesthetic notion that, by all
accounts, does not appear to belong in literary modernism. The term is dated,
outmoded, and irrational. It is feminized and trivial. Charm's presence in the era
therefore wounds our accepted narratives of modernism—namely, the dominance of
post-Enlightenment projects of futurity, individualism, and the separation of aesthetics
from capital, politics, and science or technology. To focus on charm in literary
modernism is to refocus our gaze on the era, its objects, and its politics. When we turn
our critical interests toward charm's emergence in modernism, other engines of
accepted narratives in modernist studies begin to turn in response—to put pressure on
which writers we find to be prominent in modernism, for instance, means that
emergent or marginalized voices begin to appear as central. Accepted approaches to
studying modernist literature, such as formalist close reading, slip in favor of

affectively motivated attentions. And the presumed relationship of the aesthetic to the sociopolitical begins to blur into an altered dynamism that renders an estranged aesthetic autonomy. Bodies and identities as a result are themselves altered through shifting mechanisms of minoritization, sociality, and relationships to language and the literary.

To paraphrase Salvador Dalí's "Poem of Little Things," charm's ubiquity pricks me. Like Roland Barthes's *punctum*, it is a literally touching—tactile—detail to modernism. Both a physical object (such as a lucky token) and the state of a subject (to be charming, to be charmed), it typically denotes a pleasant interest or delight in something. Often, "charming" is used to refer to female attractiveness, a blank descriptor of a woman who presents as enticing or alluring in a generally non-erotic way.⁴ But more than a noun referencing an object or adjective referencing a person, "charm" also references language itself—it is a word or phrase with magical properties for healing, protection, or otherwise controlling one's surroundings, dating from Medieval incantations and healing verses. It shifts uneasily through a range of grammatical contortions—one can "be charming" oneself and charm someone else, and one can also "be charmed" by someone or something else—the ability to manipulate, to make one's surrounds malleable.

Charm points to proximity—the closeness between persons through allure or attraction, or the wider social position of influence, the potential for control and manipulation. Charm brings relationality into being by making the transparent tenets of such relationalities apparent. It is because charm plays with closeness that it is perceived as a desirable danger in modernism, a corrosive magnetism. Various

formations of social cohesion emerged during the mass upheavals of the twentieth century, including war, the increased disparities between upper and lower socioeconomic classes, and changes to the social and legal status of women. Definitions of social groups were iterated through collectivities of nationhood or patriotism, as well as through differences in identity categories of gender, race, class, and so on. In the throes of such evolving and confounding formations, charm promises proximity—social cohesion or closeness among individuals in a sociopolitical or national group with those outside of that group—as a false hope or fleeting potential, never to actually be held, grasped, or fully enjoyed. The modernist moment of charm is a site in which to deduce how modernism allows charm to occupy a paradoxical space of attraction and revulsion, an allure toward closeness while maintaining wariness of what such closeness may do. To activate charm in modernist projects, then, is to activate a logic-less logic of individuality and sociality, desire and discomfort, power and disempowerment.

To ask what charm is doing in modernism means to ask quite literally what charm is *doing*: performing, enforcing, supplanting, shattering. In an era presumably focused on Ezra Pound's dictum toward "the new" of experimental aesthetic projects, that endured a sociopolitical upheaval that included two devastating world wars, and that pushed toward a future of scientific and technological innovation, charm seems useless, a mere anachronism. But, as I argue here and throughout this study, charm becomes a rupture to modernist rupture. It interrupts a modernism already envisioning itself as an interruption. Modernism as rupture has been theorized almost since its alleged end, after WWII. This is one of the many narratives that modernism has

generated for itself (many of which have become “academic folk wisdom,” as Tyrus Miller puts it), yet, is the most pervasive.

As early as 1967, critics determined the central narrative of modernism to be synonymous with revolt, negation, and other forms of “rupture.” Irving Howe, in *The Idea of the Modern*, declared that modernism “must be defined in terms of what it is not, the embodiment of a tacit polemic, an inclusive negative.”⁵ It is a “revolt against... prevalent style, an unyielding rage against the official order” that somehow still “does not establish a prevalent style of its own.”⁶ David Harvey characterizes modernism as embedded in discourses of ephemerality and change, insecurity and fragmentation.⁷ Jurgen Habermas calls modernity a “project” that stems from intellectual efforts in the eighteenth century “to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic.”⁸ In other words, “the idea was to use the accumulation of knowledge generated by many individuals working freely and creatively for the pursuit of human emancipation and the enrichment of daily life,” including science’s dominion over nature, and rationalized forms of social organization that would lead to freedom from “the irrationalities of myth, religion, superstition” and “the dark side of our own human natures.”⁹ The “project” of modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, is likewise a secular movement that “sought demystification and desacralization of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains.”¹⁰ Yet, twentieth-century modernists began to suspect that such a project was doomed to turn against itself, rendering the “quest for human emancipation into a system of universal oppression in the name of human liberation.”¹¹ In *The Dialectic of*

Enlightenment, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer propose that Enlightenment rationality held the logic of domination within it, rendering the domination of nature as akin to “the oppressive power of purely instrumental reason over culture and personality.”¹² The project’s emphasis on technology, for instance, obscures “the exploitation of others’ work, and capital.”¹³ Effectively, “what men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men. That is the only aim... Power and knowledge are synonymous.”¹⁴

Charm appears to have no place here. If the modernist project works in responsivity or dialectic to the Enlightenment’s own project, charm’s insistence on production (that a thing can emerge from nothing, that incantation creates from mere words, sound, or look) opposes modernism’s obsessions with negation including Vorticist vacuity and the appropriation of “make it new” as destruction, or Nietzschean nihilism. Charm as itself emblematic of the continuity from the nineteenth century, as carryover from earlier eras that insisted on the primacy of the social institutions including religion, moral education, and the elevation of the domestic which included women’s docile roles as “angel in the house” as the heart of the nation. Charm’s roots in religion and spirituality confound the idea of modernism as secular, and its applicability to women and minorities fractures modernism as primarily masculinist.

Charm as rupture within modernism is thereby a meta-rupture, as it is equally a wound to modernism as much as it is a wound to our critical faculties in examining the era within the field of modernist studies. It is itself able to expose a modernist system of valuation, one that carries into our present attempts at knowing modernism,

dictating that which we find and that which we miss in our scholarly inquiry. We cannot see what we are not equipped to see—seemingly invisible tenets emerge when we look at the era askance. To view charm as “alluring blank” opens a space in modernist projects to newly apprehend a range of fantasies on the nature of modernism’s ideas about itself—particularly, its construction of systems of minoritization. What results is renewed ability to interrogate modernist aesthetic values, concerns of sociality and individuality, and the requisite categories of gender, race, and nationhood as linked to capitalist economic and social practices.

A History of Charm and Charm as Method

My central claim in *Charmed Modernisms* requires groundwork to be laid on charm’s emergence and usage. While this work is the first to examine the term as explicit force in the modernist era, I also seek to acknowledge those philosophers and writers who have engaged with charm to sketch its shape-shifting history. Therefore, what follows is two-fold: first, I will track charm’s emergence in Western literary and intellectual history, dating from the Middle Ages. Major ideas within this include charm’s mystic roots, its vocality, and its emphasis on the aesthetically *felt*, or in other words, its affective dimension. This includes charm’s etymological roots in Latin and Old French, which Chaucer references in his *Canterbury Tales* (c.1300), and aesthetic philosophy from Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. It also includes the clearest engagement with charm in modernism from Walter Benjamin, who spent much of his work theorizing an elusive, mystical grasp through art—the fleeting “thereness” of charm. Secondly, I bring charm’s history into conversation with contemporary work in

affect and aesthetics, which I find is still embedded in charm's attractions, and its ability to drive our experiences with literature, with others, and with the world writ large, yet still be able to defy categorization, consequent to the "trauma" of social contact and categorization (femininity, sexuality, racialization).

That charm tends toward the multifold, slippery, and mercurial is no surprise given the bends in its etymological history. Dating from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, charm touts multiple roots, including the Latin *carmen* (n.) or "song" and the Old French *charme* (n.) and *charmer* (v.) or "to enchant." Charms tended to refer to pagan and Christian incantations alleged to work magic, or refer to a small object meant to bring healing or luck. Charms both verbal and physical addressed a range of bodily and environmental concerns, and were aimed at resituating the body and its substances with a physical and spiritual environment – from toothaches to childbirth to marriages. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* (c. 1385) makes mention of such healing properties: "To oothere woundes and to broken armes / Some hadden salues and some hadden charmes."¹⁵ Only in the seventeenth century did charm begin to lose its religious or mythic significance and become an ostensibly positive, secular, and quotidian term of praise. These aspects once associated with the religious or mythic were transformed in subsequent centuries to become forcibly secularized, though uncertainty as to its power remained.

Charm in the modern era supplanted religiosity with aesthetic perception, its own secular form of "magic" – frequent concern of modernist artists and writers, aesthetic perception could influence, delight, or otherwise elicit spontaneous feeling. As such, it recalls what Walter Benjamin deems an artwork's "aura." Writing in 1936,

Benjamin explains a “unique apparition of a distance,” or, that which solidifies the singularity of an original artwork, is always attached to our encounters with art. It is “the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place.”¹⁶ Aura is a kind of presence, a temporal distance with a simultaneous closeness, that has been lost as contemporary perception has changed with the advent of photography and cinema. Benjamin finds aura “identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition,” or, art as it was used in its origin, “in the service of rituals—first magical, then religious.” Its “original use value” was that of authenticity. In the twentieth century, “for the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual,” founding it instead “on a different practice: politics.”¹⁷ I reference Benjamin’s outline of the trajectory of artistic perception through modernity to draw parallel to the rough outline of charm’s position through history. Charm, like “aura,” retains a lost referent, replaced in the modernist era with capitalist consumption and politics. These forces, in other words, become the driving aspects of charm’s manipulations and allures, and too are subject to capitalism and politics’ assumptions of value and primacy.

The term seems an ideal example of secularized aesthetic concept within modernism, confirming modernism’s own interest in the secular and rational. Indeed, charm had already appeared long before within aesthetic theory. Immanuel Kant, of course, was one of the first aestheticians to incorporate charm in a study of aesthetics, albeit to negate its purity for proper assessment of the beautiful. Kant not only names *charm* (*Reiz*) as such in his account of aesthetic experience in the *Critique of Judgment*, but does so because he is sure to place it outside the realm of the

beautiful.¹⁸ Kant finds design to be that which is essential in art, not emotion or “sensation”: “it is not what gratifies in sensation but merely what pleases by its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite for taste.” Beauty, he notes, “which ought properly to be a question merely of the form,” is often confused with the lesser “*charm* and *emotion*.” Beauty is conceived as distinct from charm as the “intrinsic” over mere “ornamentation.” This duality is essential to what Kant finds to be pure, rather than empirical, thinking. Pure perception is thus pitted against the ornamental and emotional. “A judgement of taste,” Kant concludes, “which is uninfluenced by charm or emotion... and whose determining ground, therefore, is simply finality of form, is a pure judgement of taste.”¹⁹ Kant colludes emotionalism with charm, implicitly indicating that he finds emotional or affective response may affect the quality of our perception, and thus, that the object of our gaze may not be indeed objective. The legacy of such thought in Western aesthetics exists in perpetuity. Any *impure* or otherwise “not pure” judgments of beauty are encounters in which “every interest corrupts the judgment of taste and deprives it of its impartiality.”²⁰ Those judgements deemed not pure for reasons of interest are “charms” (*Reize*). Such impure judgements seem to be already embroiled in modernist caution toward emotionality, aesthetic investment, and the dangers of interest over “disinterestedness.” Despite colloquial interpretations that note otherwise, charm is therefore theorized as on the fringes of the beautiful, but *not* a degree or modality of the beautiful in itself.

Rosalind Galt underscores the link between social inequity and aesthetic categories, including the beautiful, in *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (2011). As with charm, “pretty” has become denigrated or “lesser” value (often, perceived to

be feminine and non-Western) to the more significant “beautiful” throughout Western aesthetics and philosophy. “The rhetoric of cinema,” Galt argues, “has consistently denigrated surface decoration, finding the attractive skin of the screen to be false, shallow, feminine, or apolitical.”²¹ The “resilience” of the idea that cinema is “empty spectacle” is proof positive for Galt that the critical terms used to assess and evaluate art are themselves embedded in modes of reading learned from “a transhistorical Kantian schema of beauty.”²² Galt aims, as I do here, to trouble such a history, yet I find charm’s viability as not cinematic but literary quality rendering texts and textual experience as incantatory necessarily also caught in particular kinds of questions about form. Charm is both aesthetically formal and affectively *of* form. It is a structure that is, paradoxically, a mysterious force difficult to precisely identify but that occupies some dependency or asymmetry of aesthetic feeling and form.

To examine charm in the purely aesthetic sense as aspect of aesthetic perception, literature, and art is to place charm into the often-theorized tangle of aesthetic response. Sianne Ngai, who tracks minor negative aesthetic emotions in *Ugly Feelings* (2005), defines aesthetic response simply: aesthetic emotions are those “feelings unique to our encounters with artworks.”²³ These feelings’ “objective or subjective status,” however, poses continual problem in aesthetics: one of the oldest theories of aesthetic experience, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, failed to clearly distinguish whether particular emotion (catharsis) occurs within an audience in response to drama or is located in the dramatic object itself.²⁴ She refers to Gérard Genette’s attempts to get around the very question of subjective or objective emotion by emphasizing the relativism (meaning, that what elicits positive feeling in me may not elicit positive

feeling in you) that Kant and other philosophers have tried to outwit. Genette's "unapologetically subjectivist theory of aesthetic judgment as a mode of illusory projection," Ngai writes, is "what amounts to a fundamentally subjective appraisal [...] treated 'as if' it were one of the object's own intrinsic properties."²⁵ Aesthetic judgment, then, "is this illusory objectification," something that Genette deems "aesthetic predicates" such as precious, momentous, or imperious, either created from or stemming from our initial perception of the aesthetic object.²⁶ Eve Sedgwick offers an alternative affective-aesthetic framework as she turns to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (*A la recherche du temps perdu*). Proustian "modes of being, of relation to self and the world," she writes, becomes contemplation as a search to understand "his continuing access to a psychology of surprise and refreshment, as well as his nourishing relation to work."²⁷ Sedgwick's idea of such capacity for "surprise and refreshment" became unofficial groundwork for contemporary affect studies. Feeling or *affect* functions as political and social currency, yet, remains an unknown variable that in most cases is not reliably predicated, manufactured, or exerted, and thereby is independent of power, while it may work within and beside it.

Such aesthetic-emotional responses encounter particular problems in the realm of not only aesthetics, but also affect. This is largely due to the significance of form or structure, which tends to be avoided in contemporary affect theory. For example, Brian Massumi finds affect not a language or form but an "intensity" involving movement and sensation which "holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology."²⁸ Defined as the Spinozan "capability to affect and be affected," affect is significant in that it departs from an understanding of the body as a "positionality" in a

social matrix of power and domination in Foucault's formulation. Massumi argues that such a positional matrix concretizes an ideological fixity of the subject, rendering both accordance to power and subversion to power already "scripted" in the social matrix. Massumi finds affect theoretically necessary to abandon such fixity in favor of a mode that explores the dynamic subject's potential for non-predeterminate change. Affects are both virtual ("the autonomy of relation") and actual ("functional limitation") in that they "virtual synesthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them."²⁹ This is why emotions and feeling tend to be seen as disorienting, he notes, or described as outside of oneself. From that point, we may then imagine an ethics composed on the basis of such change, he argues. This change is enacted by "the *perception of one's own vitality*, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as 'freedom')."³⁰ Emotion, such as that which is elicited by artworks (or, in most of Massumi's examples, media, art, and popular culture) contrasts with affect, then, because emotion is a formalized naming or the "socio-linguistic fixing" of affect which reduces it to signification.³¹ Lawrence Grossberg adds, "affective states are neither structured narratively nor organized in response to our interpretations of situations."³² To examine an artwork and experience aesthetic emotion, then, fails to occupy either realm of aesthetics or affect/emotion on the basis of form.

However, it is here that I offer charm as remedial and necessary force in this perceived split. Charm occupies positions as affect and aesthetic emotion uniquely because it is equally referent to subjective state and physical object. In other words, charm recognizes that *specific language and form gives rise to specific affective-*

aesthetic experience. Eugenie Brinkema summarizes: “the turn to affect has corresponded with a disciplinary turn away from detail, from specificity and the local.”³³ This is because affect is seen as “the place where something immediate and automatic and resistant takes place outside of language,”³⁴ as Massumi’s “force” and pre-linguistic intensity suggests. However, the turn to affect “does not obliterate the problem of form and representation. Affect is not where reading is no longer needed.”³⁵ Affect as critical apparatus alone fails to allow affect to press back against theory, she cautions. Instead, we ought to be asking, “What... would happen to the study of both affectivity and form if we were to reintroduce close reading to the study of sensation, not as felt by moved bodies, but as wildly composed in specific cinematic, literary, and critical texts?”³⁶ Consider that charm can be an experience between persons (in which case, who holds the experience of charm – the charmed, the charmer, or both, and to what degree?), and the difficulty of reading such interactions. How we formally may account for the feeling that one person is “putting on the charm” artificially, a gimmickry that we are coded to detest, or determine whether charm is present at all, must rely upon *form*. This drives my focus on charm as a modernist literary and cultural phenomenon. Moreover, this approach follows Raymond Williams’s notion of structures of feeling, structures which named those felt social experiences which “do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and action.” Instead, they lie “at the very edge of semantic availability,”³⁷ always flirting on the border of the discursive and that which escapes discourse.

As Brinkema indicates, a return to form and to close reading is critical for affect to “do” anything for the Humanities. In doing so, I find we may better approach the work of social judgement, power, and politics. If I am “being charming” to you, for example, I am putting on a relation, and therefore, I am showcasing the “charm and charisma” that Pierre Bourdieu calls “the power,” or cultural capital, “which certain people have, to impose their own self-image as the objective and collective image of their body and being.”³⁸ In saying you are charming, or in “being charming,” I have established an asymmetry of power between us that thereby constructs each of us. In both scenarios, I have power over you, in some form, because “I” am the one who judges. “You” become the object to my subjecthood. And yet, you retain some kind of magnetic, manipulative influence in your charm, under the guise of innocuousness or inertness. Desire and pleasure from this asymmetry challenges what the “beautiful” would have established. This new, strange asymmetry occurs through language, judgement, and aesthetic feeling. Furthermore, following Bourdieu, this aesthetic feeling is a social one. Charm under this theorization—as a placeholder of judgement or legible structuring apparatus, arising from formal engagement, and necessarily indicating a lost or absent object—becomes a modernist fantasy. As fantasy, this fantasy’s “magic” of “bringing into being” is already at odds with modernism’s notions of itself as secular, rational, and future-focused, a modernism that is accepting of paradox, rupture, and revolt against objectivity and closure. It shows the modernism still sought the possibility of meaning, the ability to envision futures that were very like the present rather than “new” or progressive, still believed in magical possibility of intersubjectivity at the rise of the unknowable individual

consciousness, or the ability for individuals to retain power to manipulate their social status amidst the rise of twentieth century global capitalism. That modernism knew these things to be false or untrue was not deterrent. This provides hope for us in the present to see what formal affective engagement with literary and cultural representations of fantasies can offer for us as we live through our own time of rupture, revision, and uncertainty.

To call attention to “charm,” then, instead of the beautiful, the “interesting,” or the negative “shock” or “disgust,” is to newly apprehend the details of form as a social placeholder—a *form* of judgement—that has the unique ability to bring things and relations between things into being (or, in other words, “magicking” things into being) while laying bare the means of the production of this relation. It is because of this asymmetry that I argue for charm to be considered an important point of interrogation. Furthermore, charm is particularly of import in modernism as it becomes signal of multiple antimodernist notions. It is an antagonism to modernism, a catch in its narrative of itself, that was magnetically alluring to modernists. Our attentiveness to this phenomenon finds charm as a formal affective relationality, a force of evacuated form that moves our critical apparatuses into an otherwise that recognizes the foundations of our apparatuses in systems of power and difference.

Many recent studies in modernism have approached early twentieth-century literature and culture with a single controlling principle, as I am doing with charm. Other controlling principles have included glamour, boredom, melancholia, and ambiguous thermality, studies of which include Judith Brown’s *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (2009), Allison Pease’s

Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom (2012), Jonathan Flatley's *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, Jessica Burstein's *Cold Modernism: Literature, Fashion, Art* (2012). Such works have surged as part of literary study's so-called "humanistic" or social turn, motivated in part by the impasses left by poststructuralism through the last decades of the twentieth century. Like these studies, this project, too, ultimately seeks to worry accepted boundaries of modernist literary studies via a singular, evocative concept in order to "retain modernism's unique resources for thinking [...] in a noninstrumental fashion."³⁹ Yet, I push my project away from generalized "feeling" in modernism, since this tends to occlude the other components of modernism, particularly the problems of form. In this way, I develop the approaches and commitments of Eugenie Brinkema in *The Forms of the Affects* (2014). As I've indicated, much of what I work with here is purposefully at odds with traditional definitions of modernism, including its allegedly dominant masculine aesthetics, its emphasis on rationality and the secular, and its concern with individuation and subjectivity over the social or collective. To discuss glamour or boredom in modernism, for example, is to address accepted notions of modernist aesthetic and political project – glamour's aesthetic smoothness or hollowness, and boredom's demonstration of modernist difficulties with individuation, agency, or subjectivity. Charm, on the other hand, does not participate in any of modernism's common narratives; instead, charm ruptures these narratives to propose a kind of modernism on the margins that helps us locate the structures of modernists' values, desires, and fantasies. This marginality is not to be confused with the notion of a minor literature. In the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their well-known

essay on the subject, minor literature is characterized by its composition by a minority “within a major language,” with the common characteristics of “deterritorialization,” a political domain, and a collective value.⁴⁰ What I look at instead is a modernism that premises itself on the mechanisms of such minoritization, that does not deterritorialize through minorization but actually reterritorializes the same ground for itself.

My study of charm is important to modernist studies because, I find, as we examine lesser-studied or dismissed *forms* circulating in modernist thought and literature, we may better come to know modernism. Urmila Seshagiri finds that despite an immensity of contemporary work in alternative modernisms, including cosmopolitan modernity, comparative modernities, and postcolonial modernisms, modernist studies writ large has largely accepted modernism as I described it above – striving for the masculinist, secular, and rational. Syllabi across English departments continue to list expected, dominant authors as foundational: D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, and so on, for fear that teaching modernism without these figures decenters what modernism allegedly is. Other authors including Virginia Woolf or Dorothy Richardson, Jean Rhys, Jean Toomer, May Sinclair, or H.D. are of interest because they engage directly with such dominances, such as H.D.’s turn to Sigmund Freud or Woolf’s frequent address of masculinity in literature and politics throughout her career. Despite the current field’s alleged acceptance of “the relationship between modernism and modernity was elementally shaped by women, feminists, and feminist women,”⁴¹ then, Seshagiri finds that there remains the continued “gap” or “aporia between feminism’s vitality for modernism, on one hand, and the scholarly neglect of that vitality, on the other.”⁴² This is not a project as

Stephen Ross characterizes it, as he reminds us of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "minor" to "signify an overlooked but perfectly symptomatic literature, one that illuminates its context and the 'major' works, figures and traditions around it, as the canon cannot."⁴³ Rather, I find charm's ability to loop us in uncertain delight as itself a hopeful act of this sort of critical revitalization to examine modernism's mechanisms of minoritization. (I use "delight" deliberately – etymologically, "delight" is of mixed origin, in part out of Latin *delectare* or to allure, charm, or please, thereby is itself a loop back to charm.) Hope, like "happiness's promise," for Sara Ahmed, is a "hopeful performative," something that is "*container* of diverse objects" actually "might also *contain* the forms in which desire can be realized."⁴⁴ Such a suggested tautology, Ahmed observes, "may tell us something by not telling us anything. Without the word *happiness*, we would perhaps not have a word that desire could point to."⁴⁵ In slow study of the difficult-to-pinpoint category of "charm" – in all of its middling quotidian and its reliance upon both a feminist modernism and othered modernism – I hope that we may also begin to realize what it points to. Reading charm is a way of reading modernism's own conflicting desires, judgements, and fantasies.

Charm in Literary Modernism

Despite its oddities, charm did not solely exist in what the field today may consider modernism's margins. Rather, canonical modernists were highly interested in charm. In the case of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the classic novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) came about via Fitzgerald's self-proclaimed "idea" about "a woman's charm."⁴⁶ Virginia Woolf was "wounded" by charm when it was used as critique of her work, a

nonresponse. After the publication of her feminist essay on women's creativity, *A Room of One's Own*, in 1929, Woolf predicted: "I shall get no criticism, except of the evasive jocular kind... that the press will be kind & talk of its charm, & sprightliness." In other words, she says, "I am afraid it will not be taken seriously. Mrs Woolf is so accomplished a writer that all she says makes easy reading...this very feminine logic..."⁴⁷ Tristan Tzara bitterly noted his own "charm" in an ironic Dada manifesto. The work was composed after Tzara allegedly took insult at being deemed "charming" at a social event in 1920:

A few days ago I was at a meeting of imbeciles. There were a lot of people there. Everyone was charming. Tristan Tzara, a small, absurd and insignificant individual was giving a lecture on the art of becoming charming. He was charming, at that. Everyone is charming. And witty. It's delightful, isn't it? Everyone is delightful, at that. 9 degrees below zero. It's charming, isn't it? No, it isn't charming. God isn't up to it. He isn't even in the directory. But even so he's charming.

Ambassadors, poets, counts, princes, musicians, journalists, actors, writers, diplomats, directors, dressmakers, socialists, princesses and baronesses are charming.

You're all of you charming, very subtle, witty and delightful. Tristan Tzara says to you: he's quite willing to do something else, but he prefers to remain an

idiot, a practical joker and a hoaxer. Be sincere for a moment: what I've just said to you – is it charming or idiotic?⁴⁸

Charm in each of these literary moments appears as de facto response to literary incomprehensibility—Fitzgerald's notion of women as mysteries or inscrutable *femme fatales*, Woolf's writing glossed as unserious, and destabilizing Tzara's sense of control over his own expression. Modernism is of course no stranger to such opacity. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for example, was deemed so difficult as to be unreadable – a reviewer in 1922 noted that the novel put so many barriers in front of readers' attempts at understanding that "it appear[s] Mr. Joyce ha[s] taken some half million assorted words [...], shaken them up in a colossal hat, and laid them end to end."⁴⁹ But charm's incomprehensibility relies on particular presumptions. In any formulation, charm inescapably plays upon the incomprehensibility encountered when one hits against the particular paradoxes of what charm blankly polices—the abutting social categories of gender, sexuality, or racialization. These categories, while complicit in the engendering of difference in modernity, are further complicated when modernist projects use charm to critique the limitations of such categories, and furthermore, to propose aesthetically driven transformations of the social fabric through forms of feeling rather than normative structures.

As I have established, charm takes up the position of paradox in modernism. It is an alluring blank, a space of trauma, of incomprehension, in which a logic-less logic emerges. This is the sort of logic modernists use to think through the changes to social categorizations of gender, sexuality, class, and race. It also suggests on an aesthetic level a space of aesthetic evaluation that names something that falls short of grandeur,

a fallen promise of social cohesion or an attempt at navigating the shifts in what is considered social cohesion. Charm seems to indicate a near nostalgia for the aesthetically autonomous beautiful.⁵⁰ The term assumes a superficiality, a stylistic gimmickry, or a degraded falseness. It becomes, in other words, a polite indication of emptiness, uselessness, or extraneousness, and thus, an indication of the “feminine,” a “feminine” that is embedded in modernist aesthetic practice.⁵¹

I use charm’s central operation as gloss on degradation and devaluation as arbiters and upholders of difference (gender, race, and sexuality), and the fantasies of how to navigate (and indeed, what responsibility exists to even begin to navigate) such difference to explain charm’s perceived normativity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then rebelliousness in the early decades of the twentieth century, and finally, after the boom period of the 1920s, its fatalism in 1930s modernism. This fatalism is iterated acutely by white male modernists, such as D.H. Lawrence. While it was in the nineteenth century a desirable, genteel quality acceptable for women, charm shifted to become an engine of revolution for women writers who harnessed charm’s force of form while it became emasculating and melancholic for men. It indicated some failure of expression and nostalgia for a fantastic, imagined past. Instead of itself holding meaning, charm ended up as an evacuated placeholder for the search for a language and vocabulary to express the crisis of man (and I do mean man) in modernity.

As this shifting valuative marker, “charm” in modernist literature and culture names the formulation of a constrictive, then revolutionary, then lost object. I propose that charm functions as both a mourning and a melancholia in the Freudian definition

of these two terms as responses to loss either real (such as the death of a close friend) or imagined (in the case of a lost romantic partner at the end of a relationship). I aim to retain the capability of both terms' emphases on loss as alternately conscious or unconscious, and with result in a "poor emptiness" belonging either to the world or one's own ego. This subject/object relation is akin to Ngai's assessment of the trouble between subject and object in the affective-aesthetic relation. Freud writes in his essay on the subject: "the obvious thing is for us somehow to relate melancholia to the loss of an object that is withdrawn from consciousness, unlike mourning, in which no aspect of the loss is unconscious."⁵² The "melancholic inhibition seems puzzling to us because we are unable to see what it is that so completely absorbs the patient,"⁵³ and the loss of the love-object "is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence of love relationships to come to the fore."⁵⁴ When mourning becomes pathological, it becomes melancholy, and "the conflict of ambivalence... forces it to manifest itself in the form of self-reproaches for having been oneself responsible for the loss of the love-object," particularly, "for having *wanted* that loss."⁵⁵

Charm construed as loss, however, is slippery, as it expresses the violent, colonialist, racist, and misogynist machinery that social, national, and economic structures depend on. From the early twentieth century, charm was already read as a loss—particularly, as a mourning for a lost, masculine pastoral, in Britain. D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) is critical example. After the sudden death of her lover, Gudrun muses on her uncertain future, a future that she is pleased to find is unexpectedly now "perfectly vague."⁵⁶ "All possibility," she thinks, "that was the charm to her, the lovely, iridescent, indefinite charm,—pure illusion. All possibility—

because death was inevitable, and nothing was possible but death.”⁵⁷ The precipice of uncertainty itself holds charm for her as she “did not want things to materialize, to take any definite shape”⁵⁸ In this deathly hope for stillness, for the not-yet, the hopeful expectance of the start of the novel is wholly overturned: in its early pages, Ursula thinks her sister Gudrun “so *charming*, so infinitely charming, in her softness and her fine, exquisite richness of texture and delicacy of line. There was a certain playfulness about her too, such a piquancy or ironic suggestion, such an untouched reserve.”⁵⁹ In his introduction to the novel, Lawrence explains: “Man struggles with his unborn needs and fulfillment. New unfoldings struggle up in torment in him... Any man of real individuality tries to know and understand what is happening, even in himself, as he goes along.”⁶⁰ Lawrence deems this struggle “the struggle for verbal consciousness,” the “passionate struggle into conscious being.”⁶¹ As Lawrence indicates here, charm seems to be an evacuation of language’s ability to express; resultantly, to express anything is to express loss. From the “charming Jersey cattle... breathing hoarsely from their velvet muzzles at the human beings”⁶² to the Criches’ family home at the Shortlands, described by Ursula as “Very peaceful and charming,”⁶³ charm seeps into the landscape of Lawrence’s English countryside to mark a nostalgia for quintessential Englishness, the Englishness of manor houses made possible by the financial boons of empire. The “thing” that charm suggests but cannot express, then, is the unspoken reliance of white English masculine identity upon the back of the British empire’s gendered and racialized exploitation.

Charm as masculinist fantasy has remained so pervasive that, as recently as 2013, contemporary male writers forthrightly mourned a lost “classic” masculinity.

“The Rise and Fall of Charm in American Men,” an article appearing in *The Atlantic* by its former editor, Benjamin Schwarz, commits this same egregious fantasy-building. “[W]e live in a culture all but devoid of male charm,” Schwarz laments. He names George Clooney as the last of the male charmers, a final holdover from lost Cary Grants and James Garners. “Only the self-aware can have charm,” he points out, and “what used to be called good breeding is necessary (but not sufficient) for charm: no one can be charming who doesn’t draw out the overlooked, who doesn’t shift the spotlight onto others—who doesn’t, that is, possess those long-forgotten qualities of politesse and civilité.” By calling charm’s key components both “politesse” or “civilité” and an indication of “good breeding,” Schwarz makes apparent the assumptions of charm as its own “eugenics” of sorts, an indicator of socioeconomic status, gender, and undoubtedly, race. The supposed purity of white male sociality as embodied by Cary Grant is held as fantastical ideal. And the stakes for such a loss are high, for Schwarz. Not only does the loss of charm as quality for socializing lead to a degraded society, he argues, but it also leads to a bevy of dissatisfied women who “commonly complain about the difficulty in gaining any conversational purchase when, say, trying to engage the fathers of their children’s classmates or the husbands of their tennis partners.” Men, unfortunately, “don’t indulge in the easy shared confidences and nonsexual flirtations that lubricate social exchange among women,” and thereby “consistently fail to meet the sort of obvious standards set by guides to etiquette and to the art of conversation common 50 years ago.”⁶⁴

Schwarz’s comments clearly demonstrate the ease with which charm slips into the reinforcement of social and identity categories—the boundaries that maintain

value systems that place heteronormativity, whiteness, and masculinity as objects worthy of preservation and attention. Schwarz is excellent example of the way in which these notions align with an American conservatism, including the current political view trotted out in defense of supporting “blue-collar America” that places capitalist concern squarely in the realm of white men (chapter four furthers this argument). These are the stakes of inquiring into charm at the turn of the twentieth century. Charm’s status as space allows us critical inquiry, an inquiry that holds significance beyond mere historical description of social codes at the turn of the century.

Charm, in other words, has real consequences as it entertains a blank space of impossible logics. By “impossible logics,” I mean the space of paradox, where overly complex logical machinations occur. As Lawrence and Schwarz show, charm is a conservative notion that seems to reinforce normative ideologies and the mechanisms of a society bell hooks would later recognize as white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. But what charm also does is become itself a force of form, evacuated and alterable. While charm in the conservative context is marker of preexisting social boundaries that divide labor classes, gender categories, and whiteness from other races, modernists such as Gertrude Stein, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, and others find that charm does not mark the preexisting, but points to the open blackness, the transformability, of these notions of social cohesion or division. Charm becomes a transformative mechanism because it points out that social divisions are not concrete or unchanging, but *made*. Therefore, these divisions are radically alterable. As writers

addressed in this project will show, charm thereby can render new social bonds, ones predicated on aesthetic grounds.

A casualty of early twentieth century political, technological, and social upheaval, charm as indicator of the “death” of particularly British (male, and nationalist) potentiality in the face of modernization is itself a consequence of modernity. It is a bizarre consequence of modernity’s push toward human and social progress, a push that was actually not itself a rupture but a continuation. Specifically, it was a continuation of the Enlightenment’s utopian project that emphasized the promise of endless human perfectibility, equality, and improved living conditions made possible by advances in science, technology, and medicine. More than “an experience of temporality and a set of social transformations,” modernization for the sake of modernization was a goal in itself.⁶⁵ These moments of “modernization” evidence the ambiguous relation and curious agential and non-agential turns modernists had in the move toward modernity. Modernism or modernity is therefore not necessarily a specific aesthetic project in response to or product of historical factors (industrialization, urbanization, the rise of mass culture). Jonathan Flatley instead describes modernity as itself a “symbolic space in which what counts as modernity, what modernity is or should be, and for whom, is contested, debated, reevaluated, or otherwise articulated.”⁶⁶ In other words, looking to charm as indicator of masculinity’s melancholia in modernism is to look to one barometer of the gap between what modernity is and what it should be, what promises could be made or should be made, and what promises have failed to be kept.

This loss is, I argue throughout this project, embedded in aesthetic practice in modernism, where it becomes entwined with varied confrontations of otherness. This is, as I've described above, an encounter with heteronormative masculinity's binaristic opposite, the feminine. Yet, to be sure, it is also non-whiteness, a non-whiteness that is compositional of that whiteness. As Frantz Fanon describes in "The Fact of Blackness" (1952), the experience of a raced subject is a Hegelian "being for others."⁶⁷ "[N]ot only must the black man be black," he writes, "he must be black in relation to the white man," leaving a black body to be returned to one "sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning."⁶⁸ When "all that is solid melts into air"⁶⁹ in modernity (a phrase that itself conveys the diffuseness of the modern, as well as the urgency of the "now"⁷⁰), charm becomes synonymous with what Anthony Blanche decries in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) as that "simple, creamy English charm."⁷¹ The "creaminess" of English charm conveys a milky rurality, an agricultural past that Lawrence mourns in *Women in Love*, but moreover, a racialized whiteness.

In *Women in Love*, this coded melancholy for whiteness is echoed in the emphasis Gerald places on coal mining's laboring "blackness." While "hideous and sordid" during his childhood, in adulthood, he "saw them with pride," the "stream of miners flowing along the causeways from the mines at the end of the afternoon, thousands of blackened, slightly distorted human beings with red mouths, all moving subjugate to his will... They were ugly and uncouth, but they were his instruments."⁷² The same blackness plagued his father, manifest in "internal pains" he suffered:

The pain seemed to absorb his activity. He knew it was there, he knew it would come again. It was like something lurking in the darkness within him. And he

had not the power, or the will, to seek it out and to know it. There it remained in the darkness, the great pain, tearing him at times, and then being silent. And when it tore him he crouched in silent subjection under it, and when it left him alone again, he refused to know of it. It was within the darkness, let it remain unknown. So he never admitted it, except in a secret corner of himself, where all his never-revealed fears and secrets were accumulated.⁷³

The unnamed darkness that lurks is the confrontation with otherness that the senior Crich is unable to contend with. It would radically alter his subjecthood to the point of annihilation—precisely Gerald’s fate on the snowy mountaintop in the final chapters of the novel. The darkness, moreover, operates in uncanny connection with the plight of the senior Crich’s wife:

By some strange association, the darkness that contained the pain and the darkness that contained his wife were identical. All his thoughts and understandings became blurred and fused, and now his wife and the consuming pain were the same dark secret power against him, that he never faced [...] He had rather ignore its existence. Only, in his vague way, the dread was his wife, the destroyer, and it was the pain, the destruction, a darkness which was one and both.⁷⁴

Crich’s assessment of what forces are acting upon what entities within him meanders. First, the pain exists as darkness within him, and his wife is contained within this darkness. Then, these forces begin to blur, even as he refuses to face them and to see what lies within him. He instead projects this inner darkness outward, locating the dread and pain of confronting his own subjecthood in his wife. In her own minoritized

status as woman and property, his wife herself bears the reminder of the reach of English nationalism's colonization—it “contains” not only other nations, but its own subjects.

Racial difference and femininity expressed through English “charm” are finally also in conversation with sexual orientation. Anthony's warning to Charles in *Brideshead* extends beyond racialization and gentility. Cautioning him against the Flyte family's alluring siren song to him, Anthony declares to Charles that charm is a suffocation, “the great English blight.”⁷⁵ Indeed, charm seems to snuff Charles's artistic talents – when out with Charles after Charles's exhibition late in the novel, Anthony insists:

I was right years ago – more years, I am happy to say, than either of us shows – when I warned you. I took you out to dinner to warn you of charm. I warned you expressly and in great detail of the Flyte family. Charm is the great English blight. It does not exist outside of these damp islands. It spots and kills everything it touches. It kills love; it kills art; I greatly fear, my dear Charles, it has killed you.⁷⁶

Even Charles's supposedly successful, feral paintings showcased just prior to this moment are not true art, but “English charm, playing tigers,”⁷⁷ says Anthony. This is, of course, not a mere statement of aesthetic critique, but a statement of concern over the coded threat of charm. In this brief phrase, Anthony identifies charm's reliance on racialized colonial power – “playing tigers” recalls England's imperial hold on where tigers may exist (namely, South Asia) and moreover, suggests the “game” of power involved in empire. Again, charm's reliance upon closeness, its seeming achievability

or contagiousness, is critical component of its very allure. Its ability to not only set new relations into motion, but to spread such new relations through influential proximity. If “others—defined through gender, sexual orientation, or race—remain quite close, the melancholic loss of white, nationalist masculinity becomes all the more bizarre. The threat of charm is a revelation of difference’s falsity, its “too closeness” that signals the shift from relation to influence and social transformation.

Charming Effects

On the subject of Parisian actresses, critic Alan Dale once mused in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in 1908:

What *is* charm? It is something that you cannot see. It is something that an actress in repose never possesses. It is something that the photographer cannot catch. It is something that eludes the pen of the artist, and is but fleetingly guessed at by the caricaturist. Sometimes it lurks in a shrug or an unsuspected, graceful gesture; it is to be found in the method of addressing the audience; it exists in an unconventional way of wearing conventional clothes; it may hide itself in facial expression—in a smile, a pout, a frown, a laugh. I have seen it in a toss of the head, a sudden movement of the arms, even in the manipulation of draperies or a swish of the dress.⁷⁸

Others from the era assigned charm not to French women, but to American women. French fashion designer Jean Patou’s 1925 fall-winter show was a sensation for his Taylorist management of staging and production, keen manipulation of the press, and distinctly Fordist styling.⁷⁹ In a November 1924 edition of *The New York Times* (an

issue that also featured Patou's advertisement for the show, "MANNEQUINS WANTED FOR PARIS"), Patou declares, "The American woman is a charming creature... Women here have so many varied interests and activities that it keeps them young. They go in for sports and that causes them to retain their splendid figures. And their feet and ankles are the most perfect in the world."⁸⁰ While, as Dale notes, charm in the early twentieth century cultural imagination is "elusive," and never "possessed"; it is something that "lurks," "hides," and "manipulates," it is also, as Patou emphasizes, external, seemingly objectively located in (or on) female bodies, rendering charm highly visible (and enforceable) markers of social class, gender, and race. Yet, at the same time, these highly visible markers are—in the works of Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein, and more discussed in these pages—opportunities for subversion, and thereby, for transformation. Protagonist Miriam Henderson, a working class British woman who seeks an independent life for herself and a place for her writing in Dorothy Richardson's novel series, *Pilgrimage*, is keenly aware of charm's duplicity in this way. In the second volume of the series, Miriam evaluates the figure of Dr. Hancock, her employer, whom she believes holds romantic interest in her. As she considers him, the narration offers a slowly sharpening critique of the "charming effects" Miriam believes would be necessary for his attentions. Miriam then doubts the entire system of courtship that these effects manifest, knowing that she herself possessed none of these charms:

[H]e... was one of those men who do not know that an effect like that was just an effect, a deliberate 'charming' feminine effect. But if he did not know that, did not know that it was a trick and the whole advertising manner, the delicate,

plunging fall of the feet down the steps-‘I am late; look how nicely and quietly I am doing it; look at me being late and apologetic and interested’-out of place in the circumstances, then what was he doing here at all? Did he *want* science, or would he really rather be in a drawing-room with ‘pretty ladies’ advertising effects and being ‘arch’ in a polite, dignified, lady-like manner? How dingy and dull and unromantic and unfeminine he must find her.⁸¹

What Dale finds innate to Parisian actresses (the profession of whom is, of course, to elide the boundaries of the “real” and the “put-on”), is for Miriam a deliberately curated “effect,” one that she may see through while many men cannot. Finding women’s “charms” admittedly vapid or false – like “advertising” – Miriam still recognizes charm as alluring and desirable, becoming insecure as she determines she has none. Much like Miriam, British and American modernism writ large was both fascinated by, yet intensely wary of, what charm may do. Likewise, charm as a term to police women’s bodies and social behaviors turns on its head in the hands of the writers I discuss in this project. To attend to charm in all of its variations, in a return to the “scene of the modern” (to borrow Michael North’s subtitle from *Reading 1922* [1999]), is to allow a deepened grasp on modernist value systems, the working through of loss, and the hopeful potentiality of social transformation.

In my initial chapters, I set out the workings of charm in modernist literature and culture. I find charm reveals modernist urgings toward the social and the communal, or toward a futurity, while also anxiously cautioning against these urgings’ ills. In chapter one, I find Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) as case study in charm’s links to dangerous aestheticism and antisociality at the *fin-de-siècle*.

More broadly, too, I find the trace of charm left in works that turned the feeling into a highly linguistic, textual aesthetic that begs engagement and transformation as it applies language to the body in chapter two. I argue there that modernism offers an alternative take on gendered embodiment through charm operating within the poetry of Gertrude Stein and the rise of a mass-marketed women's culture. Charm for women was something to be "schooled" on, inhabited, and embodied, establishing an economic and social register of female or feminized bodies through repetition that, unlike theories of gendered embodiment from Judith Butler or bodily biopower from Michel Foucault, presents the woman's body as a uniquely styled set of desires.

Then, in my later chapters, I take up questions of how charm allows us to critically read texts, politics, and ultimately, the contagiousness of epistemology in interwar Britain. Charm becomes literary tonal atmosphere by curating magical thinking, a kind of feminist cognitive dissonance, in Sylvia Townsend Warner's interwar fantasy novel, *Lolly Willowes* (1926), while charm as atmosphere ties itself to feminist rebellion. Charm as arm of American capitalism emerges in the final chapter's study of short fiction from F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edith Wharton. Both seeking charm and enforcing its denigration, Fitzgerald's and Wharton's representations of charm's work present it as a force bound within twentieth-century American capitalism's value systems that prioritize white masculinity. Ultimately, charm uniquely recasts modernism's preoccupations with feeling and responsivity, individual and community, art and politics. My conclusion explores what may emerge if we in contemporary criticism take modernist charm to task. Would we more pervasively insist on a modernism that is illogical, mystical, and feminine as much as

it is rational, secular, masculinist? If we read the former modernism into the latter, we find that modernism's projects occur under a new set of possibilities or conditions – cognitive or perceptual concerns, problems of pleasure and desire, or social and aesthetic divides. What results is a modernism seen anew by fully making apparent our critical apparatuses to apprehend modernist projects—particularly those projects that exist outside of accepted literary histories within modernist studies. As a result, we see a modernism that foregrounds rupture's own ruptures: the compositionality and embeddedness of feeling that cannot stand apart from form in what we now consider “modernist.”

¹ I use the translation offered by Roger Rothman in his excellent *Tiny Surrealism: Salvador Dalí and the Aesthetics of the Small*. While I've chosen this translation for its poetic emphasis on condensation, this translation is nonetheless not the “standard” one. For this more widely accepted translation, see those offered by Willard Bohn in *Marvelous Encounters: Surrealist Responses to Film, Art, Poetry, and Architecture* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 113-14; or Haim Finkelstein in *Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 27-28. For the full poem and Rothman's apologia for his translations, see *Tiny Surrealism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), n3, 211.

² Virginia Woolf, “Craftsmanship,” in *Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, 205.

³ “charm,” Google Ngram Viewer, years 1800-2000.

⁴ “charm, n.1.” *OED Online*.

⁵ Irving Howe, “Introduction,” in *The Idea of the Modern*, 19.

⁶ Howe, *ibid.*

⁷ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

⁸ Habermas qtd. in Harvey, 12.

⁹ Harvey, 12.

¹⁰ Harvey, 13.

¹¹ Harvey, *ibid.*

¹² Harvey, *ibid.*

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 5.

¹⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*

¹⁵ “charm, n.1.” *OED Online*. *ibid.*

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1053.

¹⁷ Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 1056-57.

¹⁸ *Reiz* is translated to “charm” here, but can also refer to other stimulus or appeal. It is derived from the verb *reizen*, which equally means to irritate, excite, tease, tantalize, or provoke. These are not generally positive expressions of delight or pleasurable, but rather, may be alternately less positive components of aesthetic responsiveness.

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, S13.

²⁰ Kant, S13.

²¹ Rosalind Galt, *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image*, 2.

²² Galt, *Pretty*, *ibid.*

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- ²³ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 6.
- ²⁴ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 23. See the same passage for an extended survey of feeling's subjective or objective status through a variety of thinkers including John Dewey, T.S. Eliot, Edmund Burke, and Gérard Genette.
- ²⁵ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 23.
- ²⁶ Gerard Genette, *The Aesthetic Relation*, 71. Quoted in Ngai, 22-23.
- ²⁷ Eve Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust*, 4.
- ²⁸ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 23, 28. See the entire first chapter (23-45) for Massumi's detailed explanation of the nature of affect, ideology, and emotional response.
- ²⁹ Massumi, *Parables*, 35.
- ³⁰ Massumi, 36.
- ³¹ Massumi, *ibid.*
- ³² Lawrence Grossberg, *we gotta get out of this place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, 69-87. Sianne Ngai is the most recent theorist of aesthetic emotion or response who finds "the difference between affect and emotion" to be central to this distinction between structured and nonstructured variations of affects. Affect and emotion, she explains, is for her purposes "taken as a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than a formal difference of quality or kind." *Ugly Feelings*, 23.
- ³³ Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xvi.
- ³⁴ Brinkema, xiv.
- ³⁵ Brinkema, *ibid.*
- ³⁶ Brinkema, xvi.
- ³⁷ Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," 132. Structures of feeling also function to account for the kind of messiness intrinsic to charm, in that it is not strictly reducible to either personal experience or ideology. Rather, it exists in a kind of unformed betweenness—an alluring blank—that helps us to understand how experience, feeling, and ideology gain form.
- ³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 206.
- ³⁹ Justus Nieland, *Feeling Modern*, 21.
- ⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 17.
- ⁴¹ Urmila Seshagiri, "Mind the Gap! Modernism and Feminist Praxis," (n.p.).
- ⁴² Seshagiri, *ibid.*
- ⁴³ Stephen Ross, "Speculative Modernism," 151.
- ⁴⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 201, 202.
- ⁴⁵ Ahmed, 202.
- ⁴⁶ Letter, Fitzgerald to Willa Cather, qtd. in Benjamin Lytal, "The Stepsister Novels of Willa Cather and F. Scott Fitzgerald," n.p.
- ⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf, "A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from Virginia Woolf," 148. Later, Woolf would receive similar indictment from an anonymous review in 'The Listener's Book Chronicle' in June of 1938, which declared of Woolf's *Three Guineas*: "Mrs Woolf seems to have put on an almost puritanical restraint on her pen lest its charms seduce attention from reason and logic... She thinks of everything and is too fair-minded and sincere to want to trip her readers up." Qtd. by Virginia Woolf, *Diary 5*, 148.
- ⁴⁸ Tristan Tzara, "supplement: how I became charming delightful and delicious," in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, 97.
- ⁴⁹ Rpt. in Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism*, 14.
- ⁵⁰ Interest in classical forms, of course, is key component to the modernism that readily appears in scholarship – the modernism that T.S. Eliot insists must return to the classics and to tradition in order to move forward, that James Joyce returns to in recalling *The Odyssey* in his *Ulysses*, that Virginia Woolf, too, references through Shakespeare and Milton in *Mrs. Dalloway* and elsewhere.
- ⁵¹ On the function of the extraneous detail in aesthetics and its feminization, see Naomi Schor's landmark *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Routledge, rpt. 2007, 1984).
- ⁵² Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, 312.

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- ⁵³ Freud, *ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ Freud, 318.
- ⁵⁵ Freud, *ibid.*, emphasis mine.
- ⁵⁶ D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, 485.
- ⁵⁷ Lawrence, 485-86.
- ⁵⁸ Lawrence, 486.
- ⁵⁹ Lawrence, 6.
- ⁶⁰ Lawrence, "Foreword," xxxii.
- ⁶¹ Lawrence, *ibid.*
- ⁶² Lawrence, *Women in Love*, 28.
- ⁶³ Lawrence, 45.
- ⁶⁴ Benjamin Schwarz, "The Rise and Fall of Charm in American Men," *The Atlantic*.
- ⁶⁵ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, 31.
- ⁶⁶ Flatley, 32.
- ⁶⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89.
- ⁶⁸ Fanon, 93.
- ⁶⁹ See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).
- ⁷⁰ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 28.
- ⁷¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 312.
- ⁷² Lawrence, 230.
- ⁷³ Lawrence, 221.
- ⁷⁴ Lawrence, 221-222.
- ⁷⁵ Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 313.
- ⁷⁶ Waugh, *ibid.*
- ⁷⁷ Waugh, 312.
- ⁷⁸ Alan Dale, "The Feminine 'Charm' of Paris," 548. It is pertinent to the argument of this piece to note that Dale, a pseudonym for theatre critic, Alfred J. Cohen, was British. Born in Birmingham, England, Dale was notoriously harsh in his critiques of the New York theatre scene for several New York-based newspapers, including *New York Evening World* and the *New York American*. His negative reviews, however, were a draw for readers and inevitably contributed to the commercial success of several of William Randolph Hearst's newspapers, aiding Hearst's empire in early twentieth century America. It was perhaps his Englishness that drew him to write extensively of the otherness, the "charm," of Parisian actresses.
- ⁷⁹ Caroline Evans, "Jean Patou's American Mannequins: Early Fashion Shows and Modernism," 243.
- ⁸⁰ *The New York Times*, November 23, 1924.
- ⁸¹ Dorothy Richardson, *The Tunnel*, 148.

CHAPTER 2

THIS CHARMING MAN: OSCAR WILDE, AESTHETICS, AND INFLUENCE AT THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE

Punctured bicycle
On a hillside desolate
Will nature make a man of me yet?
When in this charming car,
This charming man
Why pamper life's complexity
When the leather runs smooth
On the passenger seat?
– The Smiths, “This Charming Man” (1983)

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things
are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.
– Oscar Wilde, Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)

Famously, Oscar Wilde was convicted of gross indecency after a highly publicized trial in 1895, and received the harshest possible sentence—two years’ hard labor in solitary confinement. Wilde spent the initial months of his prison term at Newgate and then Pentonville Prison, before finally serving the majority of his sentence at Reading Gaol. Throughout, Wilde remained in solitary imprisonment. This isolating sentence was designed specifically to allay the fear that his hypnotic persona would “infect” other prisoners, as many perceived Wilde’s alleged conduct with Lord Alfred Douglas and other men served as clear evidence of aestheticism’s aim to spread throughout Victorian society morally dubious notions that would undermine the very grounds of that society.¹

A critique in the *Daily Telegraph* summarizes the pervasive sentiment against Wilde and “his school”:

We have had enough, and more than enough of Mr. OSCAR WILDE, who has been the means of inflicting upon the public patience during the recent episode as much moral damage of the most offensive and repulsive kind as any single individual could well cause. [The] general concern... [is] with the man himself—his spurious brilliancy, inflated egotism, diseased vanity, cultivated affectation, and shameless disavowal of all morality—the best thing would be to dismiss him and his deeds without another word to the penalty of universal condemnation...²

The language of this criticism is suggestive: Wilde's faults as a man are described as "spurious," "diseased," and "cultivated." Or, in other words, his is a put-on and practiced mien, which has been carefully crafted with attention to form—an attention to form that has been theorized as the very hallmark of the aesthetic.³ His ability to exist in society without punishment has reached its limit, the critique claims, as the public has allegedly had "enough," even an excess of enough—his content exceeds his form, and his very personality is itself an indulgence, a decadence, for society. The description of Wilde's "infliction" of "damage" to the social realm presents him as a violence against social cohesion, a scourge or disease of falsity, inflation, and affected amorality. This critique effectively confirms Wilde's persona as itself part of his aesthetic practice.

If persona (and thereby, social relations) is cultivated or formed as a specific positional relationship to the social in the way Wilde's persona seems to suggest, then charm enters as a unique affective-aesthetic that makes apparent the relation of the aesthetic and the social. Charm is particularly able to draw upon aesthetics to place

individuals into social relations. When we fall under one another's spell, in other words, by being charmed by another, or being charming to another, we knit ourselves together in aesthetically and affectively-driven relation. Yet this knitting is not without its snags—aesthetics and the social are two realms notoriously at odds with one another during modernism. I link charm with Wilde through this criticism in order to explore how charm sinks to this denigrated status by the early years of modernism. After functioning as indicative shorthand for social etiquette, unthreateningly pleasant delight, and proper behavior for both men and women in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, charm's place as respectable manner slips by the *fin-de-siècle*. It becomes increasingly untrustworthy as marker of good character. Namely, its link with Wilde and his highly publicized trial begins charm's clear descent, as it becomes synonymous with Wilde's perceived aesthetic asociality. In other words, only in Wilde's era does charm begin to appear in spaces of exclusion. Yet, charm also makes clear—as Wilde does—the central paradox of this movement. As the nineteenth century's implicit trust of the social's value moves to the twentieth century's distrust of all things social, the role of the aesthetic as either social or individualist grows unclear. Charm's valuation as desirable or undesirable follows this movement.

I seek to track how charm moves from marker of a valuable sociality to marker of *asociality*. Crafting one's persona loses its place as a social activity, leading to the integration of a self into society, as it was in the nineteenth century. Instead, it became an indicator of an asocial tendency. The aesthetic and the social, then, are resultantly in direct contention with one another. We will find that charm is a force that renders clear the emerging notion of society itself as threat to the newly valued individual. I

find that this movement occurs just as modernism launches toward fulfilling the Enlightenment's promise of the individual, as a creeping anxiety over the social as in itself an intrinsic good. The structure of criticisms against Wilde are precisely the structures of charm—a catching, contagious influence, aesthetically-crafted and affectively-driven, and a destabilizing force evincing the era's nascent belief in individualism. I will first examine the theoretical underpinnings of this movement before turning to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) to track charm's role in early modernity.

Charm's Anxious Modernism

Far from an extraneous force separate from the political realm, art was still anxiously perceived as holding significant sway in social formation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴ In *Degeneration* (1895), Max Nordau attacks art and aesthetic, bohemian or unusual types (including criminals) for their role in the degeneration of society at the turn of the century. Naming Oscar Wilde, Henrik Ibsen, and Richard Wagner, among others, Nordau finds aesthetic types a common “illness”: “In the fin-de-siècle disposition,” he writes, including “the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry” and “the life and conduct of men who write mystic, symbolic and ‘decadent’ works and the attitude taken by their admirers,” there exists “two well-defined conditions of disease [...], degeneration and hysteria.”⁵ Effectively, Nordau's main argument is that contemporary degenerate aesthetes' egomania threatens the social order. Not only does his finger-pointing at the perennial scapegoat, art, signal a return to an Enlightenment view that social progress lies in the cultivation of forward-

thinking science and technology, Nordau inverts what forces control the circumstances of his criticism. While among the first to point out the very phenomenon of the *fin-de-siècle*, Nordau paradoxically fails to recognize what characterizes the era—the tumultuous lumbering toward a new social order that will characterize modernity, one that (like Nordau’s accusation of art) focuses primarily on the individual and breeds distrust of sociality and its institutions. And, as Wilde demonstrates in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as well as in “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” it is actually art that lays the foundation for society, not the inverse. Anxiety like Nordau’s over art’s degenerate potential is relieved, Nordau would surely have been happy to know, when the notion of aesthetic autonomy later meets its alleged demise under late capitalism. As Fredric Jameson writes in his landmark essay on postmodernism, “aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally,”⁶ making it near impossible to consider art to be separable from economic or commercial interests. Likewise, Jameson argues, art retains a “political unconscious” that keeps art tethered to those influences of the sociopolitical realm—however hidden or ambiguous these “unconscious” ties may be—that aesthetic autonomy alleges to excise.⁷ (Aesthetics and capitalism in the context of charm will be discussed in chapter four.)

As Nordau portends, growing fervor over occultism, spiritualism, mesmerism, and forms of theosophy emerged in both Britain and America at the *fin-de-siècle*. Aestheticist, decadent, and consumerist materialism morphed back and forth from and into fantasy and spiritualism. Because phantasmatic spaces – whether occultist or aestheticist – “redefin[ed] intimate, sexual, familial, and relational ties between people

against the usual patriarchal models of inheritance and community via marriage and the nuclear family,”⁸ the “dark arts” posed a threat to normalized social order.⁹ Leigh Wilson writes in *Modernism and Magic* that public interest in magic actually “made possible the privileged status of that crucial institution of modernity, science. While different theorists proposed sometimes opposing views of magic’s relation to social order... Making magic anathema to contemporary ‘civilization’ works to justify not just the systems of anthropology [and moreover, of patriarchal systemic order], but also the instrumental rationality necessary to carry out capitalism’s domination of the natural world.”¹⁰ The danger of occultism, spiritualism, and theosophy seemed multifold, then – such orientations of thought moved outside of scientific rationality, a rationality necessary for both patriarchal and capitalist rule; it placed power (of capital and of influence) in the hands of women and many times, racialized or ethnic “others” including many of Eastern European or “gypsy” heritage; and finally, made possible non-normative forms of transmission, or, the ability to send and receive missives in new modes across time and place. In other words, like occultism, Wilde’s aestheticism was seen as threat to traditional social forms because it introduced new modes of occupying spaces of kinship and relation. Influence, then, became an associated transmitter of these new modes, rendering them “doubly transgressive, disrupting both sense boundaries and traditional codes of behavior and alliance.”¹¹

The *Telegraph*’s critique of Wilde in this context is not precisely a critique of his falseness and excess but rather, the uncertain, anxious roil of formless influence. This is the language of spiritualism and occultism, as it is the language of aesthetic and affective formation. What is threatened by Wilde’s aestheticism in other words,

according to those who condemn him, is the accepted relation of art to the social order. That the *Telegraph* article links a “real sense of beauty” as under threat by Wilde’s “profligate taste and profane mockery” suggests a policing of artistic morality. Such policing is emblematic of the notion that socially acceptable ethical values are in contest with aesthetic ones. This is an essential assumption of this chapter’s theory—that while social order and organization is perceived as separate from the aesthetic realm, it is, in fact, reliant upon it. The threat of the aesthetic is not the absence of ethics, but is an innovated ethics. Søren Kierkegaard argues in *Either/Or* (1843) for the binary that the aesthete is opposed to the ethical (though Wilde is not known to have read Kierkegaard’s work). While both the aesthete’s view and the ethical stance “considers the personality in relation to the surrounding world,” and “the expression for this in its recurrence in the personality is enjoyment,” there is a difference. The “esthetic expression for enjoyment in its relation to the personality is mood. That is, the personality is present in the mood, but it is dimly present. The person who lives esthetically tries as far as possible to be engrossed completely in mood. He tries to bury himself completely in it so that nothing remains in him that cannot be modulated into it, because a remainder like that always has a disturbing effect.”¹² Mood, intriguingly, becomes the critical sentiment of the aesthete. As Wilde’s critics have also noted, it is mood and its closely related terms—affect, tone, bearing—that are themselves the crime Wilde commits, and the central threat Wilde poses to society. Later, Kierkegaard theorizes a particular mood, the mood of anxiety, with anxiety’s movements and forms. In describing Antigone’s tragic negative affect, Kierkegaard explains: “anxiety is the vehicle by which the subject appropriates sorrow and

assimilates it. Anxiety is the motive power by which sorrow penetrates a person's heart. But the movement is not swift like that of an arrow; it is consecutive; it is not once and for all, but it is continually becoming."¹³ While Kierkegaard refers specifically to sorrow, I find that this anxious, aesthetic "becoming" is like his notion of "mood." This mood is the structural, formal movement of charm. Charm is an alluring blank within the social relation – a catching, transformative energy, and an orientation toward the social, or to otherness. Charm catches an individual and another in a relation, one that transforms the matter of the other, that reforms the other through often non-conscious affective-aesthetic manipulation.

Wilde's work allows us to see the way in which charm may be read as socially motivated force. *The Telegraph* found it abhorrent, and Wilde himself believed it potentially dangerous (he compared himself in his prison writing *De Profundis* to pederasts and child-murderers, including the Marquis de Sade and Gilles de Rais). Yet, charm as social force becomes an intoxicating, alluring "blank" of new social potential, a partial and impossible fulfillment of social progress in entirely alternate, aesthetic terms, previewing what would obsess later modernists—the idea of aesthetic autonomy.

Dorian and the Magic of Affective-Aesthetic Influence

Wilde's engagement with "charm" as an aesthetically-driven social theory of relation is most apparent in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), in conjunction with his theoretical essay, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891). These works explicitly link aesthetic representation with a meta-awareness of aesthetic processes,

and in doing so, are invested in the phenomenon of aesthetic transmission of emotion. Both texts' engagements with charm not only attest to charm's function as marker of difference as I have elaborated in this project's introduction, but more significantly, use aesthetics to postulate alternative bonds of sociality and social identity through the transmission of emotion, or, the catching of affect, through form.

Charm drives *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The term appears eighty-five times over the novel's pages, beginning with the novel's epigraph on charm, already knotted: "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault."¹⁴ This twist on the aesthete as intrinsically good immediately introduces the novel's work with form, sociality, and morality. Dorian Gray's entrance into the novel comes via Basil Hallward's mention of meeting him as an encounter with a personality that has irrevocably changed him. And, just as charm does, the notion of who influences whom slips from figure to figure. Dorian is first, influencing Basil Hallward upon their first meeting, which Basil retells to Lord Henry Wotton. "When our eyes met," Hallward tells Lord Henry Wotton:

'I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. I did not want any external influence in my life. [...] I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray.'¹⁵

He was decidedly a "[c]harming boy,"¹⁶ as Basil's friend Lady Brandon says of Dorian. Before Dorian makes an actual appearance, then, Wilde makes us aware that

transmission and influence are forces of terrifying intensity, and are linked with artistic experience, and “terror” or danger as early as the first chapter. Then, influence slips into anxiety, as Basil worries that Henry’s presence may mar Dorian’s perfection. Just before Basil introduces Lord Henry to Dorian, Basil admonishes Henry, “Don’t spoil him. Don’t try to influence him. Your influence would be bad. The world is wide, and has many marvelous people in it. Don’t take away from me the one person who gives to my art whatever charm it possesses: my life as an artist depends on him.”¹⁷ Basil’s “charming” artistry, in other words, relies itself on the charm of another, Dorian. (Lord Henry later says to Dorian, “Basil, my dear boy, puts everything that is charming in him into his work.”¹⁸) Lord Henry’s influence on Dorian becomes the final component. He tells Dorian when they finally meet, ““There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view.””¹⁹ Yet Basil is proved right in his early warning, which goes unheeded. Henry holds immediate influence upon Dorian, who finds Henry’s influence “bewildering,” “fresh,” and the cause of a “vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.”²⁰ Dorian imagines Henry’s presence as having touched a “secret chord” within Dorian, which “seemed to him to really have come from himself.”²¹ Dorian’s revelatory experience is vaguely autoerotic, brought on by the transmission of unspoken, secret knowledge that Lord Henry realizes may be similar to his own revelation at sixteen years old, after reading “a book which had revealed to him much he had not known before.”²² An essential component of this dangerous transmission is, of course, *charm*, the thing that was initially a component of Dorian’s identity that becomes, upon closer inspection, the doing of Lord Henry himself. Charm becomes

less a substance of its own than a structure, a musical “secret chord” that sets charm forth into sociality, an anxious force that continuously reverberates and roils, that alters normative kinships and social links. If charm is originally an incantation, verse, or song, it is in a pure etymological sense that Dorian feels himself musically “incanted,” brought into a form of existence or liveliness by Henry’s influence in a way he is brought *out* of such existence by Basil’s influence—namely, through the macabrely deteriorating painting of Dorian. This is the novel’s alleged primal scene, a moment of aesthetic-affective transmission via *form*.

Eugenie Brinkema elucidates how this phenomenon can be conceptualized. In *The Forms of the Affects*, Brinkema looks to a Grimm brothers fairy tale about a boy who cannot feel fear or horror. “I cannot feel my flesh creep!” he cries repeatedly, as “affective knowledge resists him.”²³ Later in life, the boy is finally able to feel that very sensation when a bucket full of small fish is poured over him. For Brinkema, this dramatizes what is decades later iterated by William James, the theory that emotion works from the outside in. In other words, external stimuli produce emotion, instead of the commonly-believed expressivist model where emotions move from the inside outward in answer to stimuli. To reference James’s often-quoted example, one does not run from an attacking bear because one is afraid, but one is afraid *because* one runs from an attacking bear. The Grimm tale literalizes this model of affect. “[P]ut another way,” Brinkema offers, “the ending appears to suggest that a wet, cold shudder is an adequate *affective form* of textual interpretation.”²⁴ In Gilles Deleuze’s formulation, it is a relation that “*force has with itself, a power to affect itself, an affect of self on self*.”²⁵ To take this formulation seriously, and to understand that James’s

notion of affect renders it as exteriority, is to consider affect as a visible phenomenon (such as “creeping flesh” or goosebumps on the skin, and the widening of the pupils when one is afraid), or at least, a phenomenon based on the language or structuring of what constitutes appearances. The “power” of affect—as Deleuze, James, and Brinkema suggest—is its work as force upon itself. It is, thereby, a force upon the body, and the body’s relation to other bodies—the social relation.

The proximity of charm to both occultist or spiritualist discourse and aestheticism, together with new forms of sociality or kinship driven by aesthetic-affective forces, renders legible the perceived dangers of “charm” and the anxieties it produced over transmissible, influential contagion. This contagion is, as Nordau indicates, assessed as an “outbreak,” or breaking out of systems of social order. As Dorian Gray maintains his youth while Basil Hallworth’s portrait of Dorian deteriorates, Dorian holds a “strange and dangerous charm,” one that catches him between the desirability of his wealth and charm: “Society, civilized society at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and charming... For the canons of good society are, or should be, the same as the canons of art. Form is absolutely essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as its unreality, and should combine the insincere character of a romantic play, with the wit and beauty that make such plays charming. Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.”²⁶ Like the *Telegraph*’s criticism of Wilde’s cultivated personality, Dorian, too, bridges the social and the aesthetic. This passage advocates for the “canons of good society”

as the same as the “canons of art,” with an unreality and insincerity that points toward the artistic creation of it.

In “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” Wilde expresses this very view on the relation between art objects and their audiences. Individual artists, he notes, have been thus successful:

creating in their audiences... the temperament to which Art appeals. And what is that temperament? It is the temperament of receptivity. That is all. If a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it with such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art. The spectator is to be receptive. He is to be the violin on which the master is to play. And the more completely he can suppress his own silly views, his own foolish prejudices, his own absurd ideas of what Art should be, or should not be, the more likely he is to understand and appreciate the work of art in question.²⁷

Receptivity to form, to become able to receive incantatory forces or become subject to such aural forces (“to be the violin on which the master is to play”), becomes the core of Wilde’s “radical” socialism. Charm, thereby, is an integral affective-aesthetic force upon bodies that brings bodies into kinned relations outside of biological, economic, or other organizational models.

Wilde is effectively voicing the project of the New Critics, decades prior to I.A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks. Indeed, a world in which no governmental authority holds the reins over art is precisely the kind of “socialism” Wilde advocates.

To achieve such independence, Wilde proposes a new Individualism, one that is “unselfish and unaffected,” an unselfishness that “let[s] other people’s lives alone, not interfering with them.”²⁸ This Individualism would also cultivate sympathy in a wider context. Not merely sympathy for the poor or for those in pain, but “with the entirety of life,” “with life’s joy and beauty and energy and health and freedom.”²⁹ This kind of sympathy is “more difficult,” Wilde acknowledges, because it “requires more unselfishness. Anybody can sympathize with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature – it requires, in fact, the nature of a true Individualist – to sympathize with a friend’s success.”³⁰ What Wilde proposes, in other words, is a new sociality, one that—once removed from the political and aligned with the aesthetic—permits new, ethical modes of interaction with one another. It is a new individualism, a transformed sociality, founded on the aesthetic.

An early scene in *Portrait* tracks these influential affective relations, ones that are founded upon, and structured by, aesthetic experience. The aesthetic sources of these affective relations are not relegated to those objects easily considered art objects, such as Dorian’s much-discussed yellow book. It carries into social experience. When Henry and Dorian are at dinner with Mr. Erskine and Agatha, Henry suddenly takes off on a philosophical flight of fancy on the ability to make mistakes in youth: “He played with the idea, and grew willful; tossed it into the air and transformed it; let it escape and recaptured it; made it iridescent with fancy, and winged it with paradox.”³¹ As Henry speaks, he notices:

the eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed on him, and the consciousness that amongst his audience there was one whose temperament he wished to

fascinate, seemed to give his wit keenness, and to lend colour to his imagination. He was brilliant, fantastic, irresponsible. He charmed his listeners out of themselves, and they followed his pipe laughing. Dorian Gray never took his gaze off him, but sat like one under a spell, smiles chasing each other over his lips, and wonder growing grave in his darkening eyes.³²

Henry performs the social relation on affective-aesthetic terms. He gives his ideas the force of movement (it is “winged,” “tossed,” and “transformed”) and color (it is “iridescent,” and literally “color[ed]” by the imagination). The “spell” he produces that “charm[s]” his listeners out of themselves is conducted via musical metaphor. The “pipe” Henry’s listeners follow seems initially to suggest what could be a smoking pipe dangling from his lips. Yet, it more rightly references the musical Pied Piper, whose multicolored coat of lore (the “pied”) is doubled by the narration’s reported “iridescence” and “color” of Henry’s wit.

This moment of intense social affective-aesthetic influence, in which listeners are carried away by Henry’s social mien, stands in contrast to a scene I find of undertheorized importance to *Dorian Gray*, and from which I will build out to connected scenes both before and after. The critical scene involves Sibyl Vane as subject of conversation, Dorian’s doomed love object. When offstage, Sibyl’s performance of a lovestruck girl is as successful as Lord Henry’s musings in the scene prior, though to different ends. Sibyl, in contrast to Henry, is pre-staged, lending a meta-awareness of the context of the performance as a performance. Dorian first tells Lord Henry of his love for Sibyl, Dorian describes Sibyl as transfixing, but his

reported interaction with her was backstage, not onstage. She is “unconscious of her power,” Dorian reports to Henry.

Sibyl Vane is of course aptly named as already an enticing, prophetic illusion. Defending his love for her when Lord Henry disapproves, Dorian declares why he finds Sibyl attractive: “she is divine beyond all living things. When she acts you will forget everything. These common, rough people, with their coarse faces and brutal gestures, become quite different when she is on the stage. They sit silently and watch her. They weep and laugh *as she wills them to do*. She makes them as responsive as a violin. She *spiritualizes them*, and one feels that they are of the same flesh and blood as one’s self.”³³ Dorian and Lord Henry are described as becoming will-less on their own, subject to Sibyl’s “divinity,” which “spiritualizes” them. When Sibyl appears onstage, Dorian’s description of her powers comes true through charm: “Motionless, and as one in a dream, sat Dorian Gray, gazing at [Sibyl]. Lord Henry peered through his glasses, murmuring, ‘Charming! charming!’”³⁴ Yet, the illusion dissipates. While Sibyl “looked charming as she came out into the moonlight” as Shakespeare’s Juliet, all charm is quickly lost when she begins to speak. The “staginess of her acting was unbearable, and grew worse as she went on. Her gestures became absurdly artificial.”³⁵ This is a form that does not speak, but that moves, acts, and appears.

Dorian tells Henry that Sibyl said to him, “‘You look more like a prince. I must call you Prince Charming.’”³⁶ Charm here seems unaffected, natural. Yet, it is a casting strategy. Sibyl assigns the role to Dorian of “Prince Charming,” which, unbeknownst to Sibyl, forms her in the Prince’s love interest, Snow White. In her relationship to the Prince/Dorian, Sibyl therefore creates a form of social connectivity

beyond linear temporality of past, present, and future. In casting Dorian as her Prince, she both previews her own later death (much like Snow White “sleeps” in a false death), as well as arranges an aesthetic lineage of her onstage roles as Shakespeare’s Juliet and Imogen, and as Snow White. Collapsing the three figures in herself is a feat only made possible by charm’s work in the persona of Prince Charming, a figure who is able to resuscitate the socially dead.

These fictional figures’ doubled deaths—three in the aesthetic realm from Juliet, Imogen, and Snow White, one in the novel’s “real” realm, from Sibyl—themselves double Dorian and his portrait’s own connectivity. This calls attention to the ease with which we dismiss Dorian and his double as one real, and one false. When Dorian says that she is Imogen that evening, then tomorrow, Juliet, Lord Henry retorts, “When is she Sibyl Vane?”³⁷ There is no direct answer, because—like Dorian—Sibyl is never a “true,” singular “self.” Dorian instead responds, “She is all the great heroines of the world in one. She is more than an individual.”³⁸ In other words, she is not a void, but a blur, a form. She is a new kind of individual that is not a haeccectic singularity, but an indistinction. Charm blurs, fogs, and obscures, while seeming to reveal. The affective-aesthetic of charm is thereby at the center of a new sociality, enabled by Sibyl in this under-read scene, and later confirmed by Dorian’s doubleness. In affective aesthetic relations, a new sociality is thereby made possible when new forms of individuality are allowed to emerge.³⁹ This blurs the boundary between those modes of self-identification or self-distinction that are within the “real” (the sociopolitical, and confirmed by the juridical) and within the “false” (the aesthetic).

Sibyl's scene is itself a doubling of Dorian's "primal scene" near the start of the novel, when Dorian's portrait is created. Dorian arguably only "begins" at the painting's creation, much like Sibyl's transfixing presence. Upon seeing the painting, Dorian simultaneously identifies with it and fails to recognize himself in it: "Is it the real Dorian?" cried the original of the portrait, strolling across to him. 'Am I really like that?'"⁴⁰ Dorian sees himself in a painting as though he were seeing his reflection in a mirror, through the eyes of another/an other. Moments later, Lord Henry bemusedly asks Basil to identify the referent when Basil speaks of Dorian, "[W]hich Dorian? The one who is pouring out tea for us, or the one in the picture?"⁴¹ Both Lord Henry and Dorian here seek Basil's confirmation as to who Dorian is. Basil as observer/creator here makes him the primary "witness" of the doubling, and the only one who may distinguish the two. The "old" Dorian has no relation to the "new" Dorian, outside of the narration's linking language.

The scene featuring Sibyl is also a preview to the end of the narrative. After he meets with Lord Henry to discuss Basil's death, Dorian finally decides he must be free—he will "kill" the painting after years of moral immunity. He looks at the painting, horrified to see that the blood that had appeared on the painted Dorian's hand "seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilt."⁴² He first declares it "an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at."⁴³ Mirrors in nineteenth-century literature tended to be conventional images of beauty, playing with Medieval accounts of pride and *vanitas*, or Hamlet's claim to hold a mirror up to nature. By both revealing and concealing, the mirror itself is a visual trick in that it may distort assumptions of external appearances and internal truths. Mirrors can exploit spatial

and moral transgressions and reversals, as in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), or Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's poem, "The Other Side of a Mirror" (1896). This is, of course, the "mirror" of representational play, the very magic or "charm" that conjures perverse doubles through textual or aesthetic representation. Dorian radically misreads the painting as in direct correspondence to his moral reality, thereby flattening the ability of art to be anything but a separate "other" that nonetheless exists within him, outside of the painting. The painting exists, in other words, in direct correlation to the real, rather than in a more slippery, perverse relationship. Mirrors, like art, appear to present reality or truth, whether external or internal. But this is the trick of both the mirror and the art—both labor at curating this sense of direct reflection while relying on the murky craft of conjuring. Believing that the painting is therefore evidence of the real, Dorian characterizes the painting only as incontrovertible proof of the real's existence. It is "evidence... The picture itself,--that was evidence"⁴⁴ of Basil's murder. "It had been like a conscience to him," he realizes, "Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it."⁴⁵ With the same knife that he used to kill Basil, Dorian slashes the canvas, and dies. Or so we think – events in the room are not reported. The narration moves from describing Dorian "ripping the thing right up from top to bottom" directly to the next paragraph: "There was a cry heard, and a crash."⁴⁶ The sudden break in what we see is echoed by the sudden shift to passive tense. A cry and a crash were heard. When the servants who do the hearing in this sentence rush toward the room, they see "lying on the floor [...], a dead man in evening dress, with a knife in his

heart. [...] It was not till they had examined the ring that they recognized who it was.”⁴⁷

This scene indicates, I think, that Wilde wants to remind us that art—like the novel we are reading—does not help us see the real, by shifting our gaze away and into uncertainty. At the moment of death, our gaze is forcibly turned away from the dead body and the painting (to rest on the working class “subalterns,” in recall of Dorian’s parentage). Dorian and his portrait are not doubles precisely, or that at least, we will never know certainly what their relation was. It cannot be an “unjust mirror,” as Dorian calls it before slashing the painting. Mirrors are seen to reflect, not refract. It is also unclear how Dorian dies – while it is surmised that the old man on the floor is equivalent to the man in the painting, the aged, “true” Dorian, the body itself is not slashed but stabbed, with “a knife in his heart.”⁴⁸ Because of these discrepancies, the two figures (one “real” Dorian, the other the “false” painting) are undoubtedly related. But just as Dorian has difficulty determining what the portrait is and means just before slashing it, resting on one conclusion and then another they are related in dynamic fashion, Dorian and the painted image are not a static one-to-one representation. They are paradoxically distinct snags in the notion of individuality. Dorian is not individual, nor static—the painting’s “magic” or charm renders the Dorians as not two individuals, or one representation of another, but as related versions. Wilde purposefully denies us the final knowledge of who may be the “original” and the “copy,” since this is not meant to be the question at all. This is suggested both right after the painting comes into being in the novel’s early chapters, and here again, when the painting “dies” (we may think of Henry’s question of Basil, as to which is the real

Dorian, and also Henry's question of Sibyl, of when she is really Sibyl). The aesthetic-affective relation, then, is not of the real to the represented, but something far more complex. Both the "real" and the represented Dorian were Dorian, because he—like Sibyl—demonstrates a form of individuality that slashes accepted forms of individual subjecthood. The original ending of *Dorian Gray* evinces this further. The final lines read: "Lying on the floor was a dead body, withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage with a knife in its heart."⁴⁹ What is often presumed to be the "real" Dorian—the body that remains—is not a "he" but an "it." Wilde has presented an alternate subjecthood not premised on sociopolitical singularity, but the incantatory diversity of aesthetic experience.

By tracking these varied influences of "charmed" relations, what Wilde achieves in the novel becomes clear. The work postulates a sociality through modes of kinship conceived in aesthetics—through relations of *form*, *bodies*, and *feeling*—rather than in normatively-organized relations as perceived through biologically-driven links of persons (including heredity, familial structures, and sexuality). Such a "spiritualized" transformation echoes Dorian's questions after Sibyl's suicide, when he notices Basil's portrait of him has changed to reflect a cruel smirk. "Might there not be some curious scientific reason for it all?", he wonders, before considering:

If thought could exercise its influence upon a living organism, might not thought exercise an influence upon dead and inorganic things? Nay, without thought or unconscious desire, might not things external to ourselves vibrate in unison with our moods and passions, atom calling to atom in secret love or strange affinity?⁵⁰

Dorian's musing on notions of the dead and living, of some "secret," "strange," or magical vibratory connections lend a sense of an illicit connective desire to charm's ability as force of aesthetic-affective relation. Such a relation, Dorian seems to indicate, is without "thought" or consciousness, but is nonetheless a desire for connectivity that transgresses normalized boundaries of space, time, and matter.

The Social Relation

The kinds of invisible ties that Wilde's aesthetic kinships propose through charm seem to be destabilizing. This is primarily because they risk amorality, as morality was linked to the rise of the individual subject as inherently able to move beyond basic Kantian desires to use logic and reason rather than aesthetic feeling to guide social relationalities. To fail to do so is to run the risk of becoming susceptible to Wilde's cult of influence, or worse, becoming Wilde. That which is invisible or unknowable, unable to be logically determined, appeared in the nineteenth century as intrinsically primitive and base. French physician and early sociologist Gustave Le Bon lends context for Dorian's proposed social relation. Le Bon notes in *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) that sociality is defined by a new entity of the age, the "psychological crowd." This notion relies on three key processes that Le Bon sets forth: anonymity, contagion, and suggestibility. Le Bon's work, in conjunction with Freud's analyses of crowd mentalities, does significant work to destabilize notions of post-Enlightenment reason and rationality, and Le Bon attempts to account for this incongruity. What makes crowd scenarios so unpredictable, Le Bon effectively asks,

and so at odds with what is known about the individual, and the individual's morals, ethics, and individual psychology?

As Le Bon notes in his work's preface, the realm of philosophic principle is not always the realm of the real: "The study of social phenomena cannot be separated from that of the peoples among whom they have come into existence. From the philosophic point of view these phenomena may have an absolute value; in practice they only have a relative value. It is necessary, in consequence, when studying a social phenomenon, to consider it successively under two very different aspects. It will then be seen that the teachings of pure reason are very often contrary to those of practical reason. [...] In certain cases there is more truth in the unreal than in the real."⁵¹ Le Bon goes so far as to say that because of the complexity of social forces, "It seems, too, that behind the visible facts are hidden at times thousands of invisible causes." Crowds, it should be noted, are themselves ascribed to the "new age" of the nineteenth century, yet remain conflicting representations of modernity. Despite their brief flashes of revolutionary instincts, they are "instinctively hostile to changes and progress."⁵² Le Bon spends his work's early chapters explaining the peculiar nature of modern crowd scenes, which are, he notes, a threat to governmental and political power. "Little adapted to reasoning, crowds, on the contrary, are quick to act... The divine right of the masses is about to replace the divine right of kings."⁵³ Crowds are "barbarian," and "powerful for destruction,"⁵⁴ and are antithetical to the movement of civilization. Le Bon is clear to point out that the actions of crowds are not always so inferior, destructive, and revolutionary. They may be equally heroic as they are destructive.⁵⁵ In all cases, however, there exists in crowd sentiment an exaggeration or

disingenuousness. Crowds “do not admit doubt or uncertainty, and always go to extremes—Their sentiments always excessive.”⁵⁶ There is something primal or primitive in their workings: “Like a savage, it is not prepared to admit that anything can come between its desire and the realization of its desire... The notion of impossibility disappears for the individual in a crowd.”⁵⁷ These responses are, naturally, able to indicate essences of racial divisions. “For instance,” Le Bon muses, “the difference between a Latin and an Anglo-Saxon crowd is striking.”⁵⁸ More importantly, the anxiety held about crowds is less a disruption of political power or governmental overthrow than it is about regressivism, and primitivism, the dread of a return to the non-modern. Le Bon writes, “Crowds are everywhere distinguished by feminine characteristics.”⁵⁹ Their excessive emotionality renders them akin to the excessive emotionality of “inferior forms,” which Le Bon lists as “women, savages, and children.”⁶⁰ It is this contagion of lesser forms, of any stoppage to post-Enlightenment progress and reason, that is the greatest concern for Le Bon, and for many other crowd theories. What this means, in effect, is an insistence on divisions and on individuality in the modern age, a movement that in the late nineteenth century propels the industry of personality and individuation in the decades to follow during the modernist period (see chapter four).

Le Bon’s model of crowd mentality involves an individual who comes “under the influence of suggestion,” wherein an idea “enter[s] the brain” and “transform[s] itself into an act.”⁶¹ “A crowd,” Le Bon explains, “scarcely distinguishes between the subjective and the objective. It accepts as real the images evoked in its mind,” despite these images’ distance from “observed fact.”⁶² This model of feeling and

suggestibility implies an exterior stimulus transforms an interior response, a notion that flies against William James's non-expressivist model, though Le Bon's explanation of this connection actually suggests a destabilizing of the boundary between the exterior and interior. The threat of the crowd is a threat of a new sociality and thereby a new individuality, in which the body's boundaries are far more fluid than previously believed. This is in some ways an echo of American theories of transcendental consciousness, from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Margaret Fuller, some four decades earlier (and, which continues to emerge in contemporary theory as new materialism or posthumanism from figures including Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, and Donna Haraway). Charm, in fact, upholds the formality of affect in Wilde's writing. Instead of being immediate indication of some interior "secret" that is withheld, charm is actually a formal exteriority that is produced by aesthetic experience and by the narration itself. Lord Henry, for one, our narration reports, "had the charm of being very dangerous."⁶³ Charm itself does not produce danger, the text suggests; danger preexists charm.

While Le Bon attributes the crowd mentality's invisible causes to "an immense, unconscious working,"⁶⁴ which he finds one of the "secrets of their strength" as a "force still unknown,"⁶⁵ we can see that such invisible forces have echoes in Wilde's examination of the forces of affective workings when the domain of aesthetics is in view. Brinkema writes of affect, form, and bodies: "to assert that treating affect as a form ignores the body is to refuse to question what forms and bodies might mean to each other, what form might cause us to rethink about bodies, that form might deform matter or our theory of skin in productive ways—or whether,

indeed, the body itself is a kind of form.”⁶⁶ In other words, Brinkema insists that “*we have not yet asked enough of form*; that we do not know what forms are capable of; that in the strident pulling apart of form and affect, it hitherto has been undetermined what the body can do to form and even what form can do to a body.”⁶⁷ I undertake an answer to this through Wilde’s affective-aesthetics of charm. Charm is a beginning to asking more of both form and bodies. It uniquely captures the ability of the body together with its most basic of biological or scientific realities (DNA, chromosomes, cellular regeneration) as fundamentally studies in ambiguous, transfixing, and alluring blanks.

Affect’s ability to force, as social contagion, or as Le Bon’s invisible *something* behind the visible, is the center of charm. Charm renounces its roots in vocality (chant, song) in favor of visual sleight of hand, a visuality that seems to allow Cartesian triumphs of the visual as knowable but in fact enforces Le Bon’s and Freud’s notions of the peculiar, unstable responsivity between the visible and invisible, the body’s exterior and its interior. Indeed, Wilde dramatizes this very contention as his *Picture of Dorian Gray* insists on the visual reference to the painting of Dorian, when we glance at it and its deterioration, and relies heavily on imagery of eyes and vision as components of the artist’s works and the “catching” receptivity toward this work. It also insists that the painting’s visual appearance has direct relation to the painting’s hidden content. It is no coincidence that we never quite see Dorian “kill” the painting. We infer that he slashes the painting, and this magically transfers to occur on the body of Dorian himself instead of the painting. But we never truly know, because we never truly see. We only hear Dorian’s screams, and find ourselves

following the exterior action around Dorian's house, suddenly denied full access to continued narration of the scene we were just in. With Dorian's double in his painting, the spell of form is broken with a cry that we do not see.

Charm as Methodology

A consequence of assessing charm's denigration through the end of the nineteenth century to name an anxiety over new forms of aesthetically-driven sociality is that charm can now become its own mode of inquiry into marginalized or minoritized forces and figures. Because charm renders visible the structures or forms of social valuation, I'd like to close this chapter by demonstrating how Wilde's affective-aesthetic formalism in charm can open methods to newly see these structures of value. To do so, I turn to concerns of *Dorian Gray*'s "darkness."

Wilde's novel presents an aesthetic-affective transmission that results in an uncanny doubling. This bizarre transmission through charmed influence therefore exposes the structures on which normative kinship relies, and throws the requirements for normative transmission and identity formation into relief, namely, colonialist power and domination over "darkness." The novel is structured on whiteness as its central axis, a whiteness that entails the operation of the doubles of "rose-white"⁶⁸ Dorian and the "dark" painting of Dorian. The premise of the novel asks us to believe in the painting's "magic" ability to morph in some correspondence to a "reality" outside of the painting. This "outside," meanwhile, that is "real," is Dorian's highly internalized set of moral principles and devolving ethical compass—itself already a conflicting, incongruous, ambivalent force that violates the "realist" narrative

representation. The division of one figure as free of sin, while the other becomes darkly menacing; its doubled aesthetic aims of pure aestheticism and its social tinge of corruption. Wilde's preface, added several months before the publication of the second version of the novel, indicates via epigrams that paradoxes of darkness and light in aesthetic forms is central to aesthetic pursuits and textual enjoyment: "The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in the glass."⁶⁹ The notion is itself an obvious double of Dorian's declaration that the painting is an "unjust mirror."

Inescapably, an additional undercurrent to Wilde's dark aesthetics is colonialist racialization, a specific kind of "darkness" upon which white masculinity depends, as Wilde makes clear. As the perceived fantasy of white masculinity emerged due to global exchange and shifts in Britain's empire, Wilde's charm glosses racialized others as critical component of what modernity would be, while the white heteronormative futurity found such a proposal socially undesirable, and unviable. I find this racializedness embedded in Wilde's "dark" aesthetics, the "dark magic" that Wilde declared would place him alongside the figure of Rais. This darkness, a literary Gothic or chiaroscuro, seeps into both *Dorian Gray*, and functions beyond mere aesthetic representation or "mirror" of a social or individual moral darkness and depravity.

Wilde's famous tale of art turned life has been subject of numerous studies tracing its lineage from Walter Pater's use of darkness in aesthetics. These are highly formal roots. Jean Paul Riquelme, for one, notes *Dorian* is Wilde's projection of the

“dark implications of Pater’s attitudes and formulations in a mythic Gothic narrative of destruction and self-destruction.”⁷⁰ Dorian’s descent into amorality through hedonistic pursuit after artist Basil Hallward paints his portrait – doubles or reproduces him – is a “dark enlightenment” of a literary equivalent to chiaroscuro.⁷¹ Riquelme points out the novel concerns “a dark and darkening recognition that transforms Dorian’s life by actualizing a potential that was already there in his family, a potential that is one truth about British society.”⁷² This is a mutually constitutive pairing. Riquelme’s emphasis on the painting itself as comment on and challenge to the realism and aestheticism of Pater also situates the reader’s experience in the aesthetic experience of the painting: “The collaborative act of creating the painting brings into being something apparently new, original, and masterful that turns out to be not only beautiful but also atavistic and terrifyingly at odds with the public values of the society that applauds its beautiful appearance... [an act that] parallels and engages with our own act of reading.”⁷³

What Riquelme indicates here is significant beyond an assessment of Wilde’s use of Pater’s aesthetic theory—that a “beautiful appearance” or form can have social consequence, and affects us as readers. Riquelme, like many others who have addressed *Dorian Gray*’s implications for late nineteenth-century aesthetics, muses freely on the “darkness” of the novel’s Gothic character, the darkness of its moral chiaroscuro. What such an interpretation misses is that this darkness is highly racially-defined. To read the “dark magic” of the novel as racially coded is to grant new lease on Wilde’s play with familial lineage: white heteronormative individuality and perpetuity. Dorian’s lineage as already corrupt, but that the reading of *Dorian* is not

merely participatory or constructive, but an act of contagious complicity. The Gothic “conjuring” that *Dorian* participates in is the racialized animation of normative identity; by refocusing on charm, the novel can be seen to initiate an embedded animation of racialized difference, the structures of which are readily apparent through affective-aesthetic form.

We can see this first through Dorian Gray’s supposedly corrupt lineage as product of a forbidden marriage between lower and upper classes. This information arrives secondhand when Lord Henry investigates Dorian’s mysterious background early in the novel. Lord Henry seeks information about Dorian’s aristocratic family history lies from his wealthy uncle’s knowledge. A bachelor who himself appears curiously outside of heteronormative reproduction, and of no societally generative “use,” Henry’s uncle is a “genial if somewhat rough-mannered old bachelor, whom the outside world called selfish because it derived no particular benefit from him.”⁷⁴ The “truth” of Dorian Gray’s family lies in a vague reference in the novel’s third chapter. Lord Henry asks his uncle, Lord Fermor, about Dorian’s heritage. He discovers Dorian’s mother Margaret Devereaux had married “a penniless young fellow, a mere nobody, sir, a subaltern in a foot regiment, or something of that kind”⁷⁵ without financial resources, against her father’s will. Her father, Lord Kelso, then arranged the subaltern’s death in a duel, and Riquelme notes “Dorian’s decision to store the portrait in the room set up for him by his grandfather to keep him out of the way after his mother’s death suggests that the portrait’s meaning emerges in part from the family’s history.”⁷⁶ Undeniably, the portrait does indeed compile its meaning as familial history. However, the language used to describe Dorian’s father is striking.

Dorian's father is never given a name, instead, is given three descriptors by Lord Fermor that seem to repeat roughly the same information. He was "a young fellow," a "mere nobody," and a military "subaltern." Yet, Dorian's father described as a "fellow" actually monies him, given the etymology of "fellow" as literally one who lays down money in a joint enterprise. Such suggestion is in friction with his description as "penniless." More inconsistencies arise, as well. The "mere" of the "mere nobody" suggests purity, clarity, and brilliance. And, as a subaltern, rank and class collide with the term's later associations with racial and colonial exploitation. Finally, Fermor's assertion that he can "remember the whole thing as if it happened yesterday,"⁷⁷ providing details of the man's arranged murder by Lord Kelso, as well as his detailed gossip in the pages that follow, are inconsistent with his dismissive line that the man was "something of that kind." Corruption and disturbance are already at work in the heteronormative social bond, wracked by the burdens of that social bond – money, politics, war, and racial divisions.

It is notable, too, that the conversation between Henry and his uncle turns promptly from Dorian's rumored background to femininity and "charm." Abruptly after the knowledge is disseminated, the "charming" nature of American girls is discussed – women who are, Henry insists, popular marriage prospects, as an American woman "behaves as if she was beautiful. Most American women do. It is the secret of their charm."⁷⁸ Just as whiteness relies upon colonialist racialization of dark "others" (colonial subjects), the proximity of such darkness with the subject of charming women suggests that women's charm is embedded within this whiteness and darkness. Moreover, Henry notes that American women behave "as if" they were

beautiful, a beauty that is the “secret” of their charm. They are not unlike Dorian, then, who exists as inversion of their open secret of beauty. Dorian’s familial “darkness,” therefore, may not necessarily be moralistic. It is not sourced from the forbidden marriage of Dorian’s parents that seems to set Dorian up for his later hedonistic “darkness,” but rather, contains a myriad of other socially transformative threads. It is, in other words, codedly racialized, its own eugenics of sorts. As such, it also speaks to an alternative mode of individuality, if we may understand reproduction as copying or doubling.⁷⁹ Again, this speaks to Sibyl’s “slash” or wound to individuality’s relationship to the affective-aesthetic, and Dorian’s own slash, made literal in his demise at the novel’s end.

The critique in the *Telegraph*, which opened the start of this chapter, claims Wilde had been long trying “to establish a cult in our midst,” a cult of influence that would subvert the nation’s youth.⁸⁰ Wilde and his charmed circle, in “linking a certain real sense of beauty with profligate tastes and profane mockery, have undoubtedly exercised a visible influence upon the generation cursed by their presence.”⁸¹ In other words, this critique (among many) effectively supports social order as aesthetic theory, echoing aesthetic theory’s insistence on the ideal relation of form and matter. Wilde’s mien was seen as threat of the put-on or formative artificial and excessive emotionality that jeopardizes civil order. Yet, this threat cannot be assessed as strictly the threat of “deviant” sexuality, as his sentence for gross indecency would suggest. Rather, it is the threat of an uncontrolled, formless influence that violates accepted notions of aesthetic relation and moves between or among persons and only registers as a receptivity or stimuli. This force, I argue, is therefore an innovation of Wilde’s

particular modernism. Wilde's sense of form relies on charm as uniquely modern aesthetic theory as *influence*. At once formless and taking on aesthetic forms, charm names the invisible patterns of influence that point to the social order's tacit reliance on a disavowed aesthetics. Cognizant of this, Wilde in his literary works begins to re-stitch sociality through explicit aesthetic kinds of kinship.

What can we ultimately make of charm as minoritizing mode, one that is recovered on early modernism's margins to become central (though still castigated) affective-aesthetic of modernity? For one, Wilde's use of charm and the charm circulating around his persona at the time of his trials sets the map for queer theory and criticism, about one hundred years afterward. Cultural historians and other scholars have long perpetuated the notion that Wilde (and indeed, his image at his 1895 trial) effectively constructed the figure of the marginalized queer subject in public imagination. Jeffrey Weeks's influential notion from 1977 that Wilde "created a public image for the homosexual, and a terrifying moral tale of the dangers that trailed closely behind deviant behavior"⁸² rendered the modern homosexual figure as effeminate and non-normative. Other scholars contend with this notion, such as Joseph Bristow, arguing that the trial was far less a "sex trial" that established a Foucauldian category of modern sexuality than a curious patchwork of the nineteenth century legal system. Bristow's work emphasizes that the trial hinged upon the "manipulative use of admissible evidence from undependable witnesses" (who were, in fact, paid by the prosecution to testify, and never were themselves subject to criminal proceedings despite their alleged participation in both blackmail and sexual acts)⁸³ and now exists as contradictory tales from court documents and sensationalized newspaper reports.

Other work in queer theory that hinges upon minoritization is less cultural than textual. Kevin Ohi, for example, theorizes a “queerness of style” in literary texts, specifically in Henry James’s works. It is an aesthetic form, composed of “a queerness that, not circumscribed by whatever sexualities or identities might be represented by the texts, makes for what is most challenging about recent queer accounts of culture: a radical antisociality that seeks to unyoke sexuality from the communities and identities—gay or straight—that would tame it.”⁸⁴ In other words, Ohi’s sense of a queer style does not base itself on “received forms of meaning, representation, and identity.”⁸⁵ Lee Edelman, Val Rohy, and others perceive queer transmission – of knowledge, sex, materiality, and so on – as necessarily already needing to be *successful* transmissions, Ohi proposes queer transmission lying in moments of *interrupted* transmissions. The very concept of “thwarted transmission” as thematization of queer transmission means that “far from exceptional events in the history of literature and far from mere regrettable accidents to which any artifact of human cognition is subject,” “imaginings of thwarted transmission figure the literary tradition as such.”⁸⁶ Thwarted transmission “is both a locus of queer eroticism and a way of rethinking literary and cultural transmission.”⁸⁷ Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007) directly addresses notions of queerness as associated with loss, tragedy, shame, and other forms of negativity. Queerness holds an inherent contradiction as “both abject and exalted,” a “stigmatizing mark as well as a form of romantic exceptionalism.”⁸⁸ Resultantly, Love reads a variety of late nineteenth and early twentieth century texts from figures include Walter Pater, Willa Cather, and Radclyffe Hall as registering authors’ “painful

negotiation of the coming of modern homosexuality,” marking an “archive of feeling” that establishes an account of “the corporeal and psychic costs of homophobia.”⁸⁹ In other words, Love proposes that these texts may offer a described experience of living with a “‘disqualified’ identity, which at times can simply mean living with injury—not fixing it.”⁹⁰ To attend to modernity’s backward figures is to attend to the aesthetic strategies of modernity’s others.

This means, effectively, that not only does Wilde establish a form of kinship through charm, one structured upon aesthetic relations, but also that charm gains traction as a distinctly modernist registration of value. Specifically, it attends to the value placed on particular kinds of lives. If Wilde and others had to be considered (or, to consider themselves) minoritized or marginalized, then modernity begins with a perceived social and aesthetic loss. Wilde’s and others’ projects had to be conceived as failures in order to preserve the forward-moving engines of modernity’s heightened individuality, an individuality that had room for only one kind of individual—a white, male, and heterosexual, a singular subjecthood—at the expense of other forms of individuality, and moreover, alternative forms of sociality, as Wilde posits. Charm’s insistence on influence and proximity speaks to white British masculinity’s difficulties with “others,” a difficulty that charm uniquely is able to name as registration of loss, a nostalgia for the (white male) grandeur of the previous era and a concern for the future, a concern that often lacks a critical vocabulary. Wilde provides this vocabulary through aestheticism. While a source of melancholia for some in the face of the new century, Wilde’s work suggests charm’s destabilization of social identity categories as a radical potentiality. This is at its core the basis of modernist projects in taking up

with the Enlightenment's ideals of social progress, a progress that aesthetics—when taken for art's sake—jeopardizes.

As this chapter's foray into Gothic darkness and racialization begins to suggest, there are ethical stakes to charm's presence in literary modernism. The next chapter asks these questions of charm within a particularly gendered context—how charm brings into being the feminine or feminized, gendered body in early twentieth century literature as mass culture gained momentum in commodifying the processes of individualization.

¹ As Joseph Bristow notes, Wilde's trials were not as heavily interested in the spread of homosexual practice, as common knowledge would have it. Indeed, the terms at the center of the trial, "sodomy" and "gross indecency," were never defined, and were unlikely to have been as well understood by the jury as the related charge—blackmail. Building on this from Bristow, I would argue that the primary operator in Wilde's trial was the very notion of "dark" transmissions, and secret knowledge. Joseph Bristow, "The Blackmailer and the Sodomite: Oscar Wilde On Trial," 41-62.

² Qtd. in Michael S. Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society*, 53.

³ Walter Pater's aesthetic theory, I would argue, is reliant on charm as unification of the sonic and visual, subject-matter and form. In *The Renaissance*, Pater writes that the "sensuous element" in art brings with it "a special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other, an order of impressions distinct in kind—is the beginning of all true aesthetic criticism. For, as art addresses not pure sense, still less the pure intellect, but the 'imaginative reason' through the senses, there are differences of kind in aesthetic beauty corresponding to the differences in kind of the gifts of sense themselves. Each art, therefore, having its own peculiar and untranslatable sensuous charm, has its own special mode of reaching the imagination, its own special responsibilities to its material" (87). In other words, it is *charm* that names the distinct *thingness* or singularity of each art form, from "in music the musical charm" to "a picture that true pictorial charm" (87). It is a quality that Pater sought after to theorize—the unity of form and matter, the blending of the "charm of story and sentiment, the medium of the art of poetry, with the charm of line and colour, the medium of abstract painting" (53). In "The School of Giorgione," Pater summarizes in a famed line: "*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music*" (90), meaning, "while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction... it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it" (90). Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (NY: Dover Publications, 2005). For more on form as it develops in modernist aesthetic theory, see the work of Clive Bell on early formalism in *Art* (NY: Frederick A. Stokes, 1913), and Roger Fry on *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920), as well as Virginia Woolf's responses to these works. Bell coins "significant form" as a term that refers to the art object as "end in itself" (53), a thing in itself that—working against Kant, who believed the "thing itself" was unknowable—is accessible through art, according to Bell. Fry elaborates on "significant form" to draw out its impulses of control and domination: significant form "implies the effort [of the] artist to bend our emotional understanding by means of his passionate conviction some intractable material which is alien to our spirit" (302). The artist, then, is one who manipulates reality (form) to behave in accordance with will—an echo of sociopolitical forms of order and domination. Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, finds form matters as an emotional order. Form in fiction means "that certain emotions have been placed in the right relations to each other" (129). For

more on this, see Josephine Donovan, "Everyday Use and Moments of Being: Toward a Nondominative Aesthetic," 53-67, *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Hilde Hein, Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁴ On this subject, see Andrew Goldstone *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013). Goldstone notes that while aesthetic autonomy was once influential, the advent of historicist approaches in contemporary criticism means that the belief that art "is a law unto itself, neither governed by nor responsible to extra-aesthetic concerns, has few defenders" (1), replacing this approach with how "literature participates in history" (1). However, says Goldstone, aspects of modernist pursuit of "relative, worldly forms of independence for literature within society" ought to be taken seriously "as a genuine and significant aspect of modernist literature's engagement with its world" (2). Goldstone classifies Wilde's version of aesthetic autonomy as "the refusal of social realism through literary form" (2).

⁵ Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 15.

⁶ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 53.

⁷ See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁸ Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking 1880-1920*, 2.

⁹ In its early years, theosophy "attempted to occupy both poles of the primitive/civilized axis simultaneously and to confound easy distinctions between science and religion, West and East, male and female." Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England*, 21.

¹⁰ Leigh Wilson, *Modernism and Magic: Experiments with Spiritualism, Theosophy and the Occult*, 7.

¹¹ Wilson, 2. I certainly do not intend to implicate queer theory or queer studies' aims as always negating, defying, or otherwise irritating that which is normative, as Lee Edelman has argued. See Mari Ruti's *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects* for an illuminating rebuttal of this point. My goal here is to argue that the "queerness" in this context retains the force of alterity, and thereby opens up the spaces that modernist charm posits as alluring blanks.

¹² Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. II, 229.

¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. I, 154.

¹⁴ Oscar Wilde, "The Preface," in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 3.

¹⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 10.

¹⁶ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 11.

¹⁷ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 16.

¹⁸ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 50.

¹⁹ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 19.

²⁰ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 20.

²¹ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *ibid.*

²² Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This scene and its mysteries (what book? what knowledge? why does Lord Henry recognize Dorian's experience as familiar?) has been much-discussed in queer criticism as a moment of queer self-realization. The most well-known critical readings include the scene's homography, wherein Dorian misrecognizes himself through the painting in a moment of metaphysical metonymy (Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*, NY and London: Routledge, 1994); and as "symptomatic," revealing Dorian's repressed child abuse at the hands of his cruel and hated grandfather, Lord Kelso – the abuse being those unnamed "boyhood things" that he recalls shortly after this moment (Esther Raskin, "Art as Symptom: A Portrait of Child Abuse in 'The Picture of Dorian Gray,'" *Modern Philology* [95:1, 1997], 68-80).

²³ Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 186.

²⁴ Brinkema, *ibid.*

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 101. Qtd. in Brinkema, *ibid.*

²⁶ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 183.

²⁷ Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," 1058.

²⁸ Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," 1063.

²⁹ Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," *Ibid.*

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- ³⁰ Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," 1064.
- ³¹ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 38.
- ³² Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 39.
- ³³ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 69-70, emphasis mine.
- ³⁴ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 70.
- ³⁵ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 71.
- ³⁶ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 48.
- ³⁷ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 49.
- ³⁸ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 49.
- ³⁹ The singular, inner "truth" of the subject as something to be worked out or discovered is repeated throughout critical theory and philosophy, including during the Enlightenment as the "bundle theory" of multiplicity of selves. See David Hume's work as example, which is traced into contemporary theory of self and individuality from Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in particular. My distinction here is that the role of form and aesthetics is uniquely iterated through charm in Wilde's works.
- ⁴⁰ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 28.
- ⁴¹ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *ibid.*
- ⁴² Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 301.
- ⁴³ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 302.
- ⁴⁵ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 303.
- ⁴⁸ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 303, n5.
- ⁵⁰ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 89.
- ⁵¹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd*, vii-viii.
- ⁵² Le Bon, 16.
- ⁵³ Le Bon, xvi.
- ⁵⁴ Le Bon, xviii.
- ⁵⁵ Le Bon, 14. Specifically, Le Bon finds the crowd "always intellectually inferior to the isolated individual, but that, from the point of view of feelings and of the acts these feelings provoke, the crowd may, according to circumstances, be better or worse than the individual" (14). All depends on whether the "suggestion" to which "the crowd is exposed" is itself heroic or criminal (14).
- ⁵⁶ Le Bon, 16.
- ⁵⁷ Le Bon, 19.
- ⁵⁸ Le Bon, *ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ Le Bon, 20.
- ⁶⁰ Le Bon, 16.
- ⁶¹ Le Bon, 21.
- ⁶² Le Bon, 22.
- ⁶³ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 96.
- ⁶⁴ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, viii.
- ⁶⁵ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ix.
- ⁶⁶ Brinkema, 40.
- ⁶⁷ Brinkema, 40-41.
- ⁶⁸ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 300.
- ⁶⁹ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 3.
- ⁷⁰ John Paul Riquelme, "Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic Gothic," 497.
- ⁷¹ Riquelme, *ibid.*
- ⁷² Riquelme, *ibid.*
- ⁷³ Riquelme, 498.
- ⁷⁴ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 29.
- ⁷⁵ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 32.
- ⁷⁶ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 497 n3.

⁷⁷ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 32.

⁷⁸ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 33.

⁷⁹ While the perception of social taintedness due to racial integration is of note as it derives from the work of Charles Darwin and August Weismann, I will only suggest it here to later develop this notion in my final chapter on F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edith Wharton's address of American concern with ethnic or racial purity and socioeconomic ascendancy.

⁸⁰ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 53.

⁸¹ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 53.

⁸² Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, 21.

⁸³ Bristow, "The Blackmailer and the Sodomite: Oscar Wilde on Trial," 57.

⁸⁴ Kevin Ohi, *Henry James and the Queerness of Style*, 2.

⁸⁵ Ohi, *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Ohi, *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ohi, 4.

⁸⁸ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward*, 3.

⁸⁹ Love, 4.

⁹⁰ Love, *ibid.*

CHAPTER 3

DESIGNING WOMEN: MODERNIST MASS CULTURE AND THE FORMATION OF THE FEMALE BODY

In the early 1920s, a New Jersey department store called Bamberger's launched its own glossy American fashion magazine, published in-house and aimed at suburban women. Simply titled *Charm*, the magazine aimed to be more than a simple catalogue for the store's items. It was forthrightly an eclectic lifestyle magazine—writing and art from avant-garde figures Mina Loy and Jean Rhys graced its pages alongside articles on the professions from feminist journalist Brenda Ueland (a June 1924 article asked, “Is It Possible for a Woman to Be a Wife and Mother and Still Make a Good Living?”). It also featured profiles of women artists by modernist little magazines editor Florence Gilliam (“Paris Women in the Arts” in March 1925), and Djuna Barnes provided satirical travel pieces for multiple issues on Americans abroad under the pseudonym Lydia Steptoe.¹ Such varied subjects appearing alongside features on the latest fashion trends made *Charm* “the most ambitious effort of any American retail establishment to identify with its clientele through the publication of a general-interest magazine.”² *Charm* effectively sold an image of modern femininity—reflecting women's evolving identities in the marketplace as modern, progressive workers interested in the political, artistic, and literary as well as homemakers interested in home design and fashion.³

Though *Charm* was ultimately short-lived, shutting down production by 1929,⁴ the magazine is notable for its bold use of charm as catch-all for the modernist “woman” in its multifold aims, echoing the everyday allures of consumerist tastemaking as America and Britain adapted to sociopolitical shifts after WWI, including the push toward new roles (and wardrobes) for women. Dominant social discourses resultantly alternated between fetishizing and devaluing “femininity.” As Jane Garrity argues, this makes modernist women’s “presentation of the self... conditioned by an awareness of the body’s visibility, a visibility that is predicated upon a masculine aesthetic in which women are objectified.”⁵

I begin this chapter with *Charm* to introduce the very notion of “charm” as part of white, middle- to upper-class women’s domain in the modernist era. Charm is used to refer to female attractiveness, a blank descriptor of a woman who presents as enticing or alluring in a generally non-erotic way.⁶ Both a physical object (such as a lucky token) and the state of a subject (to be charming, to be charmed), charm typically denotes a pleasant interest or delight in something. But more than a noun referencing an object or adjective referencing a person, “charm” also references language itself—it is a word or phrase with magical properties for healing, protection, or otherwise controlling one’s surroundings, dating from Medieval incantations and healing verses. It shifts uneasily through a range of grammatical contortions—one can “be charming” oneself and charm someone else, and one can also “be charmed” by someone or something else—the ability to manipulate, to make one’s surrounds malleable. Charm the word is as malleable and enigmatic as its denotation suggests. It is precisely these qualities—charm’s high linguistic value, its gloss as an ability to

manipulate the self, and its complex aesthetic and affective dance from subject to object and back again—that render charm a rich point of inquiry into women’s self-making during the era.

The odd links between the making of the modern “woman” can be examined further with the visual aesthetic of *Charm* magazine’s covers. In its irrepressible urge for the “modern,” *Charm* managed to draw famous artists for its cover images, including Pablo Picasso in April 1928, and the *New Yorker* illustrator Constantin Alajalov for a March 1929 cover. A cover that ran a few years prior in August 1925, however, is most intriguing. The image is a rendering of a woman clad in a bathing suit, balancing a red ball midair, and standing in concentric circles of water (see fig. 1).⁷ Designed by Peruvian caricaturist Julio Málaga Grenet, the image is boldly graphic, relying on minimalist lines and shapes with high-contrast colors, much in the style of *Vogue* as well as other department store magazines of the era, such as Wanamaker’s. The bold black, red, yellow, and grey horizontal stripes of the bathing suit on *Charm*’s starkly white-skinned cover girl oppose the color and shape of the radiating blue and white rings of water surrounding her. The image is suggestive in a few ways. Structurally, it is a study in contrasts – horizontal stripes blur into the circular waves of the water around the submerged woman; the woman’s opaque, delicate feet suggest ballet (an idea strengthened by her arms’ upward pose) though the ball she holds implies a less-dainty female athleticism. Thematically, the image indicates something else entirely.

The woman’s delicate S-shape rising from the water and the red ball balanced close to her upward-turned nose are comical suggestions of a trained seal. Even the

Figure 1. *Charm: the magazine of New Jersey home interests*. August 1925. Newark, N.J.: L. Bamberger & Co. Publishing Company, 1924-32.

colors of the image suggest circus advertisements common to the early twentieth century: yellows, blues, and reds. The woman is a trained spectacle, a performing animal. Her showmanship of a beguilingly delicate, yet athletic, femininity is bolstered by the ringed waves surrounding her torso. These concentric circles (along with a slightly lighter-toned bathing suit under the water line) visually replicate the tiers of a larger hoop-style skirt, itself an unmodern relic of the previous century. We are signaled toward an “underneath,” so to speak—underwater is a risqué peek under-skirt. But such an erotic look loses its allure in plain sight. We see exactly what we expect to see on the surface, a surface that does not mask an underneath. Grenet, expert caricaturist who would in the same era illustrate similarly self-conscious

advertisements for soap and women's hosiery in *McCall's* magazine, manages an image that plays with puzzles of bodily transparency, surfaces, and depths. The caricature does not showcase a fashionable woman's body made comic, but rather, our own ability to *see* bodies made estranged. The image is paradoxical, certainly representing *Charm's* doubled motives as both fashion-forward commercial vehicle and savvy literary magazine, but likewise, the oddity of charm as bearer of such deceptions.

This suggests to me that in making modern "women," the modernist era's mass market clashed with more fluid notions of femininity and with the potentiality of the body itself. Reading charm's role in women's writing during the era illuminates the problem of white woman as bodily form. *Charm* magazine's bathing suit cover, with "woman" at its conceptual and visual center, dramatizes charm's sleight of hand, its unapologetic conceit of deception that I find a rich puzzle of femininity's visuality, embodiment, and desire during the early twentieth century. To "charm" the body, such as through the literalization of this process, charm school, entails a conditioning or hailing through social, discursive, and institutional regimes. The goal of these practices is to produce desirable female-identified or effeminate subjects whose bodies are susceptible, masked, and marketable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These conditioned bodies tend to be unsuitable subjects for feminist theory, as they seem to only participate in Foucauldian regimes of biopower. Yet, I argue that charm denotes a superficiality or refusal of depth in female embodiment that *interrupts*, while also acknowledges, the physiological marks inscribed upon socially-written bodies.

Interrupting Bodies in Theory

Women's bodies in feminist theory have been construed variously, though most clearly, as sites of sexual difference. Such sexual difference is an arm of theories of subjectivity formation, as taken up by theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Examinations of the dichotomy of sexual difference, of man/woman, grew to critical examinations of its spillover into other formational logics of Western thought (phallogocentrism), including nature/ culture, subject/object, and surface/depth. By the 1990s, however, this type of focus on sexual difference became increasingly less scrutable as a lived body, even as these theories held an emphasis on corporeal aspects of womanhood including childbirth, sexual experience, menstruation, or lactation. Elizabeth Grosz, Dorothy Roberts, Jennifer Nash, and Susan Bordo intervened in the bodilessness of poststructuralism by returning a material "real" to questions of bodily habitation and sexual difference. Materiality, write the editors of *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, has been "volatile site" for feminist theory, "so volatile, in fact, that the guiding rule of procedure for most contemporary feminisms requires one to distance oneself as much as possible from the tainted realm of materiality by taking refuge within culture, discourse, and language."⁸ There is, for example, a materialization to Grosz's "volatile" body that overturns poststructuralism's emphasis on the anti-dermal discursive and ideological. In contemporary theory, Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, and Sara Ahmed work through bodies as constitutive of larger ecologies, or as primarily of emotional responsivity, including attention to racialization and other

modes of difference. This includes such emphases as “gut feminism,” feminist new materialisms that renounce the primacy of the human body, and posthumanism or digital feminisms.

Yet, few if any of these theoretical developments to feminist theories of the body attend to the smooth cultivation of surface. Even Anne Cheng’s study of the body in modernism, *Second Skin*, calls attention to the smoothness of modernist skin as primary characteristic: “The discourse of the ‘pure’ modern surface thus produces a nexus of metonymic meanings—purity, cleanliness, simplicity, anonymity, masculinity, civilization, technology, intellectual abstractism—that are set off against notions of excessive adornment, inarticulate sensuality, femininity, backwardness.”⁹ This is the “dream of undistracted surface”¹⁰ in modernity, she notes. But even while locating smoothness as a primary objective for modernists (and therefore, not without its own paradoxes, as Adolf Loos’s architecture—with sleek exteriors belying lushly decorated interiors—demonstrates), smoothness remains intact. Josephine Baker’s “second skin” during her nude and semi-nude performances, likewise, is a worn nakedness, “like a sheath.”¹¹ There is no interruption to the surface itself, only, a slip of one surface for another, what is under, what is over, and what is integrally connected. (Affect theory in many contemporary iterations often retains the same problem.) The problem of skin, then, of whether skin is container of the body, is a problem of modern aesthetics, she notes: “that is, the heuristic and critical problem of distinguishing decoration as surplus from what is ‘proper’ to the thing,”¹² a notion that would hold wide implications for raced bodies. Charm’s slip of subject and object, of

what is seen as extant about the body and particularly, the female body, interrupts this tacit acceptance of the body's smoothness in theory.

Charm denotes a superficiality or refusal of depth in female embodiment that interrupts, yet nonetheless acknowledges, the physiological marks inscribed upon socially written bodies.¹³ Such theories of the body can be found in the early experimental poetry of Gertrude Stein, and are refracted in the materials of mass culture including pamphlets and self-help books. This pushes Cheng's notion of surface and ornamentation further, and likewise, brings together seemingly disparate threads of feminist theories of the body—that the body is at once discursive and fleshly material, human and posthuman cyborg. Stein's avant-garde poetry and prose showcase a range of ironic explorations of women's visual charm through fashion – from the erotic allure of ladies' undergarments, to presenting a woman's body as blazon of handkerchiefs or petticoats – and uses language to interrupt cognitive processes of aesthetic and lingual appreciation. I find that these charmed bodies are not what they seem by being *exactly as they seem*. There is both a *seam* and a *seemingness* to women's bodies, a fissure or stitch that exposes their construction as based on the play of appearances (or that which seems) that uniquely emerges through modernist literary examination. Recalling the roots of “seem” from the Old Norse, “fitting” (*soemr*, *soema*), attention to charm's seems/seams render the line between women's fashion industry, of mannequins, commerciality, and clothes on the one hand and divisions of naturalness and unnaturalness, of how a body appears on the other. Examining this thread allows us to see how a body relates to language in modernity, and how the desire to see the body then “magicks in” its own appearance.

Gertrude Stein and Mass Women's Culture

Charm in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (published first in 1914, then reissued in a larger printing in Eugene Jolas's *transition* in 1928), is an aesthetic explicitly acknowledged as critical to her poetics. Writing as her partner, Alice, Stein reports in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933): "[Tender Buttons] was a very charming little book and Gertrude Stein was enormously pleased."¹⁴ An arrangement of small poems, set in small type, and devoted to small objects, *Tender Buttons* is even physically inseparable from its own charm – in its first edition, the book was just seven inches tall and five inches wide.¹⁵ *Tender Buttons* takes as its poetic subjects those objects that echo its diminutive size. Divided into sections that suggest domestic spaces and things, "Objects," "Food," and "Rooms," the collection takes on small parts of wholes such as windows in rooms, the red interior of a roast, umbrellas, glasses, or coats. It is undeniably an odd little book. Presumably, the poems are "set" in an ostensibly bourgeois domestic space, comprised of dresses, umbrellas, roast beef, books, and cocoa. While these objects tend both toward the feminine and masculine, they are largely neutral. Absent from all the poems are any human actants—no one is doing the domestic labor of cooking the roast beef, or shopping for the dresses, or reading the books. Because of this, Juliana Spahr writes, "It is tempting to say that *Tender Buttons* says something feminist, something queer, something opposed to those big modernist epics such as T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' or Ezra Pound's *Cantos*."¹⁶ But *Tender Buttons* incessantly confounds. Critics such as Marjorie Perloff locate a "synecdochic riddling poetry" in the work. Writes Mena Mitrano, it has an

“intensely intransigent and uncompromising linguistic surface,”¹⁷ and James Mellow describes *Tender Buttons*’s literary experimentation as Stein transforming the English language into a “‘foreign’ language of her own.”¹⁸ This language labors in a way that can in effect be described as incantatory. The poems bring something into being—they introduce forces and potentialities of materiality and language when not at “work.” In short, with their incantatory nature, replete with meter and rhythmic repetition, they *charm*.

Critics have long pinpointed the literary quality of charm in the work explicitly. Gertrude Stein’s good friend and sometime-patron Mabel Dodge, for one, wrote in *Arts and Decoration* one of the first praises of Stein’s writing in America, celebrating Stein’s writing for its “charming” qualities (as we’ve seen in the introduction). What happens when Stein alters words as small as prepositions is the opening of an “excessive” or large element of aesthetic experience. As example, I quote “NOTHING ELEGANT” in full:

A charm a single charm is doubtful. If the red is rose and there is a gate
surrounding it, if inside is let in and there places change then certainly
something is upright. It is earnest.¹⁹

Here, Stein’s syntax presents a familiar logical sequence based on syllogism: *if* “the red is rose,” with a gate around it, *and* “if inside is let in,” *then* “certainly something is upright.” But in this simple logic problem, there is no logic. Red we can understand as “rose,” or a “rose red,” but how can this premise be based on the condition that a gate surround a color? Similarly, how can an “inside” be “let in,” if this presumes that “inside” is really an outside? There is no “certainly,” though Stein tells us so, and even

more certainly, there is no logical “then.” And what is the referent for the “it” that “is earnest”? One’s reason does – and must – sleep, temporarily in reading poems like these. Stein’s work begins to explain how the “nothing” can be “something [...] upright.”

The “surface” quality of Stein’s difficult writing defies conventional attempts at understanding, and effectively interrupts cognitive expectation. The charm of *Tender Buttons* serves to problematize bodily response as juxtaposed with cognition in response to aesthetic works. In other words, Stein allows us to see what we are seeing (our desires) when we think we see the body. In the section, *Rooms*, Stein muses on desire, which she calls “craving,” as caught between cognition and seeming: “Why is there more craving than there is in a mountain. This does not seem strange to one, it does not seem strange to an echo and more surely is in there not being a habit.”²⁰ Desire or craving, Stein indicates, is a figure of mountainlike immensity. To grasp the vastness of one’s desire, the poem proposes that one must behave like an echo, a sonorous force that uses surfaces (valleys or mountainsides) to grasp depth. By finding the edges of the void, or what “seems,” an echo’s pattern can reveal the shape of the mountain’s terrain. The echo’s interplay between surface that indicates depth, of what seems and what is, renders the shape of one’s desire. As Stein’s “NOTHING ELEGANT” suggests, the seemingly empty nothing of desire, then, becomes the shape of “something.” This is, I find, is very like the shape of the body.

Bodies as established through repeated habits are immediately commercially apparent if we examine the profusion of early twentieth-century charm schools and women’s advice manuals in Britain and America. Bodies entailed a conditioning or

hailing through social, discursive, and institutional regimes. Tim Armstrong considers the body's relationship to these regimes as a defining force in modernism. At the start of the nineteenth century, Armstrong says, the body was believed a whole unit, a "machine in which the self lived."²¹ The end of the century, however, saw the body turn to pieces as "a more contingent mechanism, incorporating evolutionary survivals, and with ... perceptual, neurological, and performative apparatus[i]."²² This twentieth-century conceptualization imagined the body in fragments, responding to the conditions in which it existed. Simultaneously, it was a body envisioned as unprepared for these conditions, ill-adapted to the multifarious demands of modern life. The lacking body necessitated compensatory technologies, practices, or other remedies to achieve "wholeness." Capitalism took advantage of this fragmentation to sell the "fantasy of the complete body," leading bodies to be seen as "projects" to be developed by the self, with correct habits cultivated, and proper care given.²³ Here arises the goal of producing desirable female-identified or effeminate subjects whose bodies are susceptible, masked surfaces, but also, these bodies are ultimately *interrupted* by attempting smooth surfaces reliant on seeming, and therefore, seams.

The aptly titled *The Magic Key to Charm*, by socialite Eileen Ascroft, promised American women of the 1920s and 1930s that, "No woman, however beautiful or clever she may be, can live her life to the full unless she learns the secret of charm. And every woman, no matter who she is, [...] can be charming. Because charm lies already in her soul. She has only to learn how to set it free and express it to others."²⁴ Ascroft promises readers: "*We are going to study together how to bring out the very best in you*"²⁵ to "develop the charm that is in you, spiritually from within and

practically from without.”²⁶ This “best” is achieved in a three-pronged approach: “First, mentally, by directing your thoughts and actions into beautiful channels and filling your mind and brain so full of charming constructive thoughts that there will be no room for ugly, destructive ones. Secondly, by practical advice about how to use clothes and make-up to emphasize your personality. [...] And thirdly we are going to study your attitude to others together and learn how to find friendship and love.”²⁷ Most important of all, however, “there is no mystery about charm,”²⁸ since every woman already has it—or rather, the white bourgeois woman has it. Ascroft incants the realm of the white bourgeoisie through a Steinian range of domestic objects she references throughout. She recommends: “A vase of flowers, a delicately-scented talcum powder, your powder in a lovely colored bowl instead of its box, your perfume in a colored scent spray to match—all these little things bring charm into your surroundings.”²⁹ The whiteness is made even more explicit in one of the early chapters, as she demands her readers erotically enjoy their whiteness: “Look at the beauty of that body God has given you. [...] Look at the rhythmic curve of your shoulders, the exquisite soft whiteness of your breasts.”³⁰ The self-help guide by Ascroft—one of many similar advice manuals and conduct books published at the turn of the twentieth century—is unintended confirmation of the slip of surfaces, charm’s mystery and mastery. Ascroft’s premise is already a logic of illogic: if every woman has charm, and there is no “mystery” about it, then it is not “secret,” but instead an open secret that paradoxically leaves its heart on its sleeve. Charm makes no deceit about its own mechanisms, and yet, mass culture perpetuates a refusal to envision women’s charm as having such openness.

Charm's open deceit takes crafting and attention to detail—and as such, it carries the logic of formalist performance. Eugenie Brinkema's theorization of the formal dimensions of emotion can help us here. Brinkema mentions a psychoanalytic session described by Freud's contemporary, Pierre Janet. A "sick" girl comes to Janet and "wants to confide the secret of her turmoil," yet, during the session, the girl finds she cannot do so as she begins to sob. "But does she sob *because* she cannot say anything?... Or does she sob precisely *in order not to say anything?*,"³¹ Janet asks. That the girl sobs "not as loud profession but in order to remain silent," Brinkema observes, "[...] theorizes emotion as organized behavior, means aiming at an end. But what that emotion-behavior aims at is precisely deception, delay, and an evasion of difficulty."³² In other words, what occurs in the scenario is *already on the surface*. It needs not be "read" for a depth of meaning—if it were, we may surmise that the girl's sobs are *because of* the weight of her turmoil, or that her inability to speak is *produced by* her psychological turmoil. Emotions, however, could be "not windows into the soul; rather, they are 'a particular subterfuge, a special trick, each one of them being a different means of eluding a difficulty.'"³³ The truth of emotions is that they are masks.³⁴ We may alter this phrasing to note a related conclusion: the truth of charm is that the seams are clear—charm reveals masks. It now becomes clear what Ascroft's open "secret" is—that white bourgeois femininity is not innate but made, fashioned into a body desired to be seen as white, natural, and neutral. The open secret of charm is that it suggests that this white bourgeois femininity available to all women including women of color, and especially black women as part of the era's concern for race progress. But charm also introduces a snag to this availability, as it simultaneously

stages the question—why is this mask desirable? As Stein concludes the poem from *Rooms* quoted above, the “why” is there: “Why is there so much useless suffering. Why is there.”³⁵

With an emphasis on thoughtless, habitual acts without centers, Stein’s use of charm is in line with the premise of Ascroft’s and other conduct manuals. Charm reveals its curious hold as her writing combats the expressivist relation of depth and surface by refusing readers’ cognition. The first iteration of “A BOX” (a later poem in *Tender Buttons* holds the same title) does precisely this. The poem reads:

Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question,
out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle. So then the
order is that a white way of being round is something suggesting a pin and is it
disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine
substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point
again.³⁶

There is an intriguing emphasis on superficiality here as Stein directs attention to surface readings and surface similarities: kindness, redness, and rudeness are visually similar in their suffixes, but carry disparate signifieds. Yet their juxtaposition asks us to see what may be “red” about “kind,” for example. We are “not to red [read]” but “to point again.” The “order” is “a white way of being.”

Stein’s repetition through detail – and its superficiality – is evident in the many poems in *Tender Buttons* that take garments as their focus, an already surface-dependent subject that insists upon coverage and “mere” exteriors. Specifically, her focus on everyday and often *women’s* garments echoes Naomi Schor’s and Sianne

Ngai's interest in the embodied feminization (and, thereby, racialization) of small, everyday affects or aesthetics.³⁷ "A PETTICOAT" includes a line about a "rosy charm" in the garment that's overtly feminized, textualized ("ink"), and eroticized: "A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm."³⁸ Given four simple (and largely monosyllabic) characteristics that appear to be contradictory or, at the least, not necessarily given toward a compatible single image, the petticoat boasts the same "rosy charm" that echoes in "NOTHING ELEGANT." Moreover, it ties negative emotionality (the "disgrace" of what seems to be the red of menstrual blood) with positive (the spot's "rosy charm") as the two objective observations ("a light white" and "an ink spot") are given corresponding interpretations or meanings.

While many critics have addressed the poem's feminist appeal – it contests male fetishism, as the blood "ruins" the fantasy of the petticoat's virginal innocence, for example³⁹ – I emphasize the poem's own reading of itself that dramatizes a nonreading of detail, the prick of white, naturalized bodies. The poem plays on demands of secrecy (about the disgrace of menstruation, or the taboo of addressing women's undergarments at all) and disclosure; or, in other words, demands awareness of our own cognition through Salvador Dali's "prick" of the particular. Aligning images of blood on white undergarments with ink on a white page not only anticipates *écriture féminine* theorized by Hélène Cixous and French third-wave theorists, but invites a myriad of other interpretations that request of the poem a depth and largesse of interpretive cognition that, perhaps, charm cheekily lures us toward as it tempts us toward its truth-bearing function. The poem's reasoning, however, is continually threatened by falsification and misprision – how exactly do the second and fourth

evaluations modify the first and third observations? Do these four parts actually correspond in some pattern of logic, or are we seduced by difference through these paired doubles, and the repetition of Stein's image of feminine bodily "rosiness" and "charm"? The poem also suggests alternative alignments—that the disgrace is not menstrual blood on white garments, but it is "inky" blackness, opposed to the rosy charm of whiteness. This reading runs anti-dichotomously, as ABBA, rather than ABAB. The suggestion of the female body here is then a body theorized in an alternative alignment to phallogocentric oppositions. Instead of a running list of privileged and deprivileged binaries (like nature/culture, body/mind, emotion/reason, and so on) it is within enclosure—the BB within AA. Such a realignment also orients itself with inversion, a gloss on queer or lesbian eroticism. In other words, the alignment has an immediacy that repeats, that "magicks" something in, within the mask of the privileged term.

The charm of Stein's works, as observed by Mabel Dodge, for example, ostensibly demotes what her poetic or aesthetic projects actually are, yet more characteristically *denotes* a very Steinian superficiality, a diminution, a bathetic anticlimax that asks us to question precisely what Gilles Deleuze diagnoses of the modern condition – we seek this game of difference, and delude ourselves into depth of thought about an "endlessly extractable" set of differences.⁴⁰ Stein's poetic state of charmedness incants us into experiencing our own modes of logic, and confronts us with a quotidian confrontation with a self, a female body, as yielding nothing but nondisclosure.

This formalist performance echoes modernist anxieties over bodies, faces, gender, and emptiness. Glamour, as we've learned, the ultimate ideal of modernist fashion and lifestyle, flirts with "the suspicion of nothing behind it all," an absence that is "something [...] seductive, powerful, and often simply gorgeous."⁴¹ The biographer in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) avers, "Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath."⁴² While Judith Brown, Jessica Burstein, and others have argued for such an absence of a "beneath" as a sustained modernist attraction to nihilism, coldness, detachment, and negativity, I find that this is not the case in Stein.⁴³ Rather, Stein's work jeopardizes the easy idea of a surface and a depth. In *Second Skin*, Cheng argues that modernism's fascination with surface and skin (animal prints, furs, architectural "skins," and racialized black skin) must be considered under the assumption that visibility encodes upon *what* is seen *how* we are to see it. Cheng writes that the trouble of seeing is the trouble of differentiating subjectivity from objectivity, transparency and opacity. Modernism, Cheng finds, operates upon the complications that result when disavowals "repeatedly avow themselves," patterns of avowed disavowals that "are embodied within the very figuration of the modern object." When examining modernist objects, "[W]e are looking not at hidden depths or longings but the material traces of a desire that is written on the skin/surface again and again, like striated lines."⁴⁴

Charmed Bodies as Women's Labor

Michel Foucault offers a history of bodies in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), arguing that bodies have long been products of social and juridical conditioning

around power. Bodies that register as bodies, which retain the “right to life,” as Foucault argues, are entwined with the relatively modern idea of “biopower.” Put simply, biopower is the subjugation of bodies and control of populations through networks of power relations that, by the seventeenth century – unlike previous centuries – were not sourced from a single sovereign, but through smaller strategies of power that are non-authoritarian, strategies that are forces of quotidian normalization, dominance, and subordination. The new distribution of power shifted from exercising juridical control over legal subjects— over whom the ultimate punishment was wielded, death—to individuated mastery of living beings or the right to life. Available forms of selfhood or individuality then were constituted by biopower, as that which “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life.”⁴⁵ Foucault explains:

there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he [sic] is his [sic] own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself [sic].⁴⁶

Understanding biopower’s emphasis on one’s involuntary regulation of one’s existence and pleasures allows us to see charm as revealing itself in the social and ideological operations of the twentieth century. Such a conception of bodies and bodily control appears in line with twentieth-century concerns over bodily regulation, habit, and appearance. A booming self-help industry, enabled by the buying power of an eager middle class in America and Britain, counseled citizens on various methods of bodily habit that required bodies’ biology and physiology to be conditioned to achieve proper behavior, eliminate wastefulness, or other aims, through acts of sheer

will, and of course, the help of commodities. These methods were popularized in the early twentieth century as part of what Suzanne Raitt locates as a desire for efficiency, an efficiency that was “a kind of moral crusade and efficient itself [was] a form of ethical superiority.”⁴⁷ Failure to do so indicated not only moral ineptitude, but an inner primitive, or in some cases, a vulnerability to the “African within” white men.⁴⁸ Bodily practices moved fluidly from business and industry to one’s own corpus in daily life. Taylorism, a theory of labor systems management created by Fred W. Taylor in 1911, advocated for workers’ jobs to be converted to individual, timed, essential motions to enhance worker productivity. Once provided the proper training, and incentives to reward efficient labor, workers’ productivity would soar to machinelike levels.⁴⁹

These practices were aimed largely at male workers, not at women. Though New Women—who could be of middle social classes—were frequently employed as nannies or caretakers, tutors and teachers, work in factory settings or that involved the kind of physical labor often associated with early twentieth century industry remained in the realm of lower-class women. Capitalism and capitalist labor had to reach moneyed women and alter notions of embodiment as docile subject formation through other means. Outward appearances of the body and especially the face skewed toward the plastic and the “put-on” in the early 1900s, and was part of a larger movement toward bodily habits, control, and self-betterment.

In gendered parallel to Taylorist machinations of the body, the face and body – generally, both men’s and women’s, but far more often the latter – became the primary focus of middle and upper class women’s labor. These features were considered

alterable and therefore subject to the pursuit of habitually controlled perfection. Through controlled alterations, common wisdom went, the body was eventually able to be “mastered.” The era’s crazes for body and facial exercises, we find they emphasize the ability to reconfigure an inferior woman’s body (and thus, recuperate an autonomous, disembodied self) through regular movements. Unlike similar gymnastic drills that required metaphysical attunement as celebrated by other practitioners including Delsart, German doctor Bess Mensendieck’s immensely popular functional movement exercises were solely based on the body.⁵⁰ Mensendieck advocated a rationalized physical culture system inspired by avant-garde dance in Weimar Germany and interwar America.⁵¹ The resultant “relaxed, flexible, and individualized body” aligns itself with the “un-corseted and lounging avant-garde elite, the athletic New Woman.”⁵² Should one fail to properly enact bodily discipline, poet and avant-gardist Mina Loy warns in her 1919 pamphlet, *Auto-Facial-Construction*, one would risk an interruption to beauty caused by a subpar muscle:

One distorted muscle causes a fundamental disharmony in self-expression, for no matter how well gowned or groomed men or women may be, how exquisitely the complexion is cared for, or how beautiful the expression of the eyes, if the original form of the face (intrinsic symbol of personality) has been effaced in muscular transformation, they have lost the power to communicate their true personalities to others and all expression of sentiment is veiled in pathos.⁵³

While the female body is seen here to be malleable to accommodate shifting social requirements for the “feminine,” what strikes me is the implicit argument Loy makes

as to the plasticity of femininity. The form of the face can be “effaced”—one has the ability to alter the expression of one’s “true” personality. In other words, one can falsify oneself. The body is no longer a solid, staid, knowable object, but a mutable, responsive entity prepared to alter itself depending on valuation of its exterior.

The kind of embodiment Loy’s work recalls is not Foucauldian somatic control so much as the theories of Joan Riviere, psychoanalytic theorist who followed Freud and Melanie Klein’s work. Riviere suggests in “Womanliness as a Masquerade” (1929) that “womanliness” amongst successful professional or intellectual women is actually masked aggression. A woman’s exterior, then, suggests something other than the direct interior-to-exterior expressivity of Loy’s “true personality.” There is something to the act of perception and the feminine body here that charm exposes. When charm is the ultimate objective, charm reveals the labor implicit in the recognition of (and desire of) gendered bodies. The “seam” or interruption that charm renders to the smoothness of bodies in theory is that charm reveals the means of production, exposing its reliance on language or discourse *and* the material simultaneously. This is also part of the “catch.” Riviere finds that some women—those who “while mainly heterosexual in their development, plainly display strong features of the other sex”—are visually demonstrating a deeper deception. The femininity of these women, Riviere explains, is actually a fraudulent one – it is not “genuine,” but a “mask” designed to avert anxiety or fear of retribution arising from rivalry with men in the public sphere, particularly, in public speech acts. “Womanliness” as a mask serves “both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it,”⁵⁴ a subversion and

deflection of imagined power. For Riviere, such feelings are shields not for sexuality (one's homosexuality in a heterosexual realm, for instance, or an asexuality) but for anger. Seeing shields or masks is integral to seeing charm, as an awareness of charm's seams or seeming is itself a component of charm's social construction. A focus on charm allows women to see the body that ideology desires, and to newly perceive the ways the body is *made* by those desires.

In Judith Butler's discussion of Riviere's work in *Gender Trouble*, Butler is quick to point out Riviere's assumptions within such a theorization: "Clearly, Riviere begins with set notions about what it is to display characteristics of one's sex, and how it is that those plain characteristics are understood to express or reflect an ostensible sexual orientation. This perception or observation not only assumes a correlation among characteristics, desires, and 'orientation,' but creates that unity through the perceptual act itself."⁵⁵ Notably, Riviere elides the difference between "womanliness" and its fashioned mask, arguing that there is no separation between surface and what is supposedly underneath: "The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade.' My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing."⁵⁶ If the mask is genuine and indicative of false womanhood, then womanhood is itself superficial. But, if she deems "womanliness" a "masquerade," does "masquerade" not already imply that there indeed remains a depth? Or, in Butler's formulation, "What is masked by masquerade?"⁵⁷ While Butler uses this question to arrive at a critique of Lacanian divisions of gender and the construction of the law that guarantees failure in such divisions, we may repurpose the question to

address what is *the mask* of the masquerade. Is the mask a superficial persona from which embodied “charm” emanates as mere play of surfaces and disguise? Or does this mask in itself bring something into being?

Reading Charm, Reading Bodies in Modernism

If modernism can be described as a venture both of texts and interpretation, then modernism’s bodies can be envisioned as like these texts and interpretations. Elizabeth Grosz explains of bodies as form and content, surface and depth: “The surface of the body, the skin, [...] provides the ground for the articulation of orifices, erotogenic rims, cuts on the body’s surface, loci of exchange between the inside and the outside, points of conversion of the outside into the body, and of the inside out of the body.”⁵⁸ Bodies as exhibiting an inside (content) and outside (form) which can be scrutinized, rationalized, and made sensible—modernist bodies seem to be exercises in interpretation. Charm, however, throws a wrench in this process. If criticism insists upon scrutiny, charm *refuses* scrutiny—indeed, charm *dissolves* under scrutiny. If the role of the reader or observer in modernism is to “familiarize the seemingly unfamiliar,”⁵⁹ to make James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, or Wyndham Lewis’s *Tarr* “make sense,” then charm is the most anti-modern of modernist projects as it defamiliarizes the familiar—the body. It is therefore the *most* modern, if we are to trace what Slavoj Žižek writes of modernism: that “the pleasure of the modernist interpretation consists in the effect of recognition which ‘gentrifies’ the disquieting uncanniness of its objects.”⁶⁰ In other words, charm teaches us that as we read

modernism, we must attentively read modernism's interruptions to interpretation, and our desires for interpretation.

As Clarissa observes in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), in modernity, one can no longer say that one is "this" or "that," a unique singularity. Charm is necessarily existent in an in-between, a dynamic interplay that cannot avoid how we are taught to see bodies as reliant on surface/depth, internal/external. To see charm is to see how female embodiment functions as a mode of calling into singularity, a distinction that is a perennial puzzle of our desire for surfaces. We ultimately "see" our own desires of seeing the body—and find an illusion of valuation made to please capitalist desires. Stein and the texts of mass body culture demonstrate how charm is a key component of this puzzle, a puzzle that renders a larger modernist network of modes of "embodiment" and thinking the body, particularly for women, in the early twentieth century. Charm uniquely tells us what other studies have been unable to fully address within modernism—how language alongside perceptual processes and commercial materialism come together to perpetuate the idea of a modernist female body. The body conditioned toward and as hailed by *charm* actually changes our grasp on contemporary debates in theories of the female body by emphasizing surfaces, visibility, and styled individuality. We will never know the body—and particularly, the body as gendered—until we grasp the ways in which we "magic in" a body that holds critical lure for us in each theorization. Suggesting the hanging of clothes or trying on fashions, Gertrude Stein puts this process of magicking another way in *Rooms*: "A whole center and a border make hanging a way of dressing."⁶¹ Exposing its machinations, Stein's treatment of charm when placed in conversation with the era's

self-help texts reveals modernist bodies to be instructive masquerades, ways of dressing up desire into endless models.

¹ Bamberger's Department Store, Charm Magazine, and the Culture of Consumption in New Jersey, 1924-1932 (New Jersey Historical Society, 1984).

² John E. O'Connor and Charles F. Cummings, qtd. in Linda B. Forgosh *Louis Bamberger: Department Store Innovator and Philanthropist*, 88.

³ Sophie Oliver, "1920s Women's Magazines and Writers," <http://www.c-span.org/video/?321524-1/discussion-1920s-magazines>

⁴ The magazine was bought out in the 1940s, to then be revamped in the 1950s by what would become *Glamour*. The magazine in the 1940s was (tellingly) originally subtitled, "The Magazine for the BG" – an asterisk on the "BG" cheekily clarifies that it is an acronym for "Business Girl." This later was changed in the magazine's 1950s relaunch to "Women Who Work," but the infantilization this subtitle boasts by deeming their women audience as "girls," and the market typification of the slangy codeswitch "BG," reveals the magazine's mixed allegiances to women's equality and women as market.

⁵ Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 53.

⁶ "charm, n.1." *OED Online*. 12 June 2015.

⁷ Charm 4.1 <http://www.philsp.com/data/data091.html#CHARM1924>

⁸ Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, "Introduction," in *Material Feminisms*, 1.

⁹ Anne Cheng, *Second Skin*, 25. While Cheng does not explicitly note this here, echoes of the era's eugenicist rhetoric of racial purity can be added easily to this list.

¹⁰ Cheng, *ibid.*

¹¹ Cheng, 1.

¹² Cheng, 33.

¹³ In his edited collection, *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London and NY: Routledge, 1994), Moe Meyer makes a similar turn with "camp," recognizing camp as a style that refuses the depth-surface model. Though commonly perceived as "merely an aestheticized sensibility characterized by triviality and lack of content, or simply an operation of taste," camp is "a suppressed and denied oppositional critique embodied in the signifying practices that processually constitute queer identities" (5, 1). In his article in the same volume, "Under the Sign of Wilde: An Archeology of Posing," Gregory Bredbeck adds to this formulation the significance of gestures, specifically, the "pose." The pose also originates in systems of bodily mechanics such as Delsarte and Mensendieck, which this chapter later discusses.

¹⁴ Gertrude Stein, *Selected Writings*, 147.

¹⁵ Seth Perlow, "Editor's note," in *Tender Buttons*, 90.

¹⁶ Juliana Spahr, "Afterword," in *Tender Buttons*, 111.

¹⁷ Mena Mitrano, "Linguistic Exoticism and Literary Alienation: Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*," 87.

¹⁸ James Mellow, *Charmed Circle*, 164.

¹⁹ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 15.

²⁰ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 75.

²¹ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, 2.

²² Armstrong, 3.

²³ Armstrong, *ibid.*

²⁴ Eileen Ascroft, *The Magic Key to Charm*, 9.

²⁵ Ascroft, *ibid.*

²⁶ Ascroft, 19.

²⁷ Ascroft, 9-10.

²⁸ Ascroft, 11.

²⁹ Ascroft, 22.

³⁰ Ascroft, 42.

³¹ Pierre Janet, qtd. in Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 16.

³² Brinkema, 17.

³³ Brinkema, *ibid.*

³⁴ Brinkema, *ibid.*

³⁵ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 75.

³⁶ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 13.

³⁷ See Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (NY and London: Methuen, 1987) and Ngai *Ugly Feelings*, *ibid.* Schor points out the heightened emphasis on the detail in contemporary thought, citing Barthes, Habermas, and Foucault, the latter of whom once called for the “history of the detail.” Schor argues, however, that “[t]o focus on the detail and more particularly on the detail as negativity is to become aware, as I have discovered, of its participation in the larger semantic network, bounded on the one side by the ornamental, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the everyday, whose ‘prosinness’ is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women. In other words, to focus on the place and function of the detail since the mid-eighteenth century is to become aware that the normative aesthetics elaborated and disseminated by the Academy and its members is not sexually neutral; it is an axiology carrying into the field of representation the sexual hierarchies of the phallogocentric cultural order. The detail does not occupy a conceptual space beyond the laws of sexual difference: the detail is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine” (4).

³⁸ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 24.

³⁹ For this argument, see chapter one “‘Replacing the Noun’: Fetishism, Parody, & Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*” in Elisabeth A. Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003). Frost’s reading of “A PETTICOAT” begins at 24.

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.

⁴¹ Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 5.

⁴² Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, 139.

⁴³ For these arguments, see Judith Brown *ibid.*, and Jessica Burstein’s *Cold Modernism: Literature, Fashion, Art* (Penn State UP, 2012), et. al.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 143.

⁴⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 155.

⁴⁷ Suzanne Raitt, “The Rhetoric of Efficiency in Early Modernism,” 836.

⁴⁸ Raitt quotes Arnold Bennett, who was proponent of particularly mental efficiency, which relied on “the disciplined and vigorous condition of the brain,” which must be “put into training.” The full passage utilizes racist language and what Raitt deems the “imperialist roots of the efficiency movement” (837-38).

⁴⁹ Fred W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Taylor uses the example of shoveling at the Bethlehem Steel Company that after “thousands of stop-watch observations” made “to study just how quickly a laborer, provided in each case with the proper type of shovel, can push his shovel into the pile of materials and then draw it out properly loaded,” it became “evident that the man who is directing shovelers can first teach them the exact methods which should be employed to use their strength to the very best advantage, and can then assign them daily tasks which are so just that the workman can each day be sure of earning the large bonus which is paid whenever he successfully performs this task” (n.p.).

⁵⁰ See *The Mensendieck System of Functional Exercises* (Portland, ME: The Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1937). Practitioners of the Mensendieck method were encouraged to work in front of mirrors, preferably, with barely modest or no clothing. In formal practice rooms, the exercises utilized two mirrors in what is now a common dance practice room configuration – one to view the front of one’s body, and another at an angle that allows a view of the back. According to her later instructional text (not yet published at the time of Loy’s pamphlet), *The Mensendieck System of Functional Exercises*, such an arrangement of mirrors “train the eye to be the guardian which ‘polices’ the body, which locates the truant muscles that habitually shirk their function” (xii).

⁵¹ “It is not by cultivating bizarre and exaggerated types of dance movements that bodily perfection is to be attained,” Mensendieck noted, nor through “a so-called ‘expressionism,’ which, through bodily contortions, gives rein to a fancy even less esthetic [sic] than are the movements themselves.” Bess M. Mensendieck, “*It’s Up to You*,” 196, 36–37. (Qtd. in Veder, *ibid.*)

⁵² Robin Veder, "The Expressive Efficiencies of American Delsarte and Mensendieck Body Culture," 819-838.

⁵³ Mina Loy, "Auto-Facial-Construction," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, 165.

⁵⁴ Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade," 304.

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 68.

⁵⁶ Riviere, 305.

⁵⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 71.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, "Psychoanalysis and the Imaginary Body," in *Feminist Subjects, Multi-media: Cultural Methodologies*, 188.

⁵⁹ Sara Danus, *The Senses of Modernism*, 26.

⁶⁰ Slavoj Žižek, "Alfred Hitchcock," in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know*, 2.

⁶¹ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 63.

CHAPTER 4

LOLLY WILLOWES AND CHARM AS REVOLUTIONARY FEMINIST

THINKING

“Feminism Will Give—Men More Fun, Women Greater Scope, Children Better Parents, Life More Charm.” –Edna Kenton, *Delineator* July 1914¹

Written by British historian, musician, and writer Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes, Or, the Loving Huntsman* (1926) has long been considered a work of whimsical fantasy with key connections to its social and historical moment. In conversation with both the years following the Great War and the early twentieth century women’s movement, *Lolly Willowes* follows Laura Willowes, disparagingly called the title name “Lolly” by her family, raised as the only daughter of three children in the “conservative” Willowes family. The family “kept to old-fashioned ways”² (3) at their estate in rural Dorset, Lady Place, resting in physical and political comfort from generations of wealth (their domain includes beds and chairs that “insensibly persuaded them into respect for the good sense of their forebears”³ [10]). Laura’s childhood and early adolescence is peaceful, and Laura is her father Everard’s favorite. Everard dies as Laura reaches her late twenties, however, and as a single woman without independent means, Laura must give up life at Lady Place to move in with her brother Henry and sister-in-law, Caroline, in London. She lives with her family for decades in a dissatisfied life as “old Aunt Lolly, so useful and obliging and negligible”⁴ (150), until the age of forty-seven, when on a whim, she decides to use her meager savings to move to a rural village in the Chilterns called Great Mop. Once there, Laura soon realizes Great Mop’s residents are actually a secretive society of

witches who enjoy the perverse pleasures of a solitary life. By the end of the novel, Laura meets Satan on a desolate hillside, and launches into a tirade on women's limited position in society before peaceably accepting her new vocation.

The fantasy element of the novel dominated much of the discourse surrounding *Lolly Willowes* upon its publication. For her part, Warner seems not to have entirely discouraged this, playing up interviewers' speculation that she herself was a witch by flippantly suggesting that fellow modern witches should use vacuums for brooms. Later, Warner would disappoint Virginia Woolf when Warner declared to her that she knew so much about witches because Warner was one herself, during Woolf and Warner's first (and what would be only) meeting.⁵ Yet, privately, Warner felt her novel was not quite understood. Writing to lifelong friend and fellow Dorset writer, David Garnett, she noted wistfully: "Other people who have seen Lolly have told me that it was charming, that it was distinguished, and my mother said it was almost as good as Galsworthy. And my heart sank lower and lower; I felt as though I had tried to make a sword, only to be told what a pretty pattern there was on the blade. But you have sent me a drop of blood." A critical component of this misreading, in Warner's words, is its charm – a description as off the mark as a comparison to John Galsworthy. As her biographer Clare Harman puts it, the novel's focus on the "struggl[e] for privacy, not power, is still not a very common view of the feminist ideal and the retiring nature of the heroine, Lolly, perhaps persuaded readers that it was not a very serious one, either."⁶

Scholars in recent years have given the novel more serious attention, with more frequent attunement to the novel's critique of the limitations placed on women in early

twentieth-century British society.⁷ Gillian Beer unites the two emphases on feminism and fantasy to note that *Lolly Willowes* is, for feminists, “total fantasy gratification.”⁸ Warner’s novel, however, is more complex than either simple fantasy, or unified political treatise or allegory read in the way Beer suggests, as a portrait of a feminist utopia, particularly for single women.⁹ As Jacqueline Shin cautions, while an “assessment of the novel’s revolutionary potential is not inaccurate, ... it flattens Warner’s sly, slippery, and perverse text by forcing it into the genre of the manifesto.”¹⁰ Noreen O’Connor likewise calls the novel “not easily organized into either traditional pre-war narrative forms or the alienated individuality we have come to expect from modernist works.”¹¹ Such readings, in other words, ignore its narrative complexities and often fail to account for the significance of the fantasy elements as not feminism made whimsically coded but foregrounded and foundational to Warner’s feminist imagining. Charm, I argue in this chapter, helps us see how the unique feminist fantasy of *Lolly Willowes* operates as experimental exercise in sensation and belief, specifically through its cultivation of literary tone or, as I will call it here, its charmed atmosphere.

Warner’s Revolutionary Feminism

In the twentieth century’s early decades, Perry Anderson says, “the prospect of revolution was ... more proximate and tangible than it had ever been.”¹² Before turning to the novel, I’d like to set out context for the kind of feminism in which Warner’s novel is situated, and the role of charm within this revolutionary spirit. Writer and literary critic Edna Kenton saw feminism as many other women of the

early twentieth century did—as a radically new, fittingly modern notion. Writing in the American women’s magazine *The Delineator* in 1914, Kenton deems feminism “something so new that it isn’t in the dictionaries yet.”¹³ A uniquely modern phenomenon, feminism’s relationship to modernism was a complex, paradoxical one. “Femininity” as a category seemed to be the “other” of modernism, carrying with it undesirable associations with Victorian gentility and sentimentality. Historian Lucy Delap writes:

Over the first ten years of the twentieth century, feminism came to occupy a similar space to the idea of the ‘new woman’ of the 1890s, signifying a radical, subversive grouping closely associated with the avant-garde and radical movements that flourished before World War One. It connoted rupture, and was emblematic of the aggressively new century that was so widely understood as a millennial turning-point.¹⁴

The feminist avant-garde or, as Edwardians often termed it, “vanguard,” this circle drew upon a much older thread of political radicalism dating from the mid-nineteenth century. It indicated “a discourse or social imaginary within feminism, rather than a movement.”¹⁵ Physical spaces that opened up to women in the early twentieth century were significant—such as the tea shops represented in Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* (1915-38), or restaurants and clubs moved through by the aptly named Doris Kilman in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Yet, significant engines of feminist thought lay in “textual space,” meaning “the shared discourses circulating within feminist periodicals and essays, rather than any kind of tightly drawn circle or site.”¹⁶ Feminism, in other words, held critical ties to the reading of feminist texts. As

Delap puts it, “to be a feminist was very centrally a reading experience.”¹⁷ It is within this form of feminism, which is at once avant-garde and highly literary, that I trace Warner’s literary expression of feminism in Britain in the 1920s as distinct tonal atmosphere, fundamentally composed by charm.

Charm was already embedded in discourses of feminism in the first decades of the twentieth century. It appeared to be a quality closely associated with femininity that modernity attempted to distance itself from, yet paradoxically, became avant-garde emblem of the kind of radical shift in lived experience and aesthetic representation sought after by modernists. It also delineated separations within feminist groupings, as charm was never itself associated with the pervasive suffrage movement. Foundationally tied to aesthetic and affective forces, charm became a unique, slippery force of form that relied on the construction of atmosphere or tonality to bring support and promise to the movement. This kind of support was not enjoyed by the suffragists, despite the movement’s relative successes for legal and social reform. Suffragists, who decidedly lacked charm, were depicted as both unfeminine and, conversely, *too* feminine by the British mass media and vocal anti-suffrage groups. In a double bind, suffragists were skewered for their “masculine” desires to enter the political landscape assumed to be the realm of men, as well as criticized for their campaigns showing “the biologically determined flaws of their sex” such as hysteria or lack of intellectual capacity, “thus proving their inability to participate usefully in Parliamentary politics.”¹⁸ Charm smoothed the edges of such criticisms, and kept out of the headlines, favoring the promise of the literary as force of avant-garde feminist thought. As a 1914 note on the status of French women in *The Times* of

London commented, feminism was fresh and modern, a “charmingly feminine thing.”¹⁹ In its “lighter moods,” an anonymous Paris correspondent observes, feminism “is as graceful a gesture as it was in the days of the historic ‘salons,’” full of “fine feeling and dainty courage.”²⁰ As this comment shows, charm is uniquely able to slip less attractive notions under detractors’ noses while ostensibly upholding the norms of femininity and gender roles. And, I argue, it is this “trojan horse” quality of tastefully normative blankness that drove feminism’s ability to imagine another form of social relations through the peculiar means of speculative or magical, charmed thinking.

Lolly and Feminist Fantasy as Charmed Thinking

The novel immediately draws attention to will and susceptibility through narrative technique. *Lolly* opens with a punning meditation on “will.” The novel’s first line declares Laura Willowes’s fate upon her father’s death – to “live in London with her elder brother and his family”²¹ (5). Laura’s sister-in-law, Caroline phones Laura immediately to declare, ““Of course [...] you will come to us””²² (5). Laura’s response reads doubly: ““But it will upset all your plans. It will give you so much trouble. Are you sure you really want me?””²³ (5). Laura’s equivocations indicate her actual will is not to live with Caroline. Yet, another will insists she do so—her father Everard’s physical will, left upon his death, which dispenses with both the family assets and Laura (who, for her part, “was ready to be disposed of as they should think best”²⁴ [10]). Symbolically, this also names the will of the patriarchy, that a single, odd woman nearing thirty, with no marriage prospects is of no use to society at large.

Beyond these significations of will, the notion of will in the opening sentences of the novel introduces with it a sense of uncertain trajectory, conjuring a literary tone that itself jeopardizes our ability to read the novel conclusively. The narration's sly slipperiness quickly seems to accrue its own "wills" and intents.

As is characteristic of contemporaneous fantasy novels, *Lolly Willowes* relies upon the construction of an otherworldliness, a realm of possibility beyond the present. Warner's novel is unique in that this otherworldliness – the kind of slipperiness indicated by the novel's opening – is both alluringly magical and blankly quotidian. By this I do not mean to suggest that Warner elevates Laura's domestic, rural everyday life to the transcendent or spiritual,²⁵ nor do I mean to suggest that the novel's fantasy renders an unreachable utopia. Rather, the novel's ordinariness is a critical source of its very realist feminist thinking, created by the affective and aesthetic solicitation of response through tonality or atmosphere. Specifically, while ordinariness seems to connote a legibility, the quotidian fantasy realm of the novel actually crafts in its readers is one of confoundment, a cognitive dissonance or productive stupor produced when the novel evokes the naturalness of reason while compounding it with an immersive charmed delight in the feminist-inflected fantastical. This is where one's "will" fails to correspond to one's sensation or belief in the novel.

Lolly Willowes practices sequences of sly deceits and sleights of hand, sequences that present a tonal atmosphere that is itself a form of avant-garde feminist thinking that can only be described as *charming*. The world of London and of Great Mop are at turns both earthly and unearthly in *Lolly Willowes*—at the greengrocer's in

London, Laura imagines the greengrocer's mother bottling fruits: "the sliced pears in syrup, the glistening red plums, the greengages."²⁶ An image strikes her: "A solitary old woman picking fruit in a darkening orchard, rubbing her rough fingertips over the smooth-skinned plums,"²⁷ and suddenly, "She forgot the winter air outside, the people going by on wet pavements. She forgot that she was in London, she forgot the whole of her London life. She seemed to be standing alone in a darkening orchard, her feet in the grass, her arms stretched up to the pattern of leaves and fruit."²⁸ The strength of Laura's imagination becomes clear in moments such as these, as it appears to blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality. The blurring is rendered complete when Laura actually foresees her later encounter with Satan during this early moment in London. She is roused from her fantasy when the shop owner asks her what she wanted. "He wore a gardener's apron," the narration notes, "and his hands were brown and dry as if he had been handling earth."²⁹ Sure enough, in a perverse play on Eden, when we meet Satan later in the novel, he is "a slouching and prowling" gardener "carrying a flag basket and a pair of shears"³⁰ as he emerges from a shed enclosure.

Because of its quotidian, "realist" nature, the novel's magical or fantasy elements twist the familiar adage that seeing is believing. Unknowingly, events transpire in the novel that sweep over the reader, who is immersed in the novel's charm but attuned and susceptible. Events of the novel have to be believed to be seen. For example, while Laura believes acutely in her conversion, from a critical distance, it seems much less certain. While in the kitchen at her new home in Great Mop, Laura suddenly "felt something move by her foot. She glanced down and saw a small kitten,"³¹ which promptly claws her until she bleeds. Then, "not for a moment did she

doubt. But so deadly, so complete was the certainty that it seemed to paralyze her powers of understanding... She continued to stare at the kitten, scarcely knowing what it was that she knew... She, Laura Willowes, in England, in the year 1922, had entered into a compact with the Devil.”³² This conversion occurs without much thought or agency from Laura herself. While she alleges she “scarcely [knew] what she knew,” she nonetheless retains a significant amount of conviction: “All knew, all could bear witness.”³³

Laura believes that she has become a witch, and the kitten is “her familiar spirit, [one] that already had greeted its mistress, and sucked her blood.”³⁴ Yet, the scene could be read in a fundamentally less “magical” fashion—a stray kitten has found its way into her lodging, and in the sudden presence of a stranger, scratches at her. Warner’s narration emphasizes “doubt,” “knowing,” and “certainty” when Laura is not very intellectually sure of anything in particular in the novel. Laura “knew herself to be unpractical, unmethodical, lacking in initiative”³⁵; her own “freckles on her nose mocked her with the receptivity of her skin compared to the dullness of her senses”³⁶; and “She had no thoughts; her mind was swept as clean and empty as the heavens.”³⁷ ““I don’t think I do think,””³⁸ she later confesses.

What the insistence on rational certainty in this conversion scene indicates is that there is something at work in the novel to which we as readers must be receptive or attuned. This presence requires our own complicity or belief to be influenced or subsumed by it – otherwise, we read a novel about a woman who we presume has constructed her own feminist fantasy realm inside of a realist narrative, in the style of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), for instance. The novel

thereby *charms*. It not only represents a magically-inflected feminist realm of possibility, but also enacts such a charm upon its readers through careful cultivation of tone.

Warner herself helps to explain how her novel operates upon the reader through tone, especially as this tone suggests the supernatural through feeling of giving over one's sense of reason or will. In early 1925, Warner corresponded for the first time with Harold Prentice, the man who would become both her close friend and longtime editor at Chatto & Windus. Upon reading her "story about a witch," the work that would become *Lolly Willowes*, Prentice enthusiastically accepted the novel for publication. In a letter from March of that year, however, while discussing with Warner edits on the manuscript, Prentice asks if the ending – where the tale's female protagonist delivers to Satan a lengthy tirade about women who, despite their "vivid imaginations," are forced into "dull lives," "so dependent upon others"³⁹ – is meant to encourage the reader to sympathize with the devil, effectively asking whether Satan was a feminist ally. Warner answers, "I am very grateful for your analysis of your unease, especially for the two words 'forensic' and 'humanistic.' I think they give me the clue as to [...] what is wrong."⁴⁰ She then elaborates on her vision for Satan:

[T]here must be nothing humanistic in Satan's sympathetic attitude. At the moment I have an idea for making him play the flute at some point in the conversation.

I have always identified the Satan of the witch-cult with [P]an. (Warlocks seem to have worshipped a quite different Satan, with a definite religious

significance: a power of evil). I believe I am right in saying that there has never been a religion founded on Pan. He has been acknowledged only: [sic] and under two aspects: the unaccountable terror that lies in wait in solitary places; and a simple out-door festivity. This mixture of fear and Bank Holiday on Hampstead Heath is very closely reproduced in the witch-cult.⁴¹

Warner answers Prentice's concerns by indicating that her Satan is not a religious evil. Instead, Warner notes anthropologically, he is associated with the pagan god Pan (whose name forms part of the word, panic, thereby associating Pan's irrational frivolity with fear). He is outside of humanity, a "terror" and a "festivity," a comingling of "fear" and "Bank Holiday." Satan's potential as a feminist, in other words, suggests Warner's notion that feminist thought is itself a panic. The world as envisioned by the women's movement was both a terror and a festivity, a challenge to the normative and a celebration of such a possibility. Satan is less important here than what he suggests, as manifestation of magical presence in the novel. This presence is caught between form and feeling, between the structure of the text and the reader's cognitive and affective work. In this betweenness lies charm. The purpose, ultimately, of this play with readerly susceptibility, for a novel to do work upon its reader and confound one's sense of reason or will, is to practice a feminist imagining. As *Lolly Willowes* demonstrates, charm slyly operates as a mystical, magical quality bearing an altered approach to new visions of the possible—specifically, as a fantasy rendered legible through the literary.

Charm as Tonality

To restate, as a complexly quotidian fantasy, *Lolly Willowes* narratively performs the magic it represents upon readers as it coaxes readers to unknowingly immerse themselves, to become susceptible to something through the use of charm. In so doing, the novel showcases modernist charm as literary operative, and attention to its effects makes charm's literariness—its emphasis on words and formal structure—more apparent.

When I note Warner's literary tone as establishing a charmed atmosphere, I mean to indicate that charm draws equally upon two separate notions. The first is the notion of literary tone, which itself creates an affective atmosphere or something that is somehow unshakably attached to an artwork. Sianne Ngai's definition of literary tone as less an attitude as "adumbrated by the New Critics," than a "hyper-relational concept of *feeling* that encompasses attitude: a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world."⁴² It is "an affective relay between subject and object in which feeling paradoxically produces a 'beyondness' rather than a nearness or immediacy."⁴³ As this "beyondness," tone has a mysterious, distancing aura that rings of the fantastic or magical. Interpreting Walter Benjamin's notion of aura, Theodor Adorno links tone to "the atmosphere of an artwork, that whereby the nexus of the artwork's elements points beyond this nexus and allows each individual element to point beyond itself."⁴⁴

This brings us to the second related notion of atmosphere, which Adorno suggests is an indexical, yet unspecified kind of tone. Stemming from the Greek *atmos*, meaning vapor, and *sphaira* (ball, sphere), atmosphere suggests a surrounding sense of elements, climate, or environment as well as the outer envelope surrounding

various terrestrial and celestial bodies or forces (electrical atmosphere, gaseous envelope surrounding planets).⁴⁵ In relation to tone, it suggests a closed dimensional space of the encounter of an artwork in combination with the realm the artwork suggests. Referenced later by Ngai, Mikel Dufrenne describes the aesthetic encounter as having a singular “affective quality” or, to use Dufrenne’s term, “atmosphere.” For Dufrenne, the atmosphere initiated within an aesthetic encounter is part of the unity or sphere of the artwork together with its reception. This unity can then be read as ideology or worldview. While Dufrenne writes, “The unity of an atmosphere is thus the unity of a *Weltanschauung*; its coherence is the coherence of a characteristic or quality.”⁴⁶ I would depart from Dufrenne to note that such a continuous, unified, and solid worldview risks totalizing the whole of aesthetic experience into an ideological metalanguage of infinite explanation. What I emphasize from this is that in Warner’s novel, and throughout my argument here, there is something absolutely *unknowable*, incomprehensible, mystically mysterious and unpredictable to this atmosphere that is nonetheless fundamental aspect of its “set toward” the world, and a critical component of this unknowable something is the observer or reader’s own ability to be susceptible to the artwork. Ngai begins to note something similar when she says that in “giv[ing] [artworks] their unity,” atmosphere suggests that “affective qualities are revealed or ‘read’ by our own feelings (*sentiments*), but are not identical to them,”⁴⁷ or, I would add, reducible or predictable as these feelings. To encounter the tone or enter the atmosphere of an artwork is therefore an interreliance of the artwork’s form and feeling and the reader or observer’s form and feeling. This new sphere is not as

Dufrenne says reflective or constitutive of an ideological worldview, but rather, is under Warner's charming hand the creation of a radical *new*.

It is not happenstance, either, that tone and its connection to atmosphere is critical to Warner's novel successfully charming its reader into the realm of the quotidian fantastical, which, as I emphasize throughout, renders a feminist "possible" or world of radical revolutionary potentiality. Modernists like Warner were keenly aware of the power of felt atmosphere, even and especially outside of aesthetic encounters. In Virginia Woolf's late work *Three Guineas* (1938), she states plainly how one type of atmosphere—the ideology of patriarchy—affects its inhabitants. She initially deems it the "odor" of the honorific, "Miss": "'Miss' transmits sex; and sex may carry with it an aroma. 'Miss' may carry with it the swish of petticoats, the savour of scent or other odour perceptible to the nose on the further side of the partition and obnoxious to it."⁴⁸ Woolf goes on to name the qualities of this "Miss-ness" as the perceived danger of feminine charm, a danger that explains why women do not hold professions or public offices: "What charms and consoles in the private house may distract and exacerbate in the public office."⁴⁹ She then revises her phrasing to indicate that what "Miss" connotes is part of an atmosphere:

Atmosphere plainly is a very mighty power. Atmosphere not only changes the sizes and shapes of things; it affects solid bodies, like salaries, which might have been thought impervious to atmosphere. An epic poem might be written about atmosphere, or a novel in ten or fifteen volumes. But since this is only a letter, and you are pressed for time, let us confine ourselves to the plain statement that atmosphere is one of the most powerful, partly because it is one

of the most impalpable, of the enemies with which the daughters of educated men have to fight.⁵⁰

This passage suggests Woolf's knowledge of atmosphere as a political force that pervades the private and public sphere, one that is falsely presumed to be neutral. Timothy Wientzen suggests that Woolf and other modernists are responding to the notion of reflex (part of the era's transatlantic craze for bodily conditioning such as Fletcherism, or Taylorist workplace practices, described elsewhere in this project) as point of contention between individual bodies or psyches and politics. He explains that these crazes "raised questions regarding consent, individuality, and community in a mass age. Indeed, because the science of reflex seemed to trouble the traditionally democratic emphasis laid upon individual agency, anxieties about reflex found especially fertile ground in modernist writing about fascism."⁵¹ In what would later be called "imagined communities," in Benedict Anderson's terminology, this kind of atmosphere reliant upon a population to give over agency toward a larger shared imaginary of "nation" is, to Woolf, potentially dangerous and subsuming.

Atmosphere in *Three Guineas*, then, is an ambivalent force. It is able to form persons into rational agents and create cohesive modern collective life, and serve as toxic ideological tool for enforcing collective decision-making and docility. What Woolf deems the "disastrous unanimity"⁵² on the wartime homefront and that is essential component of fascist rule is the key to Warner's vision of a new possible. Rather than the suppression of difference or individuality, Warner's vision is very like a thread of the feminist avant-garde that believed not in a utopian collective sameness, but a realist vision of equitable diversity within communality.

Atmosphere

Warner's novel, published a decade prior to Woolf's *Three Guineas*, shows great interest in atmosphere. Not only is it formulated through the novel's tone, but it is also represented by Laura herself. When Laura becomes of marrying age, the narration ironically laments her lack of charm, which turns away potential suitors: "Abroad, and in company, she was not animated," and at formal parties, "she found there little reason for animation."⁵³ For her part: "Being without coquetry [Laura] did not feel herself bound to feign a degree of entertainment which she had not experienced, and the same deficiency made her insensible to the duty of every marriageable young woman to be charming, whether her charm be directed towards one special object, or, in default of that, universally distributed through a disinterested love of humanity."⁵⁴ Laura insists that her failure to exhibit charm is her failure of marriageable duty. Yet, of course, this lack is perverse—she does wield charm as the novel goes on, in its originally magical, nonnormative form. She is already sensitive to atmospheric attunement, or invisible forces that affect her just as much as she later is able to affect her surrounds. Before she leaves London for Great Mop, Laura feels an intensity, the presence of what the narration can only deem an indistinct "it" within the natural world. After the family returns to London one autumn after spending a summer in the country, forty-something Laura feels an ambiguous "disquiet,"⁵⁵ an unease that is irrelevant but integral: "had no relevance to her life. It arose out of the ground with the smell of dead leaves."⁵⁶ Laura can only describe the feeling as a pronoun: "[S]he was in for it. What It [sic] was exactly, she would have found hard to say."⁵⁷ For

Warner, and for the novel, witchcraft and Pan/Satan/the title “Huntsman” is less a solid idea or personage than something that lives in language as an “It”-ness, a vaporous, contagious *atmos*. As such, Laura presents charm as literary tonality that must be winkingly “caught” through affective openness and formal construction.

This winking, hidden feeling, felt by Laura as the magic of Satan’s realm of witchcraft, but also by us as readers as we feel the narration slip slyly around us. And this invisible atmosphere of something, an “it-ness” as the novel puts it, can be read multiply if we insist on reading what Ngai deems the “affective relay” of the novel’s charmed atmosphere as ideological or sociohistorical representation of the invisible impact of or remnants of the first World War lurking at the novel’s edges, or of the burgeoning feminist movement that moved invisibly to change the fabric of British society and politics. I find that it is both of these things, but something more, too—as an openness to speculation or imagining, charm is a feminist exploration of how radically affective-aesthetic experience can restructure the possible.

Charmed Thinking

Charmed thinking is practiced by Laura roughly halfway through the novel. After Satan disappears, when she muses on his character as “truly integral, a perpetual flowering of power and cunning from an undivided will—[it] was enough to constitute the charm and majesty of the Devil.”⁵⁸ His mind, she reflects, “brooded immovably over the landscape and over the natures of men, and unforgetting and unchoosing mind,”⁵⁹ and this becomes her revelation – it is not her witchcraft, her subservient allegiance to Satan, or her predisposition toward the supernatural that has moved her

out of the realm of heteronormative society, but her realization that she does not have to “reflect” at all to be a subject.

She undergoes a changed engagement with the world, a banal shock of epistemological change, that is curiously not her conversion to witchcraft, believed to occur when her familiar, Vinegar, scratches her in her cottage. This change is actually an encounter with a memory that even she cannot recall. Laura herself undergoes this change in the Chilterns, a change that continues to tie her to witchcraft as well as a feminist worldview. After the first few months of her new life at Great Mop, Laura intends to find a field of blooming cowslips, as “she had promised them to herself”⁶⁰ when she first arrived. While neither Laura nor the narration says so, Laura’s interest in medicinal and edible plantlife such as cowslips actually begins at Lady Place.

The magic of quotidian, unmarked recall of a previous memory is part of charmed thinking—the blissful, naïve encounter with something that is very like an engagement with the state of magical thinking associated in Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalytic theory with infantile omnipotence. When the infant realizes its terrifying needs are at the destruction of others (the parent), she is comforted by the fact that this omnipotence is in check with limits of reality, according to Klein. For Freud, this process of confrontation with the limits of the self and the external realm is essential for forming civilization, as civilization cannot coexist with the individual’s “uncorrected sense of omnipotence,” making the primary task of maturation the internalization of social prohibition. As Eve Sedgwick writes, following this process:

It is not mainly ‘civilization’ that needs the individual to be different from the way she spontaneously is. The individual herself needs to be different, insofar

as her instinctive impulses conflict with one another even more drastically than they conflict with the claims of her environment. Instead of the undifferentiatedly blind, pleasure-seeking drives of the Freudian infant, which encounter no check but the originally external ones of prohibition of lack, the Kleinian infant experiences a greed whose aggressive and envious component is already perceived as posing a terrible threat both to her desired objects and to herself. The resulting primary anxiety is an affect so toxic that it probably ought to be called, not anxiety, but dread. It is against this endogenous dread that the primary defense mechanisms are first mobilized—the splitting, the omnipotence, the violent projection and introjection.⁶¹

Laura completes the maturation process Freud's notion of civilization requires, only to realize that the intensity of its prohibitions destroyed her. Moving toward reparation, she shifts from this reality of civilization back into the powerful potential of magical thinking. For Laura, this entire process begins and concludes with botany. "[S]weet-gale, water purslane, cowslips, and the roots of succory"⁶² composed a variety of "washes and decoctions" that Laura composed for her family, including her father, who consumed her herbal salads "at first in hope and trust, and afterwards with flattering appetite."⁶³ Herbs and wild plants are significant to Laura's formative sense of herself in Part I of the novel as a young woman at Lady Place. She is able to use these plants as a mode of controlling or influencing the world around her, as they had been used for centuries in healing and ritual. Once, she is said to be examining philosopher John Aubrey's *Miscellany* (1696) during a family discussion about a specific variety of mugwort, which her nanny (named Nannie) recommends after

Laura's first attempt at mugwort tea made her brothers Henry and James ill. The fleeting mentions of herbal remedies and foraged plants here appear unremarkable, since mugwort and similar plants are commonly used for brewing and rustic winemaking, the Willowses family profession. Yet, by the time the fantastical enters the novel in Parts II and III, this brief foray into plants makes Laura appear to have been training for the kinds of potions a witch would be expected to create. Laura's examination of Aubrey's *Miscellany* also gains significance. The *Miscellany* is best known not as a brewer's handbook, but as a folkloric document of "hermetick" or supernatural and occultist practices. That this text is mentioned early in *Lolly Willowses* seems a clear nudge toward the novel's eventual direction as fantasy, further allowing the "realist" aspects of the novel to bleed indistinctly and unremarked upon into the fantasy elements.⁶⁴

Laura never recalls the importance of her brewing past in later years, nor does the narration remind us. In Part II, she walks into a meadow near her cottage at Great Mop. There, she finds "it was bloomed over with cowslips, powdering the grass in variable plenty, here scattered, there clustered, innumerable as the stars in the Milky Way."⁶⁵ Struck by their unexpected blooming, she transforms:

She knelt down among them and laid her face close to their fragrance. The weight of all her unhappy years seemed for a moment to weigh her bosom down to the earth; she trembled, understanding for the first time how miserable she had been; and in another moment she was released. It was all gone, it could never be again, and never had been. Tears of thankfulness ran

down her face. With every breath she drew, the scent of the cowslips flowed in and absolved her.⁶⁶

In this communion with cowslips, Laura changes. She is no longer preoccupied with perceptions of her, including her family's disapproval of her move to Great Mop, or their continued, meddling attempts at controlling her happiness there during their visits. Yet, she also did not forgive them: "She had not, in any case, a forgiving nature; and the injury they had done to her" of demeaning her, limiting her, and rendering her the subservient Aunt Lolly "was not done by them."⁶⁷ Laura connects her family to a larger framework of systemic inequity and marginalization wrought by British patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. If she were to start forgiving, Laura muses, "she must needs forgive Society, the Law, the Church, the History of Europe, the Old Testament, great-great-aunt Salome and her prayerbook, the Bank of England, Prostitution, the Architect of Apsley Terrace, and half a dozen other useful props of civilization."⁶⁸

This moment shifts Laura's supposed blankness and forgetfulness into an epistemic change, rendered by her new encounters with the world in Great Mop. "All she could do," she concludes, "was to go on forgetting,"⁶⁹ since forgiveness was impossible. This charmed atmosphere of forgetting is the forgetting of the present state of the realm, instead electing to imaginatively construct an alternative that "forgets" the ills and harms of the real realm of Britain. This charmed state is literally brought on by cowslips, a plant that brews Laura into an alternative (reparative) position. At this moment, Laura has begun her "magical thinking."

The novel renders such thinking possible not only through Laura's modeling of it, but through the work of the novel's formal structure itself. As this moment with Laura dramatizes, the novel invests in magical thinking by planting sleights of hand and wry winks that must be "caught" to be understood. Magical thinking is shown in the novel to ambiguously create or bring about events. At Great Mop, Laura's nephew Titus grows tormented by a series of misfortunes while staying with her. Titus reports the first occurrence to Laura: the milk set out "for his nightly Ovaltine" has suddenly curdled "into a sort of unholy junket."⁷⁰ He attributes the substantive change to "popular education, and the spread of science among dairy-farmers; in other words, Mr. Dodbury had overdone the preservative."⁷¹ Laura dismisses his assessment: "I don't think it's science," said Laura. "More likely to be the weather. It was very sultry this afternoon."⁷² The milk's changeover is an "unholy" transformation that makes the ordinary (milk curdling, a common practice used to make cheeses or pudding) into something extraordinarily imbued with meaning. Its shift from expected substance to other substance occurs solely via weather or atmosphere. While Titus, being a man, attempts to explain the change through science gone wrong in the hands of simpleton farmers, Laura's statement asserts the powerful influence of the atmosphere, the invisibly affective. Later that night, she attributes the milk's spoilage to her own doing: "[S]he was a witch, the inheritrix of aged magic, spells rubbed smooth with long handling, and the mistress of strange powers that got into Titus's milk-jug."⁷³ She recognizes her believed ability to use the atmosphere to invisibly change her surrounds.

Narrative sleights-of-text grow increasingly self-referential and increasingly layered. We learn, for example, that Laura's imaginative ability to control her surroundings is also very like the ability for social expectations—themselves an imagined control, of sorts—to inflict real damage. Laura's devoted father, for instance, in viewing Laura as his beloved daughter, thereby casts Laura in the role of young woman who has little means or power of her own. She is, in effect, both figuratively and literally wrought as a pet animal, as she herself is susceptible to being controlled rather than herself having control. "A stuffed ermine which [Everard] had known as a boy," we learn in Part I, was Everard's "ideal of an enchanted princess, so pure and sleek was it, and so artfully poised the small neat head on the long throat."⁷⁴ Subsequently, both he and Laura's mother begin calling Laura his "weasel" or "minx." The imagination and the realities of the sociopolitical realm therefore coalesce. One afternoon, Everard returns home from killing a female fox during a hunting party, only to report the fox made him think of his daughter, his own "pretty young vixen."⁷⁵ This fleeting set of linked images is significant in a few ways. Not only does this hunting party coyly link Laura's father with the title's "loving huntsman," meaning that the ostensibly loving father Everard is able to kill a figure of his daughter, it also links the imagined with the real. Everard's childish fantasy of an "enchanted princess" is imbued with a sense of women as pet animals. This fantasy, however, is a very uncanny echo of the reality of sociopolitical in the era. Finally, the stuffed animal the young Everard holds as his ideal of femininity is not alive, but begs the kind of primitivist, magical thinking common to childhood imagination and that is later taken

up in the realist realm by Laura, whose magical thinking does transformative rather than reifying work of imagining a feminist realm.

Everard's odd ability to kill the figure of his daughter during the hunting party is also even more dastardly suggestive of Everard representing a suffocating British social structure than it seems. Everard, upon Laura's birth, constructs for her a pretty noose. After once "going up to London[...], he returned with a little string of pearls, small and evenly matched, which exactly fitted the baby's neck. Year by year, he explained, the necklace could be extended until it encircled the neck of a grown-up young woman at her first ball."⁷⁶ She recalls in the first pages of the novel a moment when, as a child, "she had stained her pale cheeks" with crushed red geranium, and "had bent over the greenhouse tank to see what she looked like. But the greenhouse tank showed only a shadowy Laura, very dark and smooth like the lady in the old holy painting that hung in the dining room and was called the Leonardo."⁷⁷ Laura appears to herself as bloodless, having no blush of life on her cheeks, and is confronted with an alternate, dark self reflected back at her, one that is inconsistent with the Laura she believed herself to be. Jacqueline Shin identifies the painting Laura recalls here as likely Leonardo da Vinci's fifteenth-century *Lady with an Ermine*.⁷⁸ Lauded as one of the first paintings of psychological depth in portraiture, the painting shows a figure reminiscent of Laura herself – she is a young woman with a calm but determined expression, wearing simple clothing and holding a keenly alert ermine, the very animal Everard Willows associates with his daughter, and which is embedded in Laura's name itself as Laura Erminia Willows. The portrait subject, too, wears a necklace reminiscent of Laura's own, a gift from her father; yet, the sitter's necklace is

not of white pearls, but of round, black beads that closely encircle her neck. The beads could be of black amber, semi-precious stone such as agate or onyx, or even of scented paste – the opposite of Laura’s precious white pearls.⁷⁹ And most importantly, the Leonardo is a *copy* of a Leonardo. Even the lady in the portrait, then, is devoid of aesthetic “life,” or what Walter Benjamin theorizes as the “aura” of an originary work of art – perhaps an aid for us to discern added resonances to Lolly’s preferred name, Laura, or, *l’aura*. Laura is already not quite what she sees in her reflection, but also, not even “like the lady in the old holy painting” that she thinks her reflection recalls. This layered memory is a slippery one, leaving us unsure which Laura is the original (if the original even matters) and the slip of the aesthetic and affective to create an interplay of forms.

If we pair this memory of the reflecting pool and the novel’s conclusion, we may see more clearly how Warner’s novel represents the magic of feminist thinking made possible through immersion into a charmed atmosphere. Laura encounters the Devil one final time, and gives a lengthy speech on the ways women have been mistreated for centuries, as he “smil[es] at her as if she were a pet lamb,”⁸⁰ echoing Everard’s penchant for Laura as his pet. Laura suddenly hears Satan say, “Dead!”⁸¹ For a moment, the narration is unclear as to whether Satan has just commanded Laura to die. For Laura, the “word dropped into her mind like a pebble thrown into a pond. She had heard it so often, and now she heard it once more. The same waves of thought circled outwards, waves of startled thought spreading out on all sides, rocking the shadows of familiar things, blurring the steadfast pictures of trees and clouds, circling outward one after the other, each wave more listless, more imperceptible than the last,

until the pool was still again.”⁸² The early “reflecting pool” becomes middle-aged Laura’s processing mechanism – not a rational patterned thought, but a pool of pensiveness where Laura is at a remove from a “real.” What is disturbed in the pond is not what is beneath the water, where the pebble sinks, but the reflection on the pond’s surface, a relationality or ability to perceive that shifts. Laura, however, is ultimately not dead in this scene, and the answer to the question Laura has not asked remains. She rouses herself from her reverie of the resonant liquid image to note Satan is gathering himself to go: “‘Is it time?’ asked Laura. He nodded, and smiled.”⁸³

It remains unclear what the lingering command “Dead!” is meant to do in the scene, and how that alters the ending of the novel. For one, Warner’s editor at Chatto & Windus, Harold Prentice, remained uncertain how to read the exchange. Warner reassures: “Indeed Lolly didn’t die. She is at this moment alive and much looking forward to a ripe old age vis-à-vis with Satan. Immortals make the best companions then. Think how reassuring to have a friend who won’t die or go deaf or marry the cook...”⁸⁴ It is fitting, too, that Laura herself is immortal. There simply is no history, and no teleology. It is not a futurist utopian vision of what is to come through suffrage and a variety of other sociopolitical and legal changes to the rights of women. These changes, in the end, are still duties to the state that has yet to fully acknowledge women as able to be liberated, equal, or even “forgetting and unchoosing,” as Satan may be. Instead, it is a vision of the possible made so by magical thinking.

War and Feminist Atmospheres

Lest such a feminist imaginary of a transformed world in which all participants are united for a single communal cause seem unlikely or impossible, I would point out that this project once occurred during Britain's war efforts in World War I. Wartime atmosphere on the homefront (as well as in the trenches) relied immeasurably on a unified communality, a sense of atmosphere built upon felt belonging and structured purpose that comprised exactly the kind of social revolution advocated by the feminist avant-garde.

Most predominant and also most invisible at the time of *Lolly Willowes* was the shadow of the first World War. As novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) detail, England busied itself with a sense of normalcy after the war, often forgetting the remnants of war that mingled amidst them. The war has a similarly invisible, yet pervasive force in Warner's novel. When the war begins in 1914, Laura is left wrapping parcels without "such excitements"⁸⁵ as deaths (suffered by her nephew-in-law) or lorry-driving (a pleasure afforded her niece, Fancy). Yet, the war seems to alter her. While her brother, Henry, and sister-in-law Caroline "had done with the war," Laura "had only shelved it, and that by an accident of consciousness."⁸⁶ Reflecting on niece Fancy's new husband and children after the war, she thinks, "Here is a new generation to call her Aunt Lolly and find her as indispensable as did the last."⁸⁷ Nothing, indeed, has changed. And yet, Laura irrevocably has. It is perhaps the growing oppression of such familiar "old times," as Caroline deems them, that suffocates Laura, leading her to abandon her family for solitary life in a rural town to which she has never before travelled.

Also critical to grasping how the atmosphere became central concern of modernism is its manipulation during war through atmospheric terrorism (chemical agents, such as chlorine gas, first used in Ypres, Belgium) confirms that terrorism as an act is “not an isolated, one-sided attack; it denotes the willingness and readiness of partners in conflict to operate in an expanded zone of warfare.”⁸⁸ While those living prior to the twentieth century could live unquestioning of their entry into a surrounding atmosphere (stepping outside, for example), writes Peter Sloterdijk in *Terror from the Air* (2002), anyone “who lives after this caesura and moves within a culture zone in step with modernity is already bound, whether in rudimentary or elaborated forms, to a formal concern for climate and atmospheric design.”⁸⁹

Warner had seen firsthand this possibility of atmosphere, as modeled by the demands of the wartime homefront. In 1914, at the age of twenty-one, Warner was with her father, an assistant master at the Harrow School, and his Harrow colleagues when she heard the news from Europe that Germany had declared war on Russia. Warner recalled in her diary that she listened to her father digesting the news:

[Geoffrey Sturt] sat, his eyes burning, saying we must fight or France would be lost ... while my father and Philip Wood, almost as theoretical in knowledge of war as he, sat by, grievously consenting to the burden of the young men.⁹⁰

In the war’s first few months, Warner volunteered with an organization called War Help, which originally aimed to coordinate fundraising for the Red Cross before it became a housing assistance program, finding temporary lodging for Belgian refugees who had fled to England. By 1915, Warner made further commitments to the war effort. Having answered a notice in the paper for a program that “train[ed] women of

the leisured class in munition-making to relieve the regular hands,” Warner worked eight-hour shifts as a shell machinist with other “lady-workers” in a factory in Erith.⁹¹ The group was deemed “the Miaows” by the factory’s regular workers, and the work itself—base-facing, or paring down a steel shell-case to the correct length, as measured by gauges and scales—was numbing to Warner, but also imbued with a sense of powerful communality. She described her factory experience in an article for *Blackwood’s*:

Through the open doors of the workshop came noise and light and warmth: it looked as gay as a ballroom. Once inside it, the place wrapped me round like a familiar garment. [...] All the driving belts in the motion dazzle the eyes like a mist, and looking across row after row of machines, the other side of the shop seemed a mile away. Last of all one notices the workers, inconspicuous, inconsiderable – mere human beings among these infallible Titans of iron and belting.⁹²

While the *Blackwood’s* editors emphasized to Warner that she “humanize” the experience, thereby surely altering her original intentions with the article, the work is striking nonetheless. The sensation of vision, sound, and feeling comes first in Warner’s description, the affective components of the factory experience. Then, the structure – the machine placement, the floor layout. Finally, Warner notes the workers, who tellingly are the last to be noticed, as they are each subsumed by the larger whole of the workplace. Warner’s work was difficult, and took her fifteen minutes per shell. After a period of time, “it begins to flatten one into the essential dough: every shell thieves a little of one’s pride of self.”⁹³ Taken together, Warner’s descriptions of her

experiences demonstrate the ability for individuality to be lost within a larger atmosphere of nationalism and work. The divide between one Miaow and another becomes nonexistent as they all blur and reduce into a single, essential “dough-like” form.

Warner’s early socialist and communist leanings are already evident here as she notes the impact of such work on the least fortunate—the “regulars,” who Warner sympathetically described as “bone-weary, working the long hours of necessity, living in the vitiated air of the shop, where the noise eats them like a secret poison.”⁹⁴ If such a painful, exploitative, and numbing experience could be willfully participated in by Britain’s working class and upper classes alike, Warner may have thought, then the real prospect of another sort of unity aimed at eliminating social stratification and inequity under the guidance of a single imaginary, the feminist avant-garde, is also possible. Specifically, it was made possible by the integral role of language and the literary.

Doing Things with Words

While a cultural phenomenon such as feminine “charm” appears foreign or mystical, consider in literary studies the significance granted to the powers of language – consider the work of J.L. Austin, for example, on performative utterances in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Such utterances are those that do not describe or report, “constate anything at all,” “are not ‘true or false,’” and finally, are those that for which the “uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as ‘just,’ saying

something.”⁹⁵ Once we realize such utterances or sentences as *doing* and not “merely” saying, “there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act.”⁹⁶ What is useful from Austin is less the ability to do with language, than the force that is behind specific kinds of language – a poetics, of a sort. When we consider the ways in which we read texts, we “divine” – a mystic encounter of knowledge seeking, now secularized into hermeneutics. Divination or *divinatio* is “a power traditionally required by those who wish to distinguish between variant readings, and to purge corrupt texts,” notes Frank Kermode, while the “freedom to divine [as somewhat inspired guesswork] has been restricted since the Renaissance, and especially since the early eighteenth century, by the advance of what might be called science.”⁹⁷

Friedrich Schleiermacher, considered a founder of modern hermeneutics or the “science of understanding texts,”⁹⁸ used *divinatio* as a term for the “moment of intuition which was necessary to his theory, and also, probably, to any commonsense view of what it is we accomplish when we interpret a text.”⁹⁹ I quote at length Kermode’s description of this reading process:

We understand a whole by means of its parts, and the parts by means of the whole. But this ‘circle’ seems to imply that we can understand nothing—the whole is made up of parts we cannot understand until it exists, and we cannot see the whole without understanding the parts. Something, therefore, must happen, some intuition by which we break out of this situation—a leap, a *divination*, he called it, whereby we are enabled to understand both part and whole... [W]e may have to do rather more; there are works, especially modern

books, which may frustrate such responses, or at least suggest a need for going beyond them. And it is quite usual to attach more value to such complex works, and to feel that our relating of part to part and parts to whole is the only means by which anything like the sense of the whole can be achieved. In other words, our power of divination is necessary to the whole operation—without it there will be no sense, or not enough.¹⁰⁰

Many may see Kermode's "divination" as outmoded theory. However, it links two notions critical to my reading of Warner's *Lolly Willows*—first, the work of form (his description of reading as involving relations of the "part to the whole" is clearly based in formalist close reading), and second, the work of affect (divination's interpretive leap, a mechanism of or supplement to cognition). In other words, Kermode indicates that form *as well as* something more than form is at work when we read, or have an aesthetic response. This means that there is a gap to be filled, or an unknown that must materialize, when one encounters a text. This gap or blank is the space of what I call a charmed cognitive atmosphere. It is the text's ability to make its reader believe through the process of textual encounter with literary tone. Charm, in short, incants or brings into being a kind of intermedial possibility of thought and being—a charmed atmosphere. *Lolly Willows* demonstrates such possibility as an explicit fantasy of social equity. Charm reminds us of language's mediated betweenness, where readings are not declarative but exploratory. The space between form and feeling, like Ngai's notion of tone as orientation, or what I call a charmed atmosphere exists in *Lolly Willows* in such a way that the text manipulates our reading and what we believe of the novel.

What charm also does is reinsert the primacy of something other than poststructuralism's hermeneutics of suspicion, which rewards skepticism and disbelief in insisting that texts fundamentally operate by "hiding" a truth of meaning. Charm is an encounter, and a transformed engagement with the world that relies on play, encourages sensory receptivity, and resists ready formulation. But if in case we may be tempted to consider charm as a new ethical code that can be practiced to better ourselves, like a Foucauldian *askesis*, we must recall that charm resists such coding entirely. In fact, charm dissipates, betrays, dissolves, and often disgusts when it is something "put on" or practiced deliberately - it lays bare the means of its own production. In charm, there exists a perverse form of freedom and play, the very notions that Satan promises to Laura in Warner's novel—the constraint of a form exists in such a way that rather than suppressing freedoms or oppressing individuals (such as women in Britain's twentieth-century patriarchal, colonialist, and capitalist society), it provides room for expression and possibility by ensuring livelihood, well-being, and artistry.¹⁰¹ Just as a society that provides its citizens with healthcare thereby does not constrain its citizens but liberates them by freeing them of concern for the literal costs of their lives, Laura's belief in her dominion by the "loving huntsman" Satan as surrender to influencing as equally as she herself is influenced provides her with greater capacity to live, and models the brief potential of charmed thinking in the early decades of the twentieth century. In sum, *Lolly Willows* utilizes the construction of a charmed atmosphere, created by Warner's distinctly crafted literary tone, to demonstrate the possibility of magical thinking as a purposefully non-utopian,

sociopolitical, and secular sense. It is, as Warner's own Communist leftist leanings would later detail, a realist promise of a transformed, equitable world.

In sum, I argue that Warner's novel draws upon charm to create a feminist-inflected reimagined world that is both historically-driven and literarily-minded. *Lolly Willowes* does not simply offer literature as social critique; rather, it substantially participates in the significant influence of print literature and reading culture that bolstered the avant-garde feminist movement in Britain. Reading the novel this way furthers what Warner would later go on to formally advocate as a Communist leftist, in that it permits Warner to imagine "hope for progressive change without seeming utopian,"¹⁰² as Maren Tova Linett writes of Warner's later novel *Summer Will Show*. As she does in *Summer Will Show*, Warner presents a complex, slippery, and non-straightforward portrait of a realistic and not romantic aesthetically-driven political project. Emancipation, Lucy Delap notes, "was located both internally, concerning self-realization, and in society, in industrial and political reform."¹⁰³ Yet with such a dual project, with an individualist core, built upon "anxieties about bureaucracy and collectivization, in both British and American Edwardian society. A celebration of the individual planted against 'the machine' can be traced in many spheres... The machine, political or industrial, was a pervasive fear, responding to an increasingly bureaucratic and executive-dominated state that seemed to be working against the 'new individualism.'"¹⁰⁴

This is the type of anxiousness that Woolf voices in her concern about the flattening of individuality through atmosphere on the nationalist homefront. Such anxiety over the rise of collectivism was less pervasive for Warner, who found in

collectivism a more positive potential for a transformed social and political realm. While the late nineteenth-century move in the economic market to form individual businesses or firms into vast trusts and corporations was worrying, the move toward national union and labor organizations, such as the formation of the American Federation of Labor in 1886, or the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905, seemed positive. Likewise, the intensity of interest in preserving individualism seemed not to be aimed at egalitarian opportunity, a prevailing sentiment in the United States, which associated individualism with a “hostility to aristocratic, arbitrary, or hierarchical privilege.”¹⁰⁵ Rather, individualism of this libertarian sort held no interest in actual egalitarian outcomes, and often upheld what it was considered to overturn—namely, material and social privilege determined on the basis of class, race or ethnicity, and gender. Such individualism was not concerned with changing the constraints that would prevent otherwise equal individuals to compete fairly in a capitalist marketplace. Because this was the form of individualism that was most pervasive, many avant-garde feminists often envisioned a world that was closer to the collective, while still preserving the kinds of individuality that rendered a richly diverse society aimed at personal fulfillment and collective equity.

As the following chapter will explain, however, this potential would ultimately be short-lived. By the late 1920s, British and American capitalism, collapsing colonialism, and progress in the women’s suffrage movement that coalesced in a presumed threat to modernist white masculinity, effectively curtailing the paradox of charm’s believability as fantasy. As the works of Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald will show, the era rendered charm less a supernatural fantasy than a

commoditized realist quality, a magnetic appeal claimed by white masculinity as marker of access to and control over capital.

¹ Edna Kenton, "Feminism Will Give," *The Delineator*, 17.

² Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 3.

³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 10.

⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 150.

⁵ Clare Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*, 65, 66.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷ Gay Wachman finds "*Lolly Willowes* celebrates the perverse in salutary opposition to the 'normal'" (78), while Jane Garrity reads the novel as a text in which Laura demonstrates a coded lesbianism, "a kind of conspiratorial inscription"⁷ that is "detectable only through deflection" (150). Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt focuses on the novel's emphasis on patriarchal systems of land ownership, arguing that "Warner's novel is a commentary on the semiotics and politics of landscape as a structuring agent in subjectivity" (450), while more recently, James Harker also examines subjectivity formation in the novel to find in Lolly an alternate form of subjectivity, what he calls a "cognitive minimalism." Lolly's generally passive blankness, Harker argues, stylistically departs from canonical modernist novels' emphasis on deep psychological interiority in their protagonists, and ultimately makes a statement on the denial of subject position to single women. See Gay Wachman, *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Jane Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003); Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, "Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willowes*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 4 (2003): 449-470; and James Harker, "'Laura was not thinking': Cognitive Minimalism in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*," *Studies in the Novel* 46, no. 1 (2014): 44-62.

⁸ Gillian Beer, "Sylvia Townsend Warner: The Centrifugal Kick," 76.

⁹ For Warner's part, she may not necessarily have opposed allegory. She commends one to her new editor Ben Huebsch at Viking Press in 1927 – her good friend T.F. Powys's fantastic spiritual allegory *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. "As you can see," she writes Huebsch, "the story contains elements that might be difficult to carry off in a novel, and Mr Knopf, who has previously been Mr Powys's American publisher, has refused to take this book, on the grounds that it is improper and blasphemous, and would render him liable to prosecution" (12). Mr. Knopf, she explains, "is not a very spiritually-minded man, and has failed to observe that this is not a novel, but an allegory, like *The Pilgrim's Progress*" (12). Warner's later historical novels, including *After the Death of Don Juan* and *The Flint Anchor*, refuse neat historical or political parallel to the threats of Communism in the 1930s or the impending war. Speaking again of Powys's book (though also, in sly commentary on her own), she notes, "in my opinion a story containing such unusual incidents as the devil going about like a roaring lion, and a virgin carried to heaven by an angel is not very likely to be taken as a novel of real life, or judged by the standards of propriety which we apply to realistic fiction" (13). Warner, "To Ben Huebsch 5:viii:1927," *Sylvia Townsend Warner Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 12-13.

¹⁰ Jacqueline Shin, "*Lolly Willowes* and the Arts of Dispossession," 710.

¹¹ Noreen O'Connor, "From Alienation to Community," in *Communal Modernisms*, 130.

¹² Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," qtd. in O'Connor, *ibid.*, 130.

¹³ Edna Kenton, "Feminism Will Give," 17.

¹⁴ Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-garde*, 2.

¹⁵ Delap, 4. As Delap points out, in part, this radicalism was a critique of both capitalism's rise in political influence as well as the increasing sense of autonomy over communal interdependence. Indeed, writer Dora Marsden predicted that capitalism would soon render politicians "powerless to effect anything more than the slow-paced 'reform,' of which the sole aim is to make 'men and masters' settle down in a comfortable but unholy alliance... Every modern State is in pawn, in debt up to the eyes with capitalists. The capitalists own the States" (qtd. in Delap 228). Because of this, vanguard feminism has often been associated with utopian socialism, as both vanguard feminist and socialist

groups advocated for a reformed society based in craft, ruralism, and interdependency. However, many feminists preferred to preserve individualism and autonomy in labor, political, and personal concerns, thereby rendering a society in which individualism and collectivism could coexist.

¹⁶ Delap, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Delap, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Julie Bush, *Women Against the Vote*, 228.

¹⁹ “The Lighter Side of French Feminism,” *The Times* 17 July 1914, 11. Earlier, a similar sentiment was voiced in “The Feminist Movement in France,” *The Times*, 3 June 1908, extolling the virtues of French *féminisme*’s “restraint” (14).

²⁰ “The Lighter Side,” *ibid.*

²¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 5.

²² Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 5.

²³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 5.

²⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 10.

²⁵ Elevating the everyday banalities of life to the extraordinary in the early twentieth century was a distinct modernist project, however. Representative writers and thinkers of this kind of modernism include writers Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Wallace Stevens, as well as philosophers Henri Lefebvre and Henri Bergson. See Liesl Olson’s *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) for a full treatment of the subject.

²⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 79.

²⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 79.

²⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 79-80.

²⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 81.

³⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 206.

³¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 154.

³² Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 155.

³³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 156.

³⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 156.

³⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 49.

³⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 61.

³⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 102.

³⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 216.

³⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 211.

⁴⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, Letter to Harold Prentice, 10 March 1925. Chatto & Windus Archive Holdings (University of Reading, Reading, UK). I am grateful to Random House for granting permissions to read and quote from this archive material.

⁴¹ Warner, Letter, *ibid.*

⁴² Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 43. Italics in original.

⁴³ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 43.

⁴⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 274. Qtd. in Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 87.

⁴⁵ The term also suggests a related idea, *mood*. Martin Heidegger’s ontology in *Being and Time* proposes an attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) and mood (*Stimmung*) that accounts for the way in which one finds oneself in the world. Through mood, the world becomes present to us, and it is through mood that things, events, and other people may matter to us. Mood, however, is distinct from atmosphere because mood *can be neutral*. Atmosphere, by the start of the twentieth century, cannot be, due to the new meaning of the self within one’s surroundings at the turn of the century. This shift can be perceived in the era’s concern for crowd mentality (Freud, Simmel, Le Bon), management of groups (Taylor, mass media technologies that make use of airwaves), and atmospheric warfare. Mood and Heideggerian phenomenology also make critical claim for metaphysical philosophy to which Warner’s text and literary tonality do not adhere. This is especially true as a premise of my argument is that charmed atmospheres operate on crafted control that leads to shifts in epistemology (rather than ontology), and thus, theories of mood are not of great applicability within my analysis here.

⁴⁶ Mikel Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 177.

⁴⁷ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 47.

⁴⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 62.

⁴⁹ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 62.

⁵⁰ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 64.

⁵¹ Timothy Wientzen, "An Epic of Atmosphere," 59.

⁵² Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 71-72.

⁵³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 26.

⁵⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 26.

⁵⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 72.

⁵⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 72.

⁵⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 72.

⁵⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 220.

⁵⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 221.

⁶⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 135.

⁶¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "The Difference Affect Makes," in *The Weather in Proust*, 132.

⁶² Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 31.

⁶³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 31.

⁶⁴ Their connection to Aubrey's *Miscellany*, however, is that mugwort is used in the so-called "Nine Herbs Charm," a charm alleged to be used in the tenth century to heal wounds. The *Miscellany* is a document of supernatural occurrences and various stories of the occult Aubrey collected during archaeological research. But what is interesting is that this is not even the point of Laura looking at it. She is looking for something more pedantic than spiritual: Aubrey quotes from Pliny the Elder about Artemis, who "had revealed the virtues of mugwort to the dreaming Pericles." Among mugwort's primary "virtues" is to ease childbirth and stimulate menstruation. Artemis's name is the source of common mugwort's Latin name, *Artemisia Vulgaris*.

⁶⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 135.

⁶⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 135.

⁶⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 136.

⁶⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 136.

⁶⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 136.

⁷⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 136.

⁷¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 136.

⁷² Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 136.

⁷³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 166.

⁷⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 15.

⁷⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 16.

⁷⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 14, 15.

⁷⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 7.

⁷⁸ Jacqueline Shin takes up this reference, noting da Vinci's painting was famously described by Walter Pater as "Lady Lisa." Shin quotes David Bull in explaining its dynamic profile pose (the subject holds a white ermine and looks to the right of the viewer to some third party, while her body is angled toward the viewer's left), while making an observation of her own on the painting's importance to *Lolly Willowes*. I quote at length: "The ermine in the painting has been read iconographically in three ways: as standing in for Cecelia Gallerani [a somewhat revolutionary woman who served as da Vinci's alleged inspiration] herself, with the ermine's designation in Greek, *galee*, a 'pun on the sitter's family name'; as marker of purity because the animal 'was believed too fastidious to soil itself'; and as a figure for Duke Ludovico [Cecelia's lover], whose heraldic emblem was an ermine. The animal is essentially linked with Laura Willowes in that her full name—in fairy tale fashion connected to the story of her birth and coming-of-age—is Laura *Erminia* Willowes" (emphasis Shin's). *Ibid.*, 713-15.

⁷⁹ David Bull, "Dress and Coiffure."

⁸⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 218.

⁸¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 219.

⁸² Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 219.

⁸³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 219.

⁸⁴ Warner, Letter, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 63.

⁸⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 66.

⁸⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, 67.

⁸⁸ Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, translated by Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 26. Moreover, such terror practices begin in peacetime technologies including the German advances in vermin poisoning with Zyklon A and Zyklon B, as well as methods of execution (including those in Britain and America, such as the legal use of gas chambers for prisoner executions in Nevada as early as 1924). “It suffices,” Sloterdijk concludes, to say that “there was a theater, or processor” for the fusion of gas chambers already in use for the execution of patients at mental hospitals in Germany, the burgeoning German pest control industry, and SS-intelligensia to create the “practical realization” of a metaphoric operation—the extermination of the Jewish population (43-44). The same year, Joseph Goebbels, the Reich’s propaganda minister, wrote in his diary: “The Jews are the lice of civilized humanity” (qtd. in Sloterdijk 44-45). Sloterdijk characterizes Goebbels’s writing as a communication with himself “as though he were agitating a crowd,” like a hypnotics (45).

⁸⁹ Sloterdijk, 50.

⁹⁰ Warner qtd. in Clare Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*, 27.

⁹¹ Warner qtd. in Harman, 30, 31.

⁹² Warner, *Blackwood’s*, 198, qtd. in Harman *ibid.*, 31.

⁹³ Warner, *Blackwood’s*, 202, qtd. in Harman *ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁴ Warner, *ibid.*

⁹⁵ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 5-6.

⁹⁶ Austin, 139.

⁹⁷ Frank Kermode, “Divination,” *The Ordering Mirror*, 21. Kermode later eases his criticism of scientific discourse: “it would be wrong to think of science as the enemy of divination. All it does is define its limits” (22).

⁹⁸ Kermode, 23.

⁹⁹ Kermode, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Kermode, 23.

¹⁰¹ Warner was a self-proclaimed Communist leftist who campaigned for the cause across Europe, along with her partner Valentine Ackland.

¹⁰² Maren Tova Linett, *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness*, 98.

¹⁰³ Delap, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Delap, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Delap, 104.

CHAPTER 5

‘AFFORDING TO FORGET’: AMERICAN CHARM, CAPITALISM, AND IDENTITY

When a girl feels that she’s perfectly groomed and dressed, she can forget that part of her. That’s charm. The more parts of yourself you can afford to forget the more charm you have...
– F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” (1920)

As previous chapters have argued, charm in modernism is a language and practice tied to fantasy, which are forces of form as structural, desirable “blanks.” These blanks become legible value systems in modernist literature and culture, thereby enabling new readings of critical modernist concerns. Part of these value systems includes values placed on social cohesion or perpetuity, individual social identity, and aesthetic values of vagueness or “fogginess.” Charm voices these fantasies of value by presenting itself as a logic-less logic of attraction and revulsion, desire and discomfort, power and disempowerment. In this chapter, I examine how “charm” survived from its philological roots in the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century as distinctly alluring quality, to then not dissipate or hide itself, but resurge in an era of avant-garde aesthetic experimentation and sociopolitical upheaval, eventually transforming the idea of the feminine into the stuff of impossible imagination.¹ By focusing on critical history and material culture as well as my central literature, I show how charm makes legible the mutually constitutive fictions of theoretical difference (gender and race or ethnicity) and material actualities of capital.

I bring modernist concern for charm as structural bearer of values to the most literal of values—capital. This theoretical axis, as engaged within the works of American writers Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald, finds that structures of power

and domination within twentieth-century American capitalism are reliant on languages of deception, duplicity, competition, and coercion—the language of charm. Charm’s veiled threat of the feminine or foreign, its trigger of both desire and distaste, is linked to personality and capital in American modernism in ways distinct from the focus on largely British modernism in each of the prior chapters. While similar, American “charm” sets itself apart from British senses of the term during the same era by pointing less obliquely toward systems of emasculated value. British “charm,” while also contending with gender, racial and ethnic uncertainties, and “foreignness” amidst nationalist feeling (distinctly, “charm” as a catch-all for that which was French during the early twentieth century vogue for Francophilia is particularly pervasive), tends to read a perceived loss of white, traditional Englishness on the female or feminized (queer, “othered”) body.² Charm in Britain invariably is tied to class conflict and, in turn, the boundaries of one’s own station. American charm, I argue, can only read this loss through capital as mode of class climbing. The urgency of shifting toward the transatlantic here is apparent when we consider charm’s legacy within capitalist American systems, and the legacy of capitalism within American social and political systems since the early twentieth century.

I locate literary engagements with charm through Wharton’s and Fitzgerald’s explicit use of the term as part of a methodology of narrative deceit that becomes a fictional form of social ascendancy through the acquisition of (or proximity to) capital by effectively “faking it.” Faking it, while assumed to be an undesirable method of socioeconomic climbing, is actually an accepted method through which to achieve wealth, status, and power. As is echoed in the American adage, “fake it til you make

it,” charm retains a knowing unknowingness—the pretense that one does not know what one does, while recognizing the obvious overttness of these actions. As William James notes in a lecture collected in *On Vital Reserves: The Energies of Men* (1911), “From our acts and from our attitudes ceaseless inpouring currents of sensation come, which help to determine from moment to moment what our inner states shall be: that is a fundamental law of psychology.”³ Feeling itself is uncontrollable, James suggests, but because it indirectly follows action, regulating one’s actions may control one’s feelings. If one feels despondent, he therefore advises, “to sit up cheerfully, to look round cheerfully, and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there. [...] So to feel brave, act as if we *were* brace, use all our will to that end, and a courage-fit will very likely replace the fit of fear.”⁴ Such predisposition to the conditioning of the body as method to the personality is distinctly American to James. He goes on to describe reading a story in a weekly paper in which the author, “after describing the beauty and interest of the heroine’s personality, the author summed up her charms by saying that to all who looked upon her an impression as of ‘bottled lightning’ was irresistibly conveyed... Bottled lightning, in truth, is one of our American ideals.”⁵

American charm in literary representation, then, is inextricable from determinants of social identity including race and ethnicity, gender, and class, and is a charm that has been saturated by the slickness of modernist mass culture. Charm conceived as an alluring blank provides a continually mutable meta-model of the mechanisms that create and maintain sociality and difference (and thereby, perpetuate inequality and disrupt sociality) through categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and national origin in America.

Charm holds links to two related trends within the booming American modernist mass marketplace. First, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as workers' unions were growing in power and uncertainties of unregulated competition circulated, employers took a new tactic—concentration. To cope with competition, corporations had one of two choices, to either buy the competition or merge with it. In either scenario, the corporate units were forced to become larger, resulting in an increased need for managers. American companies' prowess at growing managerial capacities by the early twentieth century led Alfred Chandler to argue that the supremacy of American corporations was due to the “organizational capacities” of American management.⁶ Capitalism in the twentieth century, in other words, became increasingly “managed.”

Secondly and relatedly, this notion of “management” then seeped into something that itself could be sold to the public. Although advice books on etiquette, household management, and other care duties setting forth methods to manage one's home or social habits were common in the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth, an entire industry developed based on the management and maintenance not of a household or business, but of something else—oneself. Called the cultivation of “personality,” even T.S. Eliot acknowledged the modern demand on the individual when he called for art that eliminated such personality in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919). The poet's success is entirely based on depersonalization, Eliot's essay reasons, to ensure one's relation “to the sense of tradition.”⁷ But the “continual extinction of personality,” the “escape from personality,”⁸ requires first knowledge of said personality. He (Eliot's pronoun) must already be privileged to have personality,

and even more privileged to *know* that he does: “[O]f course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”⁹

Rochelle Rives explains that during the era, “the idea of having a personality requires the ability to stand out among others,” and thereby reflects a “spatial, sociological notion of personal authority.”¹⁰ The concept of “personality as related to charm or charisma,” Rives continues, “reinforces the meaning of the term as a function of one’s spatial authority and, further, one’s ability to influence others through effervescence and magnetism.”¹¹ To conduct oneself as agential subject was self-possession, the ability to own oneself. Identity, therefore, was bound to both social notions of gender and a capitalist mass market, which located failures in individuals and provided the goods (makeup, fashion, self-help manuals, physical regimens, and more) to “fix” them. Those who could and could not own themselves in such self-possession, and demonstrate the agency of acquiring a self, resultantly drove further divisions separating Americans by race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, and socioeconomic status.

This point allows us to continue to emphasize charm as within discourses of self-making techniques in the modernist era. However, to return to the language of an earlier chapter, charm *interrupts* this reading of modernist identity projects and capitalism. While other habits and consumer goods aimed to bring out the “authenticity” of the user or consumer, *charm was always already false and falsifiable*. The ability to cultivate one’s own allure is itself alluring, in other words, and yet ultimately detestable because, as this chapter aims to make clear, *it lays bare the means of production*. Effectively, charm falls into the realm of personality

marketing, as Rives notes, and yet remains at odds with it, since charm's ready evocation of capital makes too apparent the capitalist fuel that drives the modernist self-help project. Charm is a thing that is both known and must be "forgotten" for it to function in the same way that capitalism's particular ability to divide and exploit is both known, and must be forgotten.

Wharton and the Charm Offensive

Though she had ascended to literary popularity with such critically-respected novels as *House of Mirth* (1905) and *Ethan Frome* (1911) and cemented her literary achievements as the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize, for *The Age of Innocence* (1920), Wharton's late career stagnated. Wharton's works seemed, in "the eyes of the younger generation" to be "quaintly behind the times, but for survivors of the pre-War garden age she still has a nostalgic charm,"¹² *Time* noted in 1936. Such anachronism lessened her appeal, an anachronism in which Wharton explicitly placed herself, separating herself from modernism's rapidly shifting literary and social norms. *The Age of Innocence*, though published at the height of what many now consider the modernist era, eschews the common modernist literary hallmarks of its time—innovation, experiment, a sense of "the new." When Virginia Woolf dismissed Wharton as a writer who—because of her extended time abroad, did not exhibit a fully "American" literary voice—in an essay for the August 1925 *Saturday Review* Wharton wrote to a friend to insist that her novel was indeed "old-fashioned" because she "was not trying to follow the new methods." Isobel Archer, she says, "belongs to the day when scruples existed," unlike the "pornographic" work of James Joyce and the

“exhibitionism” of Woolf. Part of Wharton’s distaste for the modern was tied to the modern mass market. While her contemporaries and younger modernists published widely with popular magazines and for the Hollywood screen, Wharton balked, maintaining an intense dislike for such lowbrow vehicles. Wharton was further displeased with the literary industry in America, itself, for being run so heavily by men—a criticism she would have shared with Woolf. After WWI, Wharton found herself “at the mercy of a newly energized mass market that might have catered to women but was still almost exclusively powered by men,”¹³ notes Parley Ann Boswell in *Edith Wharton on Film*. Feminine labor—in other words, women’s writing—was often subject to male arbiters of taste and male “guardians” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The struggle of authority and control played out numerous times between female writers and male literary gatekeepers. Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot’s working relationship and Jean Rhys’s tumultuous mentorship (and romantic relationship) with Ford Madox Ford exemplify this. Thus, as Wharton perceived, in order to hold ground with high modernists, many women writers had to effectively “brave association with the promiscuity and commerce of prostitution”¹⁴ by publishing under the guidance of male gate-keepers. Hence, the condemnation of sexualized literary hawking, from Joyce’s “pornography” to Woolf’s “exhibitionism.”

Charm perhaps unsurprisingly emerges at this intersection of knowing pretense—knowing the difficult stakes of publishing as a female writer amidst a literary marketplace that requires a prostitutional self-promotion and demand on output. By the early 1930s, Wharton finally caved to pressures. “I have held out firmly till now against the wiles of Mr. Hearst,” she wrote in a letter to Sarah Orne Jewett of

the William Randolph Hearst enterprise's attempts to lure her to write for their publications. "I think you told me some time ago that in the case of the *Cosmopolitan* Hearst did not intervene personally... I shall have to give them one of the stories."¹⁵ One of "the stories" she refers to is a story that responds directly to the pressures of mass culture. Titled "Charm Incorporated," the story went on to be published in 1934 and earned Wharton both five thousand dollars and little critical acclaim. Wharton's discontent with the mass market and modernism's pressures (particularly on women) found footing in the story, a story that—while even Wharton scholar Parley Ann Boswell calls "an unremarkable story in many ways"¹⁶—is actually a nuanced examination of a particularly remarkable and ultimately, *marketable* force, charm.

Investment banker Jim Targatt uses "charm" as guerilla tactic in order to restore a peaceful life at home, and to thrive in New York society. He masters the tactic when he notices his Russian wife, Nadeja Kouradjine, possesses charm in spades and uses it to her own advantage. Without telling his wife of his plan, Targatt manipulates the rotating group of live-in family members-in-law (who, as they rapidly grow in number, present a personal and a financial burden for Targatt) by craftily marrying off various Kouradjines to marry wealthy men on Wall Street, or pairing Kouradjines with his business associates as assistants and secretaries. He eventually manages to achieve not only solitude, but also staggering wealth and status through his widening social network. Targatt's success sours, however, when he learns that his achievements have actually been due to his wife Nadeja, who has long been at work behind the scenes to ensure the success of Targatt's plans while allowing Targatt to believe the achievements were his own. Feeling emasculated, the story ends with a

final blow to Targatt's pride when an admiring Dutch artist attempts to seduce Nadeja. Nadeja offers Targatt a bargain: Targatt must have children with her, or else she will carry out the affair. Wharton leaves the conclusion ambiguous, as Targatt—who has finally found fulfillment both in his wealth and his solitude—finds both options equally disastrous.

To paraphrase Jean-Baptiste Clemence from Albert Camus's *The Fall* (1956), charm is apparently the ability to get what you want without ever needing to ask, the story seems to claim. Early in the story, Targatt learns how to never ask. He watches his in-laws closely for what he considers a strange, foreign allure – an allure that has secured his brother-in-law Boris a film-star wife, Halma Hoboe.¹⁷ Wharton's story therefore suggests charm is both foreign and volatile: the Kouradjines seem to have a "gift like a tenor voice," Targatt muses, "It was—what? Charm?"¹⁸ Horrified at the thought of "charm," Targatt finds the word "made his flesh creep with memories of weary picnics and wearier dinners where, with pink food in fluted papers, the discussion of 'What is Charm?' had formed the staple diet. 'I'd run a mile from a woman with charm; and so would most men,'" ¹⁹ he thinks. Immediately, charm is both effective—a "gift" even—and distasteful, associated with consumption of sickly feminine domesticity. Targatt has a bodily reaction of disgust to the notion, which he associates with social occasions like picnics and dinners and food dyed unnatural shades. He is certain that he detests charm, but because he can identify it, he is thereby immune. Yet, awareness eventually dawns that he himself has been victim: he has fallen for Nadeja's charms, charms that were useful in luring him into a marriage that seemed to be a romantic attachment. It becomes increasingly clear to Targatt early in

the story, however, that the match was a commercial transaction, a result of the Kouradjines's socioeconomic ambitions. In a short epiphany, Targatt realizes that with no particular beauty, intelligence, or domestic skills, Nadeja had somehow managed to manipulate him to marry her, and subsequently to do her bidding. During their marriage thus far, Nadeja had ensured that her emotions came across as "so exquisitely modulated" that they would "[a]ll on Targatt like the gentle dew from heaven, merely fostering in him a new growth of tenderness."²⁰

Jim finally realizes his situation early in the story. He fully grasps the family's goals when Nadeja's sister Katinka insists on living unmarried with Targatt's superior, Mr. Bellamy, sure that such an arrangement will lead to marriage (it does). With his "conventional world ... in fragments at his feet,"²¹ Targatt realizes, "Who knew better than he did that if you once had the Kouradjine habit you couldn't be cured of it?"²² So presented with "his idea,"²³ one that "he did not choose to communicate to any one at present,"²⁴ Targatt begins his own manipulations. Beginning a series of lavish social events, always with "one or two charming young Kouradjines present,"²⁵ Targatt deploys charm to get his in-laws out of his life without explicitly telling them so, or even that he desired for them to leave. Though "Wall Street was growing more and more unsettled"²⁶ and increasing numbers of Kouradjines pour into the Targatt household with no marriage or job prospects, Targatt nonetheless remains calm. "It must not be supposed," Wharton's narration makes clear, "that this rise in the fortunes of the Kouradjines was of any direct benefit to Targatt. He had never expected that, or even hoped it," yet "substantial returns he did draw from his alliance with the

Kouradjines; and it was the prospect of these that governed his conduct... And slowly but surely he was beginning to reap his reward.”²⁷

Charm is linked through this narration to Wall Street and financial reward. Targatt’s “idea” effectively means he takes the Kouradjines as competition—competition that he himself “incorporates” as his own business model. Marx notes in *Capital* that such practices are the laws of capitalism. Capitalists are forced to obey the “immanent laws” of competition, meaning, as David Harvey puts it, “No matter whether they are good- or bad-hearted, capitalists are forced by competition to engage in the same labor practices as their competitors.”²⁸ Thus, as soon as Targatt engages in the same charming practice as his competitors, he profits. Because of his recent marriage to a Kouradjine, Targatt’s superior, Mr. Bellamy, allows Targatt in on a lucrative deal “usually reserved for the already wealthy.”²⁹ The successes continue: the new wife of another Kouradjine, a wealthy owner of a toothpaste company, offers Targatt the chance to “buy a big block of Dazzle Tooth-Paste shares on exceptional terms.”³⁰ Buying in to Dazzle Tooth-Paste is a literal exposure of Targatt’s entry into controlling the means of production (and already coded notions of eugenics, class-based cleanliness, and Hollywood celebrity). Most productively, through Boris’s new young wife (post-divorce from Halma Hoboe), Targatt meets and dines with the great Mr. Guggins of Guggins industries, who leaves Targatt with extensive knowledge “to make some very useful reinvestments,” while Mrs. Guggins manages to “carr[y] off” Nadeja’s sister Olga as her “social secretary.”³¹

Targatt’s newly realized project of charm is therefore already linked to the capitalist mass market through plot and narration. Connections exist still further. The

end of “Charm Incorporated” demonstrates the stakes of capitalist gains, and charm as manipulative method. Targatt has just reached middle age, secure in his wealth and finally, happily rid of his in-laws when famous portraitist Axel Svengaart arrives in hopes of painting the beautiful Nadeja. But the story’s conclusion is less a satisfying survey of Targatt’s achievements than a twist on who has finally charmed whom. Targatt and his wife have a final match to be made in Nadeja’s final single, female relative, her “lovely but difficult”³² sister, Mouna, and plan to use Nadeja’s wiles to convince Svengaart of Mouna’s marriageability by agreeing to allow Svengaart to paint Nadeja. One evening while Nadeja is away on one of her visits to Svengaart for her portrait, Targatt suddenly worries that there is something more to her visits than sitting for a painting and singing Mouna’s praises. He becomes “surprisingly uncomfortable, and he reflected that it was the first occasion in their married life when he had suspected Nadeja of even the most innocent duplicity. And this, if it were true, could hardly be regarded as wholly innocent...”³³ Targatt confronts his wife when she finally returns, asking whether Svengaart is interested in Moura, or in Nadeja. “‘Isn’t it always the way of men? What they can’t get—’,”³⁴ she begins her reply. Targatt is overwhelmed with desperate jealousy, and the words he feels he should say (“‘You must feel yourself free--.’ Five words, and so easy to speak! ‘Perfectly free—perfectly free,’ a voice kept crying within him”³⁵) never arrive. Instead, with “his face working like a frightened child’s,”³⁶ he asks Nadeja what she wanted to do, and that whatever it is, he wanted it, too. Nadeja, with a “grave maternal” look, listens as he can only eke out half-phrases before the two come to an understanding:

‘Even if,’ he continued, half choking, ‘you understand, Nad, even if—’

She continued to look at him [...]. ‘Is this true, what you are now saying?’ she asked very low. Targatt nodded.

A little smile wavered over her lips. ‘Well darling, if only I could have got Mouna safely married, I should have said: Don’t you think that now at last we could afford to have a baby?’³⁷

The understanding fails to be iterated, existing just beyond the reach of the narration at the tale’s close. The question of the baby is the final word of the story, and dangles the question: was Targatt truly at the helm of his own success, or was a Kouradjine again holding ultimate control, with the final aim of producing children? The answer seems clear, as Wharton’s play on charm’s “incorporation” becomes means of making explicit the dangerous pull of charm in the context of capital, and particularly, capital in the hands of non-white figures, including the immigrant Kouradjines. Nadeja has won at the story’s end, by making clear her mission—to reproduce her family by manipulating Targatt’s means. The question of who is controlling whom, and who is achieving success, is ultimately at the heart of Wharton’s story, as it is at the heart of modernism’s anxious white masculinity, a masculinity concerned about modes of financial and social emasculation.

Wharton’s use of charm as complicit in distrust of non-white figures is previewed when we begin meeting the Kouradjines. Nadeja’s brother Boris, for instance, is cast as a Rudolph Valentino type. Wielding an ethnicity common to the popular romance novels of the 1920s – Middle Eastern sheiks and dashing Spaniards – Boris is only seventeen but “had the longest eyelashes of all” the Kouradjines,³⁸ with a desirability particular to such types: a “sexualized and greedy masculinity... darkly

foreign, an immigrant who was ready to make his way in the New World by living off women and their restless desires.”³⁹ It is a taboo attraction, a desire steeped in racist suspicion toward men of foreign origin, those who “were thought to be an insidious threat to the nation” should they mix with white American socialites. Such mixing was thought to produce children like the poor twins in Wharton’s *The Children* (1928), and showcase what protagonist Boyne calls “the incurable simplicity of the corrupt.”⁴⁰

Jim Targatt has immense difficulty with ethnicity and immigration throughout the story. This difficulty occasionally becomes quite literal. He and his wife, for instance, dine at a Ukrainian restaurant early in the tale, a choice made “at Nadeja’s instigation,” as she tends to seek “the most exotic that New York at the high tide of its prosperity had to offer.”⁴¹ But Jim’s alimentary system finds such exoticism difficult to digest by the evening’s close: “‘That sturgeon stewed in cream—’ he thought wearily.”⁴² Charm is quite literally *in-corporated* as the title notes, forced into embodiment, forced unpleasantly upon an unwilling and unassuming victim. Another restaurant Targatt visits—dubbed “The Transcaucasian”—has equally ill effects. This unease at the bodily “mixing” of white and non-white America is clear at the story’s end, when Nadeja effectively forces her husband into having children. Jim Targatt embodies the myths of white nationalism. The final scene makes Targatt a white America, infantilized and choking out notions of freedom while at the mercy of the manipulative, exploitative “other” who only seeks to use American wealth for corruptive purposes, to grow (or “breed”) foreign interests.

Such anxiety was rife in early twentieth-century America. American science supported the eugenics movement for the alleged health of the American population as

strains of nativism grew rampant. Immigration laws shifted with the Immigration Act of 1924, which cemented hierarchies of race, ethnicity, and nationality in its vision of America. The law “served contemporary prejudices among white Protestant Americans from northern European backgrounds and their desire to maintain social and political dominance.”⁴³ Immigrants from all Asian countries were banned, a particular insult to Japan, which had previously enjoyed more open relationship with America than other Asian countries.⁴⁴ As Mae Ngai argues, cultural nationhood became synonymous with racial nationhood—America was white, Western, and Anglo. Echoing Wharton’s language of “incorporation,” immigration restrictionists of the early twentieth century often complained about immigration as congesting the American melting pot, which itself insists upon racial and ethnic homogeneity. By World War I, restrictionists spoke of “racial indigestion,” and this notion furthered the study of eugenics.⁴⁵

Gender trouble abutted anxieties over race and immigration as having impact on American economy, and therefore, eugenic concerns about national identity were also concerns about economic insecurity. Gender was not far separated from race and ethnicity in this estimation. Hollywood film star Rudolph Valentino, for example, was in continual struggle through his brief career to prove his masculinity, even taking up boxing to prove his virility. Valentino’s appeal to American women became a coded threat of foreign charm on American capitalism as itself a reproductive machine. An anonymous writer commented on Valentino’s popularity after Rex Ingram’s *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) and most famously, *The Sheik*. Valentino, the writer declared, was popular amongst a female audience because:

The American woman is starving for romantic love... European men are far better versed in the game of love and the art of love-making than American men. They have, or take, more leisure. This is why a foreigner—especially a Latin—appeals so strongly to American women; and why so many American men lose out when competing with a European for a woman’s favor.⁴⁶

In the *Chicago Tribune*, a writer described Valentino as a “beautiful gardener’s boy,” responsible for the feminization of “Homo Americanus” as he turned Hollywood into “a national school of masculinity.” Valentino and other “Latin” or foreign stars were “prime example of the feminization of American culture that men feared,” the “woman-made” man.⁴⁷ Valentino was frequently forced to fend off rumors. Tabloids accused him of being physically incapable of consummating his brief marriage to Joan Acker, who allegedly asked for a divorce mere days after their marriage. He was also alleged to wear bracelets, a feminine accessory. While he did wear one, given to him by his second wife Natacha Rambova, Valentino insisted the rest were wristwatches, an unusual sight at the time as a relatively new, postwar replacement to pocketwatches, inspired by wristwatches’ military use. Accusations of his femininity reached his body, as well. “The domineering behavior of the Sheik and an emphasis on Valentino’s muscular physicality,” Gaylyn Studlar says, “might have supported circulating views on manliness rooted in a cult of the body, but American men regarded Valentino as a foreign beauty rather than as an athlete,”⁴⁸ such as Douglas Fairbanks.

Race and ethnicity in combination with gender trouble is just one half of the equation, however, when considering the drift of American national identity in the

early twentieth century. The other component is the challenge of the New Woman's femininity to a melancholic masculinity. I turn now to F. Scott Fitzgerald's works to elucidate charm as showcasing gender's complicity in capitalist machinations.

Fitzgerald and Masculine Charm

The concern over men's feminization and infantilization (juvenation) was common in American modernism, and has been described as an unusual form of what Greg Forter calls "literary melancholy"⁴⁹ in *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism*. The viability of white manhood was called into question amidst widespread shifts in legibility and understandings of sex, gender, and racial difference occurring from 1880 to 1920. Such a shift affected authors including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Willa Cather, who Forter finds responded to such a shift as a loss, and a loss grieved alongside melancholic ambivalence and unconscious aggression. This is not only a literary sensibility interested in gender, race, ethnicity, and social identity formation, but actually a literary rumination on the product of the success of the capitalist labor market, ones that tacitly based themselves on racial and gender divisions while masquerading as labor valuation. White masculinity thus secured itself for the new century, to be instead subject to gendered and racialized inspection as the burgeoning feminist movement insisted on revaluation of gendered spheres, and as black Americans and immigrants threatened the newly open labor market. This melancholy is clear in both Wharton's wry tale, and in F. Scott Fitzgerald's works.

When F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925, many readers pointed out its unmistakable similarities to a novella published some two years prior, Willa Cather's "A Lost Lady" (1923).⁵⁰ The premises of each are fundamentally alike – in each, an unreachable (and ostensibly undeserving) woman is the object of a young man's unrequited ardor. These critiques were not lost on Fitzgerald. While asserting elsewhere that his "artistic conscience" was pure, Fitzgerald wrote to Cather upon the publication of *Gatsby*, declaring himself "one of [her] greatest admirers," and wanting to "explain an instance of apparent plagiarism..." and perhaps "forgetting" his knowledge of Cather's earlier story. Cather generously dismissed the passing resemblance, noting, "So many people have tried to say that same thing before either you or I tried it."⁵¹ That "same thing" is the impact of charm. Cather responded to Fitzgerald's letter and reassured him:

I suppose everybody who has ever been swept away by personal charm tries in some way to express his [sic] wonder that the effect is so much greater than the cause,—and in the end, we all fall back upon an old device and write about the effect and not the lovely creature who produced it. After all, the only thing one can tell about beauty, is just how hard one was hit by it. Isn't that so?⁵²

Cather seems to indicate that the effect of charm is in excess of its substance, and moreover, suggests a woman's charm has violent impact – that one might be "hit by it."⁵³ This same charm illuminates what lies at the heart of *Gatsby*, to be sure, but more significantly, what Fitzgerald considered the driving force of his larger project, "his 'idea' about a woman's charm."⁵⁴

Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan and Cather's Marian Forrester are both described as dreamily alluring by male narrators. Marian's allure is attributed to a sense of promise, made somehow legible by her eyes:

Her eyes, when they laughed for a moment into one's own, seemed to promise a wild delight that he has not found in life. 'I know where it is,' they seemed to say, 'I could show you!'⁵⁵

Daisy is similarly described:

Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered 'Listen,' a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour.⁵⁶

In both passages, a male observer is enticed by a near-indescribable feeling that each woman uniquely generates: a "promise," a "wild delight," an "excitement," a sense of anticipation. Access points to this wild promise are each woman's eyes, and more curiously, their disembodied voices. Marian's laughing eyes seem to speak, while the "charm of her conversation was not so much in what she said, though she was often witty, but in the quick recognition of her eyes, in the living quality of her voice itself."⁵⁷ Daisy's bright eyes and mouth pair together to create an unforgettable "singing compulsion," a siren song of vocal allure and visual attraction. Charm appears to be present not in *content*, but in the stylistic qualities of each woman – Marian's speech did not matter so much as her *manner* of speech, while Daisy's voice is attractive in its *sound* of money.

Fitzgerald's and Cather's unrelated but mutual interest in the forms of a young woman's allure link explicitly the dangerous "slip" of charm as bound to gender through a vampish twentieth-century femininity that masquerades as girlish innocence. This requires some historicizing. The modernist era was fascinated by—and concerned by—such a transformation of femininity and masculinity. The nineteenth century was characterized by essential divisions between men's work and women's domesticity. Men's cultural identities and maturation rested upon this work, which included physical, intellectual, and moral education as part of their "autonomous self-making." Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1837 notion of the American scholar and Horatio Alger's tales of self-made boys-turned-men (*Ragged Dick* was published in 1866), for example, are iterations of these nineteenth century projects in manhood. By the early twentieth century, however, this easy binary was in jeopardy. Professional labor was no longer driving component of the cultural promise of man's ability to become "one's own man." Discourses of manhood as juxtaposed against boyhood were quickly "thwarted by a monopoly capitalism that reduced men to dependents in large bureaucratic structure" and resulted in "unmanly" dependence and disempowerment.⁵⁸ Manhood and boyhood became masculinity pitted against femininity.

We see this allure and disgust at work in the figure of Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan. Her voice, Gatsby tells Nick Carraway toward the end of the novel, is "full of money."⁵⁹ As we know at that point, Daisy, who has thrown herself into fashion (she cries at Gatsby's "beautiful shirts") and uses her "new" money as recklessly as she uses people. Nick suddenly realizes the truth in Gatsby's assessment:

That was it. I'd never understood it before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl....⁶⁰

Nick trails off in two sets of ellipses, as he has suddenly encountered the “real” of Daisy's allure—a romantic, false imaginary of “inexhaustible charm.” This additionally dramatizes how charm becomes devalued as mere put-on “style” of self rather than substance via Cather's and Fitzgerald's exchanges. Charm, as *Gatsby* demonstrates, holds a siren song, while making itself clear as already deceitful, manipulative, and mimicking. As it appears to cover modernist self-making, it instead reveals the machinations of an American mass market, a market that requires individuals to look away from the magic of capital and the connected means of subjectivation, and moreover, to look away from the system at work upon them.

As Fitzgerald and Cather demonstrate, charm undeniably shaped the kinds of social, political, and aesthetic understandings made possible in early twentieth-century America. Charm thrived on duplicity and difference, and as an ostensibly slight, fleeting aesthetic feeling of delight or magic (its etymology points us to *incantare* and *carmenere*, or incantation, song—Fitzgerald's description of Daisy's voice as a “cymbals' song” recalls this origin) it gave rise to a uniquely American “forgetting” of the magic of money, capitalism, and gendered and racialized labor in the modernist era.

A lesser-known short story from Fitzgerald, “Magnetism,” was published a few years after *Gatsby* in a 1928 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. In the story, Hollywood film star George Hannaford is ostensibly the bearer of the title's quality.

Wielding the familiar hallmarks of a successful philanderer, George is handsome, young, and famous. His smiles and greetings of “Hello, darling” cause multiple women to swoon – his Mexican housekeeper Dolores falls off the front steps when George arrives home (an event precipitated by Dolores’s thoughts, suddenly “contemplat[ing] having a love affair with him”⁶¹). Yet, the story’s title indicates not a genial quality of George, we find, but that George is “victim” of such a quality. In the throes of smoldering jealousy when he finds his glamour-seeking wife Kay in an affair, George finds himself inevitably pulled toward a young actress of just eighteen, Helen Avery, the latest in a string of what he considers to be platonic affairs. He muses on her attractiveness: “Helen Avery’s voice and the dropping of her eyes when she finished speaking, like a sort of exercise in control, fascinated him. He had felt [...] that if they rushed towards each other there would be a romantic communion of almost unbelievable intensity. It was this element of promise and possibility that had haunted him for a fortnight.”⁶² Part of Helen’s allure is the promise of something, much like Daisy Buchanan’s promises of “exciting things in the next hour.”⁶³ Coming from the Latin *promittere* (*pro-* meaning “forward,” and *mittere* meaning “send”), the concept of promise characterizes male characters’ attractions to Helen and Daisy. These attractions are both out of the present time and future-focused, teleological propulsion – the very means for an end. And, so, George is magnetically propelled toward what we initially expect to be destruction; yet, despite being blackmailed and serving as cause for a young woman’s attempted suicide, George sees no direct punishment by the tale’s end. He and his wife, Kay emerge – like Tom and Daisy Buchanan, figures who “smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into

their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was,”⁶⁴ says Nick Carraway – immune, aloof, confused, and careless.

“Magnetism” weaves a radical distrust and denigration of charm, while simultaneously admiring it as capitalist force, and thereby belying its reliance on white masculinity. Charm lurks throughout the story as something dangerous, desirable, alluring, yet deadly for masculinity. The women who adore George and bolster his movie-star ego also threaten to break him – his wife capriciously leaves him after a party one night, suddenly declaring their marriage over, only to later return to say of the moment lightly, “I was just mad at you; you ought to have known that.”⁶⁵ An old flirtation with a script girl, Margaret Donovan, comes back to haunt George when she and her brother turn up one evening, blackmailing George for adultery with forged love letters. George, of course, has forgotten the affair even happened until—in the back of a taxi, looking aimlessly out the window at a “pink horror” of an apartment building, “built to represent something, somewhere”—he remembers he “had once called for Margaret Donovan here the night of a Mayfair dance.”⁶⁶ Even Dolores, enraptured by George at the start of the tale, watches him leave the house in the story’s final scene, “rub[bing] her hands together in a gesture that might have expressed either ecstasy or strangulation.”⁶⁷

Margaret, in ultimately confessing the blackmail scheme was a hasty plot for money from her ex-convict brother, makes clear what charm is. She desperately declares her enduring love for George when he confronts her at her Santa Monica apartment. “‘I’ve loved you for years,’” she tells him, “‘since the first day you came West and walked into the old Realart Studio. You were so brave about people, George.

Whoever it was, you walked right up to them and tore something aside as if it was in your way and began to know them. [...] You drew people right up close to you and held them there, not able to move either way.”⁶⁸ Margaret pinpoints George’s charm as a “tearing something aside” between two people, that this parted curtain is a clarity of connection. Even Dolores the housekeeper feels this. When George smiles at her at the end of the story, the smile “faintly, fleetingly, t[ore] a veil from between them, unconsciously promising her a possible admission to the thousand delights and wonders that only he knew and could command.”⁶⁹ Yet, this sense of clarity and connection is entirely at odds with what occurs in George’s life because of these “connections” – such as the blackmail scheme, for example, or his wife Kay threatening divorce. At hearing about his effects on Margaret, George grows uncomfortable, dismissing her love as “entirely imaginary,” and insisting ““I can’t control—”” before Margaret interrupts him:

“No, I know. You can’t control charm. It’s simply got to be used. You’ve got to keep your hand in if you have it, and go through life attaching people to you that you don’t want. I don’t blame you.”⁷⁰

Charm, according to Margaret, is uncontrollable and unavoidable. Yet, once again, there is a paradox to Margaret’s assessment. There is a conflicting sense of agency in Margaret’s phrasing. If it is unavoidable, it seems odd that you must “keep your hand in” and “attach people to you.” But charm, when understood less a sociable quality than a valuation or a move toward money, then the phrasing makes sense. Margaret’s brother’s motives clarify further: charm must be used, specifically for money and exploitation. If one has it, one must participate in it, and involve others. Such a quality

of “dirty” yet necessary, duplicitous attachment rings of the “charming” businessman or investor, a closeness to capital that renders understandably necessary discomfiture.

Charm ought not to be coveted or trusted, Fitzgerald’s story seems to teach, since charm always makes clear what it is hiding—the more devious, duplicitous, or violent underlying motive of money. The narration’s highly limited point of view, full of slick, clean sentences and carefully curated details, practices this very allure. The story’s setup describes a locale that says less about the story to come than the narration’s own biases, and its pleasures in delimitation: “The pleasant, ostentatious boulevard was lined at prosperous intervals with New England Colonial houses—without ship models in the hall. When the inhabitants moved out here the ship models had at last been given to the children.”⁷¹ The line opens the story, and deceives us. We are not in New England, or anywhere near it – the story is, we’ll soon find, deeply embedded in Hollywood and the film industry. The line glosses over the setting, in multiple senses of the word. It smooths over specifics, while putting an artificial sheen on something that has begun to deteriorate. A boulevard both “pleasant” and “ostentatious” conveys a bias toward just such a glossy aesthetic, an odd appreciation and castigation of excess. The now-missing ship models in the fall signify a kind of fallenness too—though the story is set prior to the Depression, the boom times at this boulevard seem to have already passed.

These houses’ existence at “prosperous intervals” indicate an old money and old way of life that has been subsumed by what the next line will suggest to be the next generation of hopefuls, outcasts, the working class, and immigrants are taking hold in the area. The line that follows elaborates: “The next street was a complete

exhibit of the Spanish-bungalow phase of West Coast architecture; while two streets over, the cylindrical windows and round towers of 1897—melancholy antiques which sheltered swamis, yogis, fortune tellers, dressmakers, dancing teachers, art academies and chiropractors—looked down now upon brisk buses and trolley cars.”⁷² We finally find our locale, on the West Coast, but the characters that populate it are fanciful, feminine, and deceptive. Swamis, yogis, and fortune-tellers are magically unreal, Oriental “others”; dressmakers, dance teachers, and art academies are feminized removals from any kind of “serious” professions; and lastly, chiropractors appear as the most grave of snake-oil salesmen, dabbling falsely in the medical profession. By the time we reach the end of the story, we feel doubly deceived – not only have we been misled with odd descriptors throughout the story, as exist here in the story’s opening lines, but the person who seems to represent this sly deception, George Hannaford, has not received his deserts, meeting an end more like Tom Buchanan. Unpunished and unwavering, he simply goes on.

Considering Fitzgerald’s “Magnetism” and the earlier *Gatsby*, we find Fitzgerald presents a complex example of charm’s functionality as style – equally personal and narrative. As we the readers fall for George, only to become disgusted by him, we realize that everyone in the story – including the story itself – has been charmingly deceitful. George’s vain wife Kay both does and does not leave her marriage to have an affair, Dolores may or may not be contemplating violence, Margaret emotionally entraps George at her apartment (“he turned away—still not knowing that she was watching him and loving him until she thought her heart would burst with it”⁷³) only to then attempt suicide when he leaves, and the alluring Helen

Avery declares her flirtations with George to be scripted, a mere testament to their prowess at their craft: ““Oh, we’re such actors, George—you and I [...] It was a pity we didn’t have a camera.””⁷⁴ We are betrayed, in other words, as the façade drops, even though we knew it would. We forget; we are duped.

The Non-Duped

As Fitzgerald’s and Wharton’s works demonstrate, charm emerged as the name of the “magnetism” of white male power that is promulgated through the twentieth century’s new mass market. But this meteoric rise did not last. The rise and fall of Swedish financier, Ivar Kreuger, serves as example. Called the “Match King,” Kreuger negotiated large international monopolies throughout the 1920s to make fortunes on a product he did not invent – the safety match. As he bought up other companies, his success relied upon the perfection of his marketing schemes. Friends and business partners alike described him as mesmerizing. One colleague noted:

There was an odd air of greatness about Ivar. I think he could get people to do anything. They fell for him, they couldn’t resist his peculiar charm and magnetism. Above all, there was a look about him that made a difference. I saw J.P. Morgan’s eyes many times in New York. They were like fire coals. But Ivar’s eyes were not like that. They had another quality. Though small and narrow, they seemed capable, if he desired, of looking right through you.⁷⁵

This quiet, poised man seemed destined to become one of the century’s great American success stories. Yet, the stock market crash hit Kreuger particularly hard, as those who worked with him demanded payments that Kreuger could not supply.

Kreuger shocked the world when he shot himself in his Paris apartment on March 12, 1932, bankrupt after the Great Depression. *The Economist* mourned the loss: “His death in Paris last Saturday by his own hand represents the veritably tragic wreck of a career which in its sphere was unsurpassed by that of any individual in living memory.” Yet, the same paper a few short weeks later reported that accountants uncovered “deception and manipulation of accounts” in his empire. *The Economist* and others were left “feeling bitterly humiliated” as \$142 million in Italian bonds “supposedly sold to him by Benito Mussolini’s government” were uncovered, and Kreuger’s company owed more than Sweden’s national debt.⁷⁶ Kreuger became a man of myth and mystery, a “confidence man” who managed to swindle international finance on the back of the new global economy and its reliance on a financial (and ultimately, interpersonal) credit system, a system that was burgeoning faster than rules could maintain it.

“It is true that Mr. Kreuger was a charming man,” wrote modernist poet Archibald Macleish in a lengthy profile of the man for *Fortune* magazine in 1933, just a year after Kreuger’s death. “Everyone spoke beautifully of Mr. Kreuger—so beautifully that [a dinner guest of Kreuger’s] never heard a man more beautifully spoken of by everyone.” But Macleish – who himself would have a lengthy career as modernist poet, and believed capitalism to be dead – finds “charm” cannot fully explain the phenomenon of how “a match manufacturer from an unimportant European city was able over nine years to dupe the international financiers of New York and walk off with \$250,000,000 of the country’s cash.” “Granted,” he notes, “the charm was sufficient, even in Kreuger’s last weeks,” as Kreuger attempted to persuade

a slew of New York businessmen including John McHugh and Samuel F. Pryor (of Chase Bank) and Percy A. Rockefeller (nephew of John D. Rockefeller). Granted, too: that the French had called him *l'oiseleur*, the bird charmer. Nevertheless Mr. McHugh and Mr. Pryor and Mr. Rockefeller [et. al.] were not young partners. And neither were they birds. Moreover charm as a solution of the mystery runs into the obstinate and irrefutable fact that while it may explain the acquiescence of the Americans it does not explain the actions of the Swede. Commercial charm is the weapon of the vulgar swindler, the goldbrick man, the faker who wants something for himself. But Kreuger, although he pumped the better part of a quarter of a billion dollars out of America and into his own companies and enterprises abroad, was contemptuous of money for its own sake, lived, as one of his American banker friends put it, like a 'cheap bank clerk' (which is to say, in the argot of the '20's [sic], like a man of considerable but not spectacular wealth), and was chiefly remarkable for the extravagance with which he gave money away to his friends, his acquaintances, his competitors, and even to perfect strangers. To explain the deception of the American financiers on the ground that they were taken in by Kreuger's charm is to imply that Kreuger was a mere swindler out for their gold and with art enough to persuade them to relinquish it. But the implication will not hold. It was something other than money that Kreuger wanted. And it was something other than money that he persuaded his victims to give up. A man, particularly the director of forty-nine corporations, does not permit himself to be duped out of power by a nice smile and a set of even teeth.⁷⁷

Macleish goes on to explain that the two easiest theories as to why Kreuger was able to be so successful as the “Match King” are two sides of the same coin. One is that somehow, businessmen, bankers, and others were so goodhearted that they simply did not know any better. Yet, when met with critiques that the Kreuger company’s books were so poorly done that anyone with any ability in simple mathematics could have spotted inconsistencies in them, the theory switches to its opposite. Instead, such businessmen – from investors to bankers to Kreuger’s own accountants and bookkeepers – were not fooled by Kreuger’s “charm,” but rather, keen to make a profit at any cost. “The truth is,” Macleish concludes, “that New York and the ’20’s [sic] and Ivar Kreuger were made for one another as a patient is made for a disease as a disease is made for a patient. The money markets of New York turned Ivar Kreuger into a stock promoter and Ivar Kreuger as a stock promoter turned the New York money markets inside out.” In other words:

Here then was a scene set for a swindler. Here was a city and a time in which inadequate audits opened the basic corporate structure itself, the unit cell of modern industry, to corruption and rendered the domestic holding company with subsidiaries abroad practically investigation-proof... [T]he... great Krueger mystery, the mystery of the dupes, is, to put it mildly, just as a hinterland which demanded to be swindled would have been obliged to create Wall Street had Wall Street not existed, so a Wall Street which demanded to be fooled would have been obliged to invent an Ivar Kreuger had Ivar Kreuger not been born.⁷⁸

Magnetically, Wall Street and Kreuger were drawn toward one another because they were actually mutually constitutive, made for one another to thrive on, and, eventually kill. When the charm of capital reveals its links to empty valuation, it forcibly ends things—the market itself and Kreuger’s life, which Macleish seems to insist are one and the same. The market always already demanded foolery, swindling, and fictive figures to propel itself. In other words, Macleish’s formulation suggests that the market did not crash because of the exceptional Kreuger and men like him. Rather, Kreuger was exactly like any man with access to the means of production, and Kreuger’s rise and fall exposed the American and global capitalist market for its fictions of valuation, a real that deflated the “magic” allure at the center of capitalism.

Conclusion

Charm in American modernism registers what I have previously deemed charm’s recognition of aesthetic loss or fallenness. Only in American modernism does white nationalist masculinity’s relation to the labor market, commodity, and capital take center stage as driving allure and detestable revelation of the mechanisms that allow social categorization into gender, race or ethnicity, class, and nation. In this way, it dramatically previews the intervention of critical race studies into Marxist thought. An activist hermeneutic, racial capitalism finds its origins as theory in Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of a Black Radical Tradition* (1983). *Black Marxism* served as corrective to Marx and Engels’s belief, stated in *Capital*, that European bourgeois society would rationalize social relations. But Marx and Engels failed to foresee that social relations would be pushed in racial directions, along with

social ideology. Robinson explains: “As a material force... racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term ‘racial capitalism’ to refer... to the subsequent structure as a historical agency.”⁷⁹ Put simply, capitalism was always already racialized, or, divisive within a social ideological imaginary. Capitalism encourages certain kinds of human life to be valued over others, as it requires relations based on balances of unequal labor: those with access to means of production and workers without these means. These “uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations,” then, are placed onto “fictions of differing human capacities” – historically, racial difference.⁸⁰ Supporting divides makes capitalism function, since the division between humans and their labor is integral for the “magic” of the system to ensure its continuance. Divisions that both Fitzgerald and Wharton point to on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, and even age through the notion of “charm” as literary project therefore expose the economic and sociopolitical underpinnings of American modernist aesthetic thought.

¹ Herbert F. Tucker, “After Magic: Modern Charm in History, Theory, and Practice,” 106.

² See Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, for this argument.

³ William James, *On Vital Reserves: The Energies of Men; The Gospel of Relaxation*, 43.

⁴ James, 45-46.

⁵ James, 56.

⁶ James Fulcher, *Capitalism*, 43.

⁷ T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 30.

⁸ Eliot, 30, 33.

⁹ Eliot, 33.

¹⁰ Rochelle Rives, *Modernist Impersonalities: Affect, Authority, and the Subject*, 25.

¹¹ Rives, 25.

¹² Review, “Cultivated Garden,” in *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, 536.

¹³ Parley Ann Boswell, *Edith Wharton on Film*, 33.

¹⁴ Sarah Churchwell, “Lost Among the Ads: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and the Politics of Imitation,” in *Middlebrow Moderns: Popular American Women Writers of the 1920s*, 139.

¹⁵ Wharton qtd. in Boswell, 33.

¹⁶ Boswell, 34.

¹⁷ Surely, Wharton means this name as gloss on Greta Garbo’s. This may appear a clear lampoon, evidencing her distaste for Garbo and Garbo’s Hollywood circle. Yet, such an assessment must also take into account Garbo’s connection to Wharton – Garbo maintained an off-and-on affair with New York socialite, writer, and feminist Mercedes de Acosta. Acosta knew Wharton (how intimately

remains unclear, though Wharton's name was mentioned on many a lengthy list of Acosta's lovers) and indeed, reviewed a book of hers on French culture, *French Ways and Their Meaning*, in the *New France: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Franco-American Relations* in 1919. Acosta's review is pointed, noting Wharton's occasional inconsistencies of thought, but was largely positive, enthusing by the end of the review that *French Ways* is "quite well worth reading" for its final two chapters. In these chapters, Acosta raves, "Mrs. Wharton seems to write from her soul, and that she dips her pen into the life blood of the country of which she says that 'the whole world is full of her spilt glory'" (83). Mercedes de Acosta, Review: 'French Ways and Their Meaning By Edith Wharton,' *The New France* Vol. IV. No. 8, ed. Denys Amiel (New York: La France Publishing Corporation, May 1920), 83.

¹⁸ Edith Wharton, "Charm Incorporated," 658.

¹⁹ Wharton, "Charm," 658.

²⁰ Wharton, "Charm," 664.

²¹ Wharton, "Charm," 661.

²² Wharton, "Charm," 661.

²³ Wharton, "Charm," 665.

²⁴ Wharton, "Charm," 664.

²⁵ Wharton, "Charm," 665.

²⁶ Wharton, "Charm," 665.

²⁷ Wharton, "Charm," 666.

²⁸ David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, 146.

²⁹ Wharton, "Charm," 666.

³⁰ Wharton, "Charm," 666.

³¹ Wharton, "Charm," 667.

³² Wharton, "Charm," 667.

³³ Wharton, "Charm," 672.

³⁴ Wharton, "Charm," 677.

³⁵ Wharton, "Charm," 677.

³⁶ Wharton, "Charm," 677.

³⁷ Wharton, "Charm," 677.

³⁸ Wharton, "Charm," 657.

³⁹ Gaylyn Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 151.

⁴⁰ Edith Wharton, *The Children*, 136.

⁴¹ Wharton, "Charm," 653.

⁴² Wharton, "Charm," *ibid*.

⁴³ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 23.

⁴⁴ See Izumi Hirobe's *Japanese Pride, American Prejudice: Modifying the Exclusion Clause of the 1924 Immigration Act* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001) for a detailed examination of Japanese response to the Act and Lon Kurashige's *Two Faces of Exclusion: The Untold History of Anti-Asian Racism in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016) for a wider view of Asian-American relations through the Act's aftereffects.

⁴⁵ Ngai, 23-24.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in Heather Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, 126.

⁴⁷ Qtd. in Addison, 131.

⁴⁸ Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade*, 186.

⁴⁹ Greg Forter, *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism*, 6.

⁵⁰ See Matthew J. Bruccoli, "'An Instance of Apparent Plagiarism'", *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 40 (Spring 1978), 171-78. For an article that builds on Bruccoli years later, see also Tom Quirk, "Fitzgerald and Cather: The Great Gatsby," *American Literature* 54.4 (December 1982), 576-91.

⁵¹ Willa Cather, "To F. Scott Fitzgerald," 370.

⁵² Cather, "To F. Scott Fitzgerald," 370.

⁵³ Cather's *My Antonia*, too, bears similarity to *Gatsby* in the narrative technique of first person narrators, Jim Burden and Nick Carraway, who "possess a remembered association with someone unique and unexampled yet who embodied something previous, if lost, 'like the founders of early races,' as Cather had phrased it." Quirk, 577.

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- ⁵⁴ Benjamin Lytal, "The Stepsister Novels of Willa Cather and F. Scott Fitzgerald," n.p.
- ⁵⁵ Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 163.
- ⁵⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 9.
- ⁵⁷ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 67.
- ⁵⁸ Forter, 2.
- ⁵⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 120.
- ⁶⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, *ibid.*
- ⁶¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 51.
- ⁶² Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 56.
- ⁶³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 9.
- ⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 179.
- ⁶⁵ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 79.
- ⁶⁶ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 73.
- ⁶⁷ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 82.
- ⁶⁸ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 75.
- ⁶⁹ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 82.
- ⁷⁰ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 75-76.
- ⁷¹ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 49.
- ⁷² Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," *ibid.*
- ⁷³ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 77-78.
- ⁷⁴ Fitzgerald, "Magnetism," 62-63.
- ⁷⁵ Carl Bergman qtd. in Robert Shaplen "Annals of Crime: Kreuger – I-III," 3.
- ⁷⁶ "The match king," *The Economist*, n.p.
- ⁷⁷ Archibald Macleish, "A 3-part series on the life and death of Ivar Kreuger," n.p.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2.
- ⁸⁰ Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," 77.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: CHARM'S NEW DIRECTIONS FOR MODERNIST STUDIES

In this dissertation, I examine what mobilized the simultaneous discourses of charm and anti-charm rhetoric in modernist literature. Charm moves through late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Anglophone and American texts as a trojan horse of sorts, ostensibly supporting normative ideologies of the social order while its use imagines sociopolitical transformation. Charm does not foreclose non-normativity, but rather, opens the non-normative to be able to slyly destabilize accepted forms of sociality, individuality, and social bonds. I look to Oscar Wilde's works to assess how charm possesses an aesthetic magic that creates new social forms, bonding persons across normative temporality and social stratification. Threads of charm as a thoroughly modernist experimental project are then taken up by Gertrude Stein and Sylvia Townsend Warner in the early decades of the twentieth-century, in whose works I find a rendering of charm as force of social friction by revising approaches to the feminine, to women's bodies including those of women of color, and to women's lives. Finally, in the years leading up to WWII, this rebellious force becomes subsumed by global capitalism, and re-latches to normativity; namely, to white masculinity, which repossesses and subsumes the rebellious powers of charm to become a purposeful slickness—the kind of slickness F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edith Wharton suggest is the familiar, repellant and yet compelling oiliness of the salesman.

Throughout the years between 1890 and 1938, charm is alternately celebrated and denigrated in modernist literature, as ideas of charm as effeminate, supernatural, fleeting, and superficial are worked over at various turns as threatening and liberating.

Charm's presence in the era, I argue, not only helps to formulate a compelling narrative of modernism deserving of critical attention, but also a force that wounds accepted paradigms of modernist studies. As modernist studies attempts to move toward questions of theoretical approach as well as scale (historical, geographic, and even planetary), charm functions as example of what new approaches to modernism based in mechanisms of feminization, marginalization, and difference can do.

Throughout this study, charm in modernist writers' thought and works functions as clear interruption to the ease of modernism as having specific temporal or aesthetic boundaries. My study therefore joins with recent scholarship that attempts to overturn such strict delineations, such as Rachel Teukolsky's *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (2009), or Jessica Feldman's *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Human Experience* (2002). This also includes recent work on modernist decadence. Following David Weir's *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature Against the American Grain, 1890-1926* (2007), new scholarship including *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (2019) examines modernist writers' engagements with decadent principles and aesthetics from Walter Pater and Algernon Swinburne. Charm's emergence and eventual ubiquity in early twentieth-century literature suggests not a radical break from the past, but a deep thread of continuity. As such, charm flouts the narrative perpetuated by modernist studies today which arose from modernists themselves: that modernism was concerned with the new, in direct responsiveness to a newly "modern" twentieth-century life that was rapidly changing. To focus on charm in literary modernism overturns such perceptions. Charm's embeddedness in Medieval spiritual

practice, sixteenth to seventeenth-century English traditions of witchcraft and folklore, and ostensible emphasis on traditional (read: nineteenth-century) gender roles and social politesse is at odds with modernism's stated goals. Charm also lessens modernism's alleged attentions on the individual in favor of its engagement among persons and groups as a social binder. Finally, as itself an affective-aesthetic category, charm reinforces the ways in which form moves and works on us. Attention to charm's evolving powers in the early decades of the twentieth-century, then, is to refocus our gaze on the era, its voices, and its textual forms.

Separately, too, this dissertation emphasizes the advance of key scholarship in the growing subfield, feminist modernist studies. I envision charm as an example of a new sort of methodological and conceptual recovery work in direct support of feminist approaches to literary studies. Feminist modernist studies in particular aims at both utilizing contemporary feminist approaches or knowledges to re-encounter modernist texts and modernist thought, as well as drawing out modernism's own approaches to the women's movement, to feminism, to women's bodies, and concerns of marginalization, minoritization, and oppression. The field answers the concern of many scholars who have recently argued that the study of women's writing in modernism has passed its critical peak and entered into crisis. After the rise of New Modernist Studies in the 1990s, feminist criticism experienced four radical and resultant shifts that made the work of women's writing more complex, notes Susan Stanford Friedman. The move from national to transnational frameworks and the push toward intersectionality of identity categories meant that the category of "women's writing" was far more complicated. The burgeoning of digital culture, moreover,

meant that the traditional archival work of feminist recovery shifted to digital initiatives performed by librarians and historical societies.

Jane Garrity argues in a recent article, “Modernist Women’s Writing: Beyond the Threshold of Obsolescence?” (2014), that this has problematized critical projects, since we have long since passed the age of a “universal feminism” or universal concept of “women writers” as collective category. Many would say, Garrity notes, that “feminist scholarship on women’s modernism and women’s modernity is clearly at an impasse, but is this statement really true?”¹ Garrity concludes that “the fact remains that the passionate interest in women’s writing that exploded in the 1970s is no longer pervasive.”² Toril Moi accounts for this shift as the direct result of 1990s gender theory such as Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, works which marked the increased difficulty of talking about anything relating to “women” without first placing “women” in quotation marks, and prioritizing the social construction of gender and its organizational functions.

Charmed Modernisms argues implicitly and explicitly that to believe feminist “recovery work” is stalling, or to continue to uphold traditional narratives of modernist projects, means that we have lost the ability to see other approaches of modernist studies. These approaches must not be merely additive, since recovering and adding still more female writers to the canon in itself often reifies what “female writers” means—a catch-all category that often hides its carriage of privilege—that “woman” is white, cisgender, upper-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, and so on—and flattens potential difference. These approaches must also not continue to bolster the often-accepted notion that modernism was a project in rebellion, innovation, and the new.

The work of re-texturizing what we consider to be modernism proper must continue in ways other than feminist recovery of voices. We must also propose ways to hear those voices, and understand how this plethora of figures alters what modernism as a movement has been seen to be, and more importantly, how it is taught.

The stakes of accepting certain kinds of modernisms, then, have wide-ranging effects that are not only what we read, but how we read. Accepting this kind of modernism makes it difficult to assess what is on offer to modernist studies by Sylvia Townsend Warner's career in historical fiction and fantasy, for example. Putting Warner or any writer outside of the white Anglophone world within both the fabric of modernism's varied narratives about itself and its contextual history presents continued critical puzzles for us, reconnecting contemporary intellectual and social concerns of secularization, disenchantment, and the disintegration of community to their early twentieth-century explorations.³ This is itself a legacy of modernism—that modernist studies itself, like its object, must always redefine, reify, and remake itself, setting boundaries and removing them, making declarations and overturning them.

This project's work is important on a sociopolitical scale as well, one that extends beyond the literary much as charm itself extends beyond its literary expressions. Charm in literature opens forms of resistance and resilience. Following the work of the modernist writers addressed in this project, I offer modernist work on charm as an indication that re-stitching the social is possible. A radical new communality was once iterated by modernists as varied as Oscar Wilde, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Gertrude Stein, who turned to charm as methodology of finding renewed relations with others through social bonds in the face of political,

economic, and social marginalization. These bonds were set based on creative, imaginative relations rather than available existing ones, however nascent—this includes capitalism’s labor relations, systems of social stratification, and political identities. Moreover, these bonds insist not only on the cohesion of the marginalized for survival, but that within this survival is a lived, creative and occasionally perverse pleasure.

¹ Jane Garrity, “Modernist Women’s Writing,” 15.

² Garrity, *ibid.*

³ For this formulation, I paraphrase John T. Connor, “Hope Mirrlees and the Archive of Modernism” Review Essay, *Journal of Modern Literature* 37.2 (Winter 2014), 177-182 at 180.

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